

Agroecology and Critical Pedagogy: Contributions to Resistance in a Rural Community in  
Ceará, Brazil

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Honors Requirements  
for the Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean Studies Department  
Dickinson College

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Carlisle, Pennsylvania  
May 13, 2019

## **Abstract**

The scholarship surrounding social change within movements is largely geared toward studying heated moments of contestation and their ability to spark social and systemic alternatives. But in order to fully understand their possibilities and processes for change, we must also pay attention to the “day after” the contestation or fight, and study the seemingly small but consistent work that goes into creating a meaningful difference in society. In this thesis, I explore the lived experiences of those involved with critical pedagogy in the Rural Landless Workers Movement (MST) in order to unearth the threads that connect them to agroecology in the day-to-day lives of Lagoa do Mineiro, a rural community in the northeastern state of Ceará. In particular, I analyze how these threads inform social and political resistance at Lagoa do Mineiro’s high school, thus contributing to what Paulo Freire termed an emancipatory education intended to transform society. This form of education that is so clearly linked to social change and the emancipation of the working class in rural areas is essential to study carefully and thoroughly if we are to strengthen and support it. Furthermore, by looking at a local example in context, this thesis underscores the importance of critical education geared toward agricultural and land issues facing local and global communities today.

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## **Acknowledgements**

This project was made possible by the generosity, patience, and openness of everyone I was lucky enough to meet and spend time with at Lagoa do Mineiro, but particularly Ivaniza who became my advisor on the settlement. I have learned so much about the power of spirit and persistence just by trying to keep up with everything you do for your students and community, thank you.

Thank you to each of the Francisco Araújo Barros teachers, employees, and students that allowed me to interview them for this thesis. Thank you for taking the time and energy to not only answer my questions, but to answer questions I did not even know I had and challenge me to think in new ways.

Thank you, Lúcia and Nesse, for welcoming me into your homes and families and allowing me to share in your space and meals during my visits to Brazil.

Thank you, Professor Borges, my supervisor for this thesis, for your invaluable guidance throughout this entire process, and especially for encouraging and giving me the confidence to return to Lagoa do Mineiro to conduct interviews.

I would also like to thank Professor Anria and Professor Bruno. Your insights and constructive feedback allowed this project to improve each time I incorporated your suggestions.

It is fair to say that without Professor Castellanos, this project may not have happened. Thank you for teaching me Portuguese in such a way that made me fall in love with the language and with Brazil, opening the doors for my travel and research.

The Community Studies Center (CSC) and the Student International Research Fund (SIRF) at the Center for Global Studies and Engagement also hold invaluable roles in this project. They made my primary research in 2019 possible through generous travel grants. Thank you, CSC and SIRF, for your commitment to critical reflection across borders and cultures, and for your support of undergraduate research.

And thanks to my family, who has taught me that the best thing to be in life is a student, constantly learning and growing with others.

Obrigadão!

## Introduction

Brazil's land distribution is one of the most unequal in the world, and has a complex and violent history of land-use policies concentrating large amounts of land into the hands of a few. Resistance to these hegemonic practices and the hierarchical power structures that have supported them has been at the core of the Rural Landless Workers Movement (MST) since its founding in 1984 in the southern state of Paraná. Throughout Brazil's modern history of land policies, big agribusiness companies and land development have encroached upon and dominated the Brazilian countryside steadily pushing rural families, the majority of which have been dependent on small-scale farming, into urban areas. As these companies and corporations mechanized in the late 1980s and early 1990s, increased monoculture and pesticide use, and developed on agricultural lands, the MST adopted agroecology, an ideology and farming practice anchored in ecological principles, in clear opposition to them.<sup>1</sup> The MST put these principles in practice in the rural communities that have grown throughout Brazil as a result of land occupation.

In these communities, MST families along with educators and local leaders developed differentiated systems of learning that could be rooted in the values of its students and communities in order for school to be relevant and useful to the students. Instead of conforming to the educational model in place prioritizing the desires and demands of an urban-centric and market-dominated, hierarchical political economy that has historically contributed to the invisibility of rural communities, the MST fought for this alternative based on place-based education. These differentiated educational methods, common to MST

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<sup>1</sup> Agroecology is being used here as an agricultural science, movement, and practice that anchors itself in ecological principals. This definition comes from Wezel et. al, "Agroecology as a Science, a Movement, and a Practice: A Review," *Agronomy for Sustainable Development* 29, no. 4 (2009): 503-515.

settlements in several states, follow a critical education pedagogy. Rebecca Tarlau defines critical education as “both a critique of the public educational system and an attempt to theorize how to construct a more emancipatory educational model.”<sup>2</sup> This model cultivates students’ capacity to analyze political, economic, and social realities and become an agent in social change.

Agroecology and critical education became the pillars of the place-based education common to the MST-built schools around the country. The intentional insertion of agroecological practices in students’ formal education is an extension of the movement’s stance against hegemonic agribusiness and empowers rural identity to combat the forces of an exclusionary, capitalistic state. This study provides insight into *how* agriculture and agricultural knowledge is understood and communicated as an act of resistance through the critical-education model known as *educação do campo* or education in/of/for the countryside. Marília Campos defines it as an educational model placing rural students and those who live in rural areas as the “protagonists of social and political processes”.<sup>3</sup> In this thesis, I explore the lived experiences of those involved with critical pedagogy in the MST in order to unearth the threads that connect them to agroecology in the day-to-day lives of the rural community of Lagoa do Mineiro, in the northeastern state of Ceará. In particular, I analyze how these threads inform social and political resistance at Lagoa do Mineiro’s Francisco Araújo Barros High School (FAB) thus contributing to what Paulo Freire termed an emancipatory

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<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Tarlau, “How Do New Critical Pedagogies Develop? Educational Innovation, Social Change, and Landless Workers in Brazil,” *Teachers College Record* 117, no. 11 (2015): 4.

<sup>3</sup> Marília Campos and Lia Maria Teixeira de Oliveira, “Educação básica do campo,” in *Dicionário da educação do campo*, ed. Roseli S. Caldart, Isabel B. Pereira, Paulo Alentrjano, and Gaudêncio Frigotto (Rio de Janeiro: Expressão Popular, 2012), 237.

education.<sup>4</sup> This form of education that is so clearly linked to social change and the emancipation of the working class in rural areas is essential to study carefully and thoroughly if we are to strengthen and support it.

Lagoa do Mineiro is a point of reference for rural activism and MST organization throughout Brazil. The settlement was formed in 1986 and was at the forefront of developing and demanding quality public schools (Escolas do Campo) on MST settlements since 1987. It is also leading the transition to agroecological practices at their high school intended for the broader community. Lagoa do Mineiro is exemplary of how the everyday processes on one settlement reflect greater issues of autonomous agriculture, critical education, and resilient rural communities. This study, which is based on oral histories and personal narratives from Lagoa do Mineiro's residents and on participant observation during two research visits, demonstrates the importance of conducting studies that are driven by people's lived experiences with these issues, and shows how local developments are connected with broader ones at the regional and national level. It does this by highlighting how a group of Lagoa do Mineiro residents argue that the "everyday struggle" matters to larger structural and ideological shifts affecting rural populations in Brazil.

The scholarship surrounding social movements, critical pedagogies, and agroecology is largely geared toward studying heated *moments* of contestation and their ability to spark social and systemic alternatives. But in order to fully understand their possibilities and processes for change, we must also pay attention to the "day after" the contestation or fight, and study the seemingly small but consistent work that goes into creating and sustaining a

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<sup>4</sup> Paulo Freire is considered to be the father of critical pedagogy and defined emancipatory education as people "examining what brought them to the point of examining and questioning the positions, values and/or power of not only themselves, but also of their groups or societies." Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. M. B. Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2007; orig. 1970), 23.

meaningful difference in society. Furthermore, it is important to examine the practical and specific applications of abstract ideas so that they are not theorized upon in isolation, but rather reflect and challenge what is going on in real life. This project provides concrete, real examples of how agroecology, critical pedagogy, and social movement theory intertwine in the lives of people in rural areas and equip social and political resistance. It does this by exploring how the MST connects agroecology with formal, public-school learning.

As a successful Escola do Campo connected to the ideas and practices of the MST, Lagoa do Mineiro's Francisco de Araújo Barros High School provides an ideal site for this exploration. FAB is also one of the original five Escolas do Campo functioning in Ceará today, reflecting its role in trailblazing educational and community practices.<sup>5</sup> What relationships between the Rural Landless Workers Movement (MST), critical pedagogy, and agroecology are present at Francisco Araújo Barros High School? What is the motivation for and significance of the high school's differentiated curriculum? These are the central questions I explore in this thesis in order to reveal the implications of these interactions and the community's motivation. This study demonstrates that everyday mediations of cultural production strengthen larger social movements and are essential to meaningful systemic change. Specifically, it shows that the empowerment of rural identity at Francisco Araújo Barros High School is a politicized resistance in and of itself that capacitates emancipatory education and agriculture at Lagoa do Mineiro, and functions in solidarity with rural and marginalized communities throughout Brazil.

I begin by reviewing the scholarly conversation surrounding critical pedagogy and connect agroecology to it. I then present the methodology used in this particular study. Next,

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<sup>5</sup> Today, there are ten functioning Escolas do Campo in Ceará.

I provide a brief overview of land concentration and inequality in Brazil. This provides the foundation from which I summarize the historical formation of the MST and the creation of Lagoa do Mineiro, as well as the adoption of agroecology and *educação do campo* in the movement. After this, I discuss the Political Pedagogical Project document created by Francisco Araújo Barros high school and how it informs the school's curriculum practicing emancipatory education. The impact the differentiated curriculum has at local and regional scale forces us to reflect on the limitations of capitalist, market-oriented structures among marginalized rural communities. By looking at a local example in context, this thesis underscores the importance of critical education geared toward agricultural and land issues facing local and global communities today.

### **Escolas do Campo and Critical Pedagogy in Scholarly Context**

There is significant scholarship on the MST educational processes and on critical pedagogies more broadly, including their relationships with social movement theory. I begin this literature review presenting the main contributions of theorist Paulo Freire to critical pedagogy and putting them into conversation with social movement and critical geography concepts. By doing this, I seek to highlight the possibilities and constraints of current lenses to fully analyze pedagogy within social movement frameworks. I then introduce David Meek's political ecology of education lens and situate it within the umbrella of social movement framework. David Meek suggests this approach to analyze education as politically, socially, *and* ecologically engaged.

Although studies about the insertion of agroecology into the formal education sphere exist, this review demonstrates that the contribution of agroecological knowledge processes

to the resistance of a hegemonic cultural production cycle still merits further investigation. In particular, paying attention to the quotidian political struggle within agroecological education reveals how it affects the larger ideological structures and power relationships of an entire society. This literature review provides the context for the analysis of Lagoa do Mineiro's FAB as a case study and reveals that there is a gap in the scholarship surrounding these issues. This case study at Francisco Araújo Barros high school bridges that gap and offers a true bottom-up analysis of the impact of daily politics on critical pedagogy curriculum and agroecological behaviors at the local level.

Written originally in 1968 in Chile, where he lived in exile as a result of the repression that followed the 1964 military coup in Brazil, and first published in Brazil in 1975, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* soon became the foundational text for critical pedagogy not only in Brazil but throughout Latin America and the world.<sup>6</sup> Freire's ideas are also at the core of the MST's educational project. Through this work, Freire articulated a vision and praxis for an emancipated working class. By praxis, Freire meant the deliberate action towards the vision to transform social structures. This is important because Freire argued that education held the key for an emancipated working class, and his self-developed methods for adult education proved to be revolutionary for knowledge acquisition as well as social consciousness. His methods involved a horizontal relationship between educator and student, promoting a sense of exchange of knowledge rather than a hierarchical one. Freire termed the latter relationship as "banking method" and exposed its oppressive nature, one that assumed the student as knowledge-less and the educator as holder of all knowledge. He also expressed the importance of basing the learning experience in students'

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<sup>6</sup> Celso de Rui Beiseigel, "Prefácio para a reedição de *Pedagogia do oprimido*, de Paulo Freire," *Estudos Avançados* 32, no. 93 (May-August 2018): 13-24.

historical and social context. This is what makes Freirean education a dynamic one, focused on praxis rather than stagnant, accepted norms.<sup>7</sup> Freire's conception of education is central for the MST project. Christine Lima Pires highlights two fundamental concepts for Freire's pedagogy: conscientization, which is the development of critical consciousness, and liberation.<sup>8</sup> She elaborates on Freire's arguments to emphasize these two concepts and their individual weight: awareness is what makes the individual's agency to participate in their own reality a possibility as they become conscious of it, and liberation is the praxis by which the individual will transform that reality. These processes are committed to political engagement and social change.

Critical consciousness and liberation parallel the key concepts used in critical geography to discuss the MST occupations. Bernardo Mançano Fernandes theorizes about the processes of spatialization and territorialization within social movement contexts using the MST as his main example.<sup>9</sup> He defines spatialization as the occupation of space and territorialization as the subsequent transformation of that space. What makes the MST different than land-grabbers is that they do not occupy land in order to occupy the space but instead, they are charged by the intention to transform the social, political, and economic dimensions of that space. Fernandes points out how the MST, which he refers to throughout the article as The Landless, does not occupy untouched lands, but re-territorializes ones that are already territorialized by the dominant capitalist ideology. It is The Landless that seek to overcome this hierarchical and oppressive system: first by activating an awareness and

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<sup>7</sup> Cristine Lima Pires, "Paulo Freire e o MST: a pedagogia do oprimido no contexto da luta pela terra," *Revista Espaço Acadêmico* 12, no. 135 (2012): 80-87.

<sup>8</sup> Pires, "Paulo Freire e o MST," 84.

<sup>9</sup> Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, "Movimento social como categoria geográfica," *Terra Livre* 15 (2015): 59-86.

occupying the decided upon space, and then by liberating the space through its ideological and physical transformation into a new territory. This process is no different than Freire's emancipatory education model, but is rather one example of its praxis in an informal educational setting and employed by the MST. Furthermore, both pedagogical and geographic concepts rely on the processes of sharing experiences in order to create a strong ideological relationship that can work toward a common goal. Rosalie Caldart also reflects upon the MST's use of lived experiences as teaching tools in her publications, demonstrating how social movements are viewed and experienced as pedagogy in their own right because of the lessons learned through their constant give-and-take with their environment. In her book, Caldart delves into the historical and problematic separation of livelihood (manual labor) and education (intellectual labor) in the Brazilian countryside.<sup>10</sup> She points out, "Education has been approached and addressed in relation to production, and to herd cattle you do not need the alphabet nor do you need a number line."<sup>11</sup> This logic enacted at the educational policy scale has maintained an uneducated and marginalized Brazilian countryside.

The deliberate separation of manual and intellectual labor as expressed by Caldart reinforces the power of the "when and where" of social activities and the social messages they convey, which David Meek discusses in his work on the MST's political ecology of education.<sup>12</sup> Meek echoes Caldart by stating that how space and time is structured and presented to society secures social order since it will be repeated and guide other spatial and temporal systems and behaviors.<sup>13</sup> He reiterates how the message that is transmitted through

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<sup>10</sup> Roseli Salete Caldart, *Pedagogia do movimento sem terra: escola é mais do que escola* (São Paulo: Editora Vozes, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Caldart, *Pedagogia do movimento sem terra*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> David Meek, "Movements in Education: The Political Ecology of Education in the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement," PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Meek, "Movements in Education," 413.

the dominant education model is that knowledge is produced at school, in the classroom, and not in the community or at home, or in nature. This message shapes the next generation of citizens as students move through school: Their mental, emotional, and physical developments are shaped and molded by their experiences within the institution and its reinforcement/conflict from “outside of school” experiences.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars argue that the *educação do campo* model and the MST-affiliated schools combat this reproduction by basing curricula on the local realities of the students and co-producing the curricula with community members, parents, activists, educators, and students. Rebecca Tarlau, however, questions these arguments, that sometimes become assumptions, by probing into the real extent of influence the MST can have within a public-school sphere. In her article, “The Social(ist) Pedagogies of the MST,” she challenges the notion that a capitalist social production can be broken within the public-school system of a capitalist society.<sup>15</sup> Schools, she states, “are only one of the many sites that mediate the diverse forms of cultural production that produce the capitalist social relations of production the movement wants to disrupt.”<sup>16</sup> This tension is evident in the literature and also in my own study. The people I interviewed in Lagoa do Mineiro talked at length about the constant temptations of embracing a materialistic world and forgetting about the “arduous work and daily struggles of rural life” young people face.<sup>17</sup> Tarlau does not negate the importance of school as a site of resistance, but reminds us that these sites are in constant tension. In my study, I highlight the insertion of alternative agriculture processes into the school system in order to reveal how

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<sup>14</sup> Meek, “Movements in Education,” 413.

<sup>15</sup> Rebecca Tarlau, “The Social (ist) Pedagogies of the MST: Towards New Relations of Production in the Brazilian Countryside,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 21, no. 41 (2013): 1-27.

<sup>16</sup> Tarlau, “The Social (ist) Pedagogies of the MST,” 3.

<sup>17</sup> Cosma, Flávio, and Hilma all used this expression in their interviews. Lagoa do Mineiro, January 2019.

agricultural practices are also fundamental to cultural production. Once this is evident, the application of agroecology at school can then be recognized for connecting two critical sites of mediation of capitalist production—one educational and the other agricultural. Once this is recognized, agroecology’s praxis of joining intellectual and manual labor in a context of resistance is further appreciated.

The concept of social reproduction through schools traces back to Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher who first theorized on cultural hegemony and its reinforcement through education.<sup>18</sup> Gramsci wrote extensively on the different ways in which the ruling elite of a society do not have to resort to overt violence or coercion over the working class, but can manipulate systems and groups of people to “learn” and internalize the hierarchical relationship between the ruling and ruled classes. Schooling through the dominant education systems is a hotspot: through these processes, “the rulers” ingrain the beliefs necessary to maintain the hegemonic cultural system from which they benefit.<sup>19</sup> Strategies to interrupt this chain of oppression and reconstruct a liberated society are diverse. Social movements will use multiple strategies depending on location, scale, time-span, and group size. Two umbrella concepts that Gramsci developed and theorized on are essential to understand in order to analyze the strategies employed by social movements: the war of maneuver and the war of position. War of maneuver refers to the explicit moments of confrontation against the hegemonic culture like occupations, strikes, marches and other direct actions contesting the state.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the war of position refers to the slow process of consciousness and, as Wendy Wolford explains in her book *This Land is Ours*

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<sup>18</sup> Tarlau, “The Social (ist) Pedagogies of the MST,” 3.

<sup>19</sup> Antonio Gramsci, “Schools and Education,” *Australian Left Review*, 1 no. 26 (1970): 71-79.

<sup>20</sup> Wendy Wolford, *This Land is Ours Now: Social Mobilization and the Meanings of Land in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 9.

Now, “the subtler war of negotiation to win positions of power, create alliances, and construct new revolutionary political subjectivities.”<sup>21</sup> This includes acts of war and resistance like organizing events, creating spaces for dialogue, and engaging in territorialization. These fronts are also distinguished as protest politics (which mobilize people) and generative politics (which initiate innovative and collective action in order to cultivate new political actors).<sup>22</sup> Both strategies of war and politics are necessary for transformation and liberation and social movements themselves must negotiate the space and time assigned to each. In *This Land is Ours Now*, Welford analyzes “the ongoing war of position conducted by and within the MST,” and states that “positioning will determine whether, when, and how other wars of maneuver will be led by the movement.”<sup>23</sup> Welford’s contribution, with her focus on the wars of position and their equal footing with wars of maneuver, was pivotal since most scholarship until her book had focused on the MST’s wars of maneuver—that is, of confrontation with the hegemonic state, which, in this case, predominantly took the form of land occupation.

Welford’s assertion that wars of position determine “the whether, when, and how wars of maneuver” underscores the impact of slow, consistent, and everyday applications of a greater ideology in enacting tangible change.<sup>24</sup> David Meek connects Welford’s argument to the cyclical nature of territorialization: Following a physical occupation, the MST will participate in day-to-day resistance practices including social organization, schooling, and alternative agricultural methods. These resistance practices change both the social and

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<sup>21</sup> Welford, *This Land is Ours Now*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Rebecca Tarlau, “Occupying Land, Occupying Schools: Transforming Education in the Brazilian Countryside,” PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Welford, *This Land is Ours Now*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Welford, *This Land is Ours Now*, 9.

environmental landscapes. The political ecology of education framework is the most efficient in analyzing this process because it illuminates the linkages between political processes, forms of pedagogy, and environmental behaviors. These linkages are present in schools, and this is why Meek argues that schools must then be studied as incubators of larger institutional change.<sup>25</sup>

This argument is enhanced when considered alongside Miguel Altieri and Victor Manuel Toledo's article, "The Agroecological Revolution in Latin America: Rescuing Nature, Ensuring Food Sovereignty and Empowering Peasants".<sup>26</sup> In this article they argue that agroecology, in its epistemological, technical, and social aspects, means "restoring local self-reliance, conserving and regenerating natural resource agrobiodiversity, producing healthy foods with low inputs, and empowering peasant organizations."<sup>27</sup> They also argue that, "these changes directly challenge neoliberal modernization policies based on agribusiness and agro-exports while opening new political roads for Latin American agrarian societies."<sup>28</sup> This is because such methods of agriculture that are autonomous from external and artificial inputs break apart from the global hegemonic agricultural system. Furthermore, they are yet more expressions of territorialization and engage in emancipatory education. By cultivating land in a way that overtly rejects the hegemonic class and economic system, it is transforming a reality in which more actors can contribute to the construction of the future. Agribusiness is also structured in a way that excludes the participation of small share-holders

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<sup>25</sup> David Meek, "Taking Research with Its Roots: Restructuring Schools in the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement Upon the Principles of a Political Ecology of Education," *Journal of Political Ecology* 22, no. 1 (2015): 410-428.

<sup>26</sup> Miguel A. Altieri and Victor Manuel Toledo, "The Agroecological Revolution in Latin America: Rescuing Nature, Ensuring Food Sovereignty and Empowering Peasants," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 3 (2011): 587-612.

<sup>27</sup> Altieri and Toledo, "The Agroecological Revolution," 587.

<sup>28</sup> Altieri and Toledo, "The Agroecological Revolution," 588.

because having to fit the agricultural techniques into a narrow and for-profit model maintains a structure where multinational food conglomerates and seed companies dictate instructions to farm-workers, paralleling Freire's banking method of education because it negates any exchange of experience. In his article, "La agroecología como estrategia metodológica de transformación social," Eduardo Sevilla Guzmán reiterates the pluralistic nature of agroecology in comparison to conventional scientific, political, and economic processes.<sup>29</sup> He places agroecology as the sociopolitical confrontation to the closed, artificial understanding of power and ecosystems. This confrontation, Sevilla Guzmán continues, is a historical resistance strategy employed by indigenous and rural populations, whose knowledge systems and processes have been persecuted and whose rights to develop in time or space have been negated. However, these complementary arguments and processes have yet to be studied together in a sufficient manner.

Francisco Araújo Barros high school is applying each of these theoretical concepts to the everyday school and community activities. A study of this local experience contributes to the literature because it presents all of the separate arguments debated by scholars thus far through the analysis of the experiences of a rural community that grew as a result of the MST movement and of land occupation, and who has embraced these principles and puts them in practice. Through the analysis of the oral history interviews I conducted on site, this study reveals their experience and reflections about these practices. The people in Lagoa do Mineiro are mediating sites of cultural production everyday through school, agriculture, agriculture in school, and through the ways in which they organize their daily lives. At the

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<sup>29</sup> Eduardo Sevilla Guzmán, "La agroecología como estrategia metodológica de transformación social," *Agroecología y Gestión de Ambientes Rurales* (2009): 1-7.

same time, they are employing concepts of territorialization and agroecological praxis. As this study shows, their actions prove absolutely necessary to understanding how these practices interact and complement each other in the struggle for developing just alternatives to hierarchical and exploitative structures of education, agriculture, and society. It is in the context of this scholarly conversation that this study presents itself and defends its arguments and significance.

## **Research Methodology**

In Valerie Yow's book *Recording Oral History*, oral histories and personal narratives are discussed as an effective way to connect significant lived experiences to more theoretical models.<sup>30</sup> Following this idea, this study's analysis is driven by the oral histories of the people interacting with educational and agricultural processes at Lagoa do Mineiro in connection to the scholarly literature I reviewed on the central topics of critical pedagogy and agroecology. I was first introduced to the residents of Lagoa do Mineiro in November 2017 while studying abroad in Fortaleza, the capital of Ceará. After having expressed interest in learning more about the MST, the study abroad program coordinator, Oélito, connected me to Ivaniza. Ivaniza became my advisor during my one month stay at Lagoa do Mineiro, and after becoming more acquainted with daily life and developing deeper relationships with people at school and on the settlement, we discussed my initial ideas for what became this senior thesis project. Its possible focus on the FAB's place-based, community-co-developed pedagogy and its relationship with the MST grew out of our conversations and observations.

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<sup>30</sup> Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 6.

It then became further focused as I researched the scholarly literature and conducted interviews.

During my first visit to Lagoa do Mineiro, I observed key aspects of this project that Lagoa do Mineiro has embodied since its creation. As Neide, the local chapter's Pastoral Land Commission (Comissão Pastoral da Terra, CPT) counselor and an experienced farmer explained to me, life in the settlement rests on various partnerships between different perspectives coming together in consensus.<sup>31</sup> I was able to listen to these different perspectives pertaining to agriculture, the social movement's involvement in everyday life, people's relationship to the school, and to life in rural Brazil through our *convivência* (co-living and sharing). I was also introduced to the politics of the Rural Landless Workers Movement, in practice, at the local level. I aimed to incorporate these different perspectives in my project to show the complexity in people's everyday choices, arguments, and identity formations.

I returned to Lagoa do Mineiro for a second, shorter research visit in January 2019. Over the course of ten days, I conducted eleven semi-structured, oral history interviews. To do this, I used the snowballing strategy for the oral history interviews, which limited me to the direct references of each person I interviewed, centering the perspectives included in this project around the school since most of the interviewees were employees or closely linked to FAB. Because most people connected to the school are familiar with critical pedagogy, alternative agriculture, and the school's intention for the community, I was able to highlight

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<sup>31</sup> Neide explained this to me during our interview in January 2019. The CPT is an extension of the Brazilian catholic church that specifically addressed issues of social justice and rural poverty. To read more on its formation and activity, see Marco Antônio Mitidiero Júnior, "A ação territorial de uma igreja radical: Teologia da libertação, luta pela terra e atuação da Comissão Pastoral da Terra no Estado da Paraíba," PhD diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2008.

the points of consensus, tension, and disagreement surrounding these concepts in the analysis.

Even though I was referenced to most of the interviewees, I had already met and established relationships with each person I was referred to in 2017.<sup>32</sup> Interviews were semi-structured and open ended so as to not stifle the conversation and allow for the interviewees to present their stories how they desired. The interviews ranged from 25 to 65 minutes. I also took field notes each day with observations about my experience and the interactions with local people in different locales. After transcribing each interview on my return to Dickinson, I used the qualitative analysis software program MAXQDA 12 to code trends and themes across the eleven interviews.

I found that, in varying degrees and with some contradiction, the interviews reflected different aspects of *how* each person identified or not with agroecology, since when and why their understanding and relationship with agroecology was formed, *why* agroecology is the correct line of pedagogy at school, and its links to the MST. The four working umbrella themes that emerged are centered around agroecology. They are agroecology's pertinence to 1.) place and agroecology curriculum, 2.) reinvigorated camponês identity, 3.) scaling up: from the school to community and to the country, and 4.) reflections on the future.

Each person I interviewed identified as *camponês*. The literal translation of this word to English is "peasant", but it lacks the historical and political charge present in *camponês*.

According to Leonilde Sérvolo de Medeiros, *camponês* identity gained this political

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<sup>32</sup> When I returned to Lagoa do Mineiro in January 2019, I planned to interview Ivaniza, Hilma, Flávio, Cosma, and Francisco, and hoped to interview Karol, Denilson, and two other students I had met in 2017. The two other students I was hoping to interview were not at the settlement during my second stay, but more people expressed curiosity about the project and those to whom I was referred accepted my request to interview them. This is how my interviews of Neide and Dona Chiquinha emerged. Ivaniza facilitated Franciene and Alexandro to be interviewed as well.

connotation during the time sugarcane workers began to demand basic labor rights and rural and peasant workers first emerged as political actors in the 1950s.<sup>33</sup> Although camponês identity can and usually does carry a political weight, it is not a given, and its relevance or significance is ultimately negotiated upon and determined by the person who chooses to use it as an identity marker. I asked each person whether they would like me to use their real name or a pseudonym, and each person instructed me to use their real name. Below I provide a short biography of each interviewee listed in alphabetical order:

**Alexandro**, mid 30s. He was born in Lagoa do Mineiro. He worked in Itarema, the nearest city, until FAB opened, and since then he is the school's administration director. He identifies as a farmer first and then as a school employee. He is proud to be a camponês, but he does not participate in the MST. He is the nephew of Francisco Araújo Barros, one of the leaders who died during the land occupation that gave origin to the settlement, and after whom the school was named.

**Chiquinha**, late 60s. She was born in the region when it was dominated by large landed estates. She was a tenant-farmer to the last two latifundistas on the land. She was a leader in the Lagoa do Mineiro occupation and continues to be a leader in the community. She is Ivaniza and Neide's mother.

**Cosma**, mid 30s. She is from an MST settlement in the interior of Ceará, an arid region known as the Sertão. She holds a Master's degree in Agroecology and teaches *Projetos e Estudos de Pesquisa* (Research Projects), one of the key classes of the

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<sup>33</sup> Leonilde Sérvolo de Medeiros, "Rural Social Movements, Struggles for Rights, and Land Reform in Contemporary Brazilian History," in *Challenging Social Inequality: The Landless Rural Workers Movement and Agrarian Reform in Brazil*, ed. Miguel Carter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 72.

differentiated curriculum at FAB. Before teaching at FAB, she held a state-level position with the MST.

**Denilson**, 19 years old. He grew up in Lagoa do Mineiro and graduated from FAB in December 2017. He lives in Lagoa do Mineiro where he farms and is an active member of the Youth Movement. For him, there is no separation between identifying as camponês and as a MST activist.

**Flávio**, 26 years old. He was born in Lagoa do Mineiro and was initiated into the movement when he was 16. He teaches *Práticas Sociais Comunitárias* (Social and Community Practice), another important element of the differentiated curriculum, and leads soccer tournaments at the school and in Lagoa do Mineiro at large. Until 2018, he was the leader of the MST Youth Movement on the settlement.

**Franciene**, late 20s. She was born in Lagoa do Mineiro and went through school before FAB was built. She is the financial administrator of the high school. She does not participate in any MST events but stands in solidarity with the movement because she identifies with a camponesa identity and believes in agrarian land reform. She is Neide's daughter.

**Francisco**, early 50s. He was born in Lagoa do Mineiro. He is a farmer who specialized in cashew and mango orchards. He is the manager of FAB's experiential agricultural field and participates in some MST affiliated agriculture production programs. He subscribes to agroecology at school and in his own production.

**Hilma**, late 30s. She has a degree in agronomy, and came to the settlement as a MST agronomy technician. Since 2011, she has been the teacher for *Organização de Trabalho e Técnicas Produtivas* (Labor Organization and Productive Techniques), another important

offering of the differentiated curriculum. She considers the MST as part of her identity and participates in different encampments and events.

**Ivaniza**, 49 years old. She was born in Lagoa do Mineiro in 1969, when it was still a large private estate. She is the first and present director of the high school. When she was 14 years old, she began teaching the younger children to read and led reading classes. She participated in the creation of Lagoa do Mineiro's settlement and in other land occupations in the region. She has a degree in pedagogy with a specialization in history, and she is certified in *Educação do campo*. She considers MST a part of her identity. She is Dona Chiquinha's daughter and Neide's sister.

**Karol**, 21 years old. She was born in Lagoa do Mineiro. She graduated from FAB in 2014 and is now pursuing an undergraduate degree in Geography in the City of Itarema. She is an active member of the MST Youth Movement. She identifies strongly with the MST and her local community.

**Neide**, mid 50s. She was born in Lagoa do Mineiro. She is the current President of the Lagoa do Mineiro Workers' Association and the counselor of the local Pastoral Land Commission chapter. She is an experienced farmer that subscribes to agroecology. She is Dona Chiquinha's daughter, Ivaniza's sister, and Franciene's mother.

Although I was met with familiarity by everyone at Lagoa do Mineiro on both trips, my two visits happened to find Brazil in two very different moments as a country, with two different national realities. In November 2017, Jair Bolsonaro had not yet been elected President.<sup>34</sup> But in January 2019, the far-right politician and former military officer had just

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<sup>34</sup> Although Brazil's former president Lula da Silva had already been convicted of passive corruption and money laundering, the tumultuous political saga surrounding him had not yet peaked. To learn more about

taken office and his rhetoric had already stirred distress nationwide.<sup>35</sup> He and his policies were present in conversations and interviews because in addition to presenting a large threat to any and all marginalized identities, he had already targeted the MST directly in his speeches and policy actions. He declared that all MST activity would be considered acts of terrorism and that the MST-affiliated schools would be shut down, and he quickly de-funded social assistance programs like Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional (CONSEA) his first day in office.<sup>36</sup> This harsh and negative depiction of the MST has been fed by media outlets and powerful national players since the creation of the social movement and its unflinching commitment to agrarian land reform, but has been reignited (and challenged) since the election of Bolsonaro.<sup>37</sup> Although this did not alter my methodology, it did shape and inform the substance I was able to gather during my time in Brazil.

### **Land Inequality in Brazil: An Overview (1500- 1984)**

Land reform has a long history in Brazil that predates the MST. In fact, the emergence of the MST shows the limitations and challenges of earlier efforts of land reform. In order to understand the topics presented in this paper, it is essential to first ground them

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this, look to: Dom Phillips, “Brazil’s Ex-president Lula Sentenced to Nearly 10 Years in Prison for Corruption,” Brazil, *The Guardian*, July 12, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/12/brazil-president-lula-convicted-corruption>

<sup>35</sup> Eliane Brum, “How a Homophobic, Misogynist, Racist ‘Thing’ Could be Brazil’s Next President,” Opinion, *The Guardian*, October 6, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/oct/06/homophobic-misogynist-racist-brazil-jair-bolsonaro>.

<sup>36</sup> CONSEA was a governmental entity monitoring, evaluating, and promoting public programs and supportive policies geared toward food and nutritional security. For more information, see “Conheça o Consea,” <http://www4.planalto.gov.br/consea/comunicacao/noticias-internas/conheca-o-consea>. This program is mentioned by Hilma in our interview in January 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Tom Phillips, “Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro Threatens Purge of Leftwing ‘Outlaws’,” Jair Bolsonaro, *The Guardian*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/22/brazils-jair-bolsonaro-says-he-would-put-army-on-streets-to-fight>.

within Brazil's struggle with land reform.<sup>38</sup> The country's severe inequality of land ownership can be traced back to its colonial period beginning in the 1500s: During this period, the only way to access land was through a series of land grants (*sesmarias*) distributed by the Portuguese government, and to be a candidate, one needed to be a person with social standing.<sup>39</sup> Colonists who were not eligible or well-connected enough to obtain a grant still did access land, but usually in the form of squatting on the outskirts of large plantations and their squats were not legally recognized.<sup>40</sup> After Brazilian independence in 1822, new land laws were debated in Congress for thirty years. During this time, widespread land grabbing (*grilagem*) and the production of false land deeds ensured the rural elite ensured their continued ownership over large areas.<sup>41</sup> The new land law finally agreed upon in 1850 facilitated the consolidation of large-scale properties and plantations by making new land available only through purchase—it was nearly impossible for small-landholding squatters to legally purchase land, and restrictions on squatters were tightened, effectively evicting families.<sup>42</sup> Exacerbating land concentration even further, a disastrous draught from 1877-1879 drove thousands of northeasterners to work as laborers in Amazonia's rubber boom.<sup>43</sup> To this day, land concentration in the northeast is higher than the national average.

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<sup>38</sup> This is a very brief overview, but this topic has been studied extensively. For a more in-depth analysis, see Wendy Wolford, "Agrarian Moral Economies and Neoliberalism in Brazil: Competing Worldviews and the State in the Struggle for Land," *Environment and Planning A* 37, no. 2 (2005): 241-261.

<sup>39</sup> Anthony Hall, "Land Tenure and Land Reform in Brazil," in *Agrarian Reform and Grassroots Development: Ten Case Studies*, ed. Roy L. Prosterman, Mary N. Temple, and Timothy M. Hanstand (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner, 1990), 205-233.

<sup>40</sup> Wolford, *This Land is Ours Now*, 38.

<sup>41</sup> Tarlau, "Occupying Land, Occupying Schools," 5.

<sup>42</sup> In opposition to the legacy of large landholders, landlessness in Brazil is largely the legacy of squatting and slavery. Africans were imported into Brazil primarily as slave-laborers for the booming sugar cane industry, which began in the sixteenth century and was in full force by the mid-seventeenth century. In the northeast part of Brazil, where sugar cane production has dominated, slaves made up half of the population, and nearly two-thirds of the population in the sugar cane regions. Brazil is the second to last country to have abolished slavery, not doing so until 1888.

<sup>43</sup> Hall, "Land Tenure and Land Reform in Brazil," 206.

Rural resistance slowly and steadily strengthened through the beginning of the twentieth century, and finally in the late 1940s and early 1950s, there was a dramatic rise of mobilization in the countryside, with peasant leagues, rural workers associations, radical literacy campaigns, and other organizing efforts.<sup>44</sup> In 1963, rural laborers were given the right to organize. In 1964, shortly after the military coup, a new Land Statute in the Brazilian Constitution stated that all land must have a social function, and that the government can expropriate land if it is not.<sup>45</sup> As well as establishing specific criteria for the “social function of property” the Statute defined two processes of land reform: the expropriation of unproductive large estates and the progressive taxation of land.<sup>46</sup> Yet at the same time the new military regime acknowledged the country’s opposing rural interests and the need for state intervention to reduce their social conflict with the Statute, the nation’s leading peasant organizers were effectively, “arrested, killed, or forced to go underground in the wake of the 1964 coup.”<sup>47</sup> The regime aligned itself with rural elites by promoting agricultural mechanization and concentration through tax incentives and credit subsidies.<sup>48</sup> It is widely accepted that the regime’s intent was not to carry out land reform, but to use the legal Statute as a way of controlling land conflicts.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Tarlau, “Occupying Land, Occupying Schools,” 6.

<sup>45</sup> The social productive/function criteria is: a) promotes the welfare of the owners and the workers who toil on it, as well as their families; b) maintains satisfactory levels of productivity; c) assures the conservation of natural resources; and d) observes the laws governing fair working relationships between those who own the land and those who cultivate it: Rita Damasceno, Joana Chiavari, and Cristina Leme Lopes, “Evolution of Land Rights in Rural Brazil: Frameworks for Understanding, Pathways for Improvement,” Climate Policy Initiative Report, 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Damasceno, et al. “Evolution of Land,” 16.

<sup>47</sup> de Medeiros, “Rural Social Movements,” 77.

<sup>48</sup> In reality, little redistribution took place under the Statute during the military regime and when it did occur, it was usually applied in cases of colonization schemes or projects like dam construction: Hall, “Land Tenure and Land Reform in Brazil,” 217.

<sup>49</sup> Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, “The Formation and Territorialization of the MST In Brazil,” in *Challenging Social Inequality: The Landless Workers Movement and Agrarian Reform in Brazil*, ed. Miguel Carter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 115-148.

The dictatorship implemented agricultural policies based on the Green Revolution, which intended to increase production through production intensification, technological modernization, and large-scale commodity farming until its end in 1985. This only compounded Brazil's uneven regional development. As the rest of the country intensified industrializing and developing, the Northeast was still ruled by rural oligarchs who had absolute and unchallenged authority in the countryside.<sup>50</sup> Land concentration, unproductive estates, landlessness, poverty, and violence was only exacerbated in the Northeast by federal inaction.<sup>51</sup> In 2010, it was still one of the poorest regions in all of Latin America.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Rural Landless Workers Movement: Formation and Expansion to the Northeast**

The MST is Brazil's largest agrarian land reform movement and one of Latin America's leading social movements. It was officially founded in January 1984, at an assembly organized in Cascavel, Paraná, although it had already organized land occupations in Rio Grande do Sul and Matto Grosso do Sul in the late 1970s.<sup>53</sup> By 1988, the MST had organized more than eighty occupations involving 13,000 families. It has been estimated that by 2006, the MST had succeeded in winning the land rights for 134,440 families.<sup>54</sup> Since its inception, the MST has also fought for the rights and inclusion of the rural farmers whose families and communities are marginalized from Brazilian society, as well as for their access

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<sup>50</sup> Tarlau, "Occupying Land, Occupying Schools," 5.

<sup>51</sup> Anthony Pereira, *End of the Peasantry: The Rural Labor Movement in Northeast Brazil, 1961–1988* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 16.

<sup>52</sup> Wolford, *This Land Is Ours Now*, 112.

<sup>53</sup> Fernandes, "The Formation and Territorialization of the MST In Brazil," 118.

<sup>54</sup> Tarlau, "Occupying Land, Occupying Schools," 5.

to land. Today there are different sectors within the MST addressing diverse ecological, economic, and social justice issues.<sup>55</sup>

Since the movement's foundational goal is agrarian land reform, the MST has taken advantage of the Land Statute of 1964 in the Brazilian Constitution to organize land occupations and squat on the land until the government is pressured into granting them an expropriation decree, that is an official recognition of their collective ownership of the land. The expropriation process can last years and has historically been plagued by violence and intimidation tactics. But after land is expropriated from their owners—who tend to be individual landowners or multinational corporations—the federal government will deem the land an agrarian reform settlement. Land settlements are publicly owned and created with state-assistance, meaning that people living on these settlements cannot sell or buy land, but receive aid from the federal and state level for infrastructure.<sup>56</sup> Although most land occupations nowadays consist of families and individuals squatting on lands where they do not already reside, early on, most occupations were carried out by tenant farmers, rural laborers, or squatters that faced eviction from the lands they were living off of and on (this is the case in Lagoa do Mineiro).

The MST emerged as a land reform movement during the end of the dictatorship and grew in numbers and territories throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but it would not have been able to develop fully without the institutional support from other social movements or the Pastoral Land Commission within the Catholic Church.<sup>57</sup> The MST has regularly

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<sup>55</sup> To learn more, visit the MST website: "Friends of the MST," <https://www.mstbrazil.org/>

<sup>56</sup> The land divisions and agreements are complicated and difficult to obtain accurate statistics for, but there are tables and charts available to study in Damasceno, et al. "Evolution of Land," 17-22.

<sup>57</sup> The CPT was officially formed in 1975 in order to support the rights of the poor, including rural landless workers and rural movements. CPT members included nuns and priests, and also lay people. Often, their support came in the form of facilitating communication with lawyers, organizing community

collaborated with other organizations as well, but remains an autonomous social movement that is not officially committed to any political party.<sup>58</sup>

The MST has evolved specific characteristics in the Northeast because of the region's historic challenges with economic development and resource exploitation.<sup>59</sup> Even though it was not until 1989 that the MST reached the northeast of Brazil, the region was already experienced in land occupation, and today the MST is actually strongest there in terms of number of land occupations per year.<sup>60</sup> In her 2015 Masters thesis, Cosma dos Santos Damesceno highlights the Occupation of Caldeirão, a land occupation that lasted eight years (1930-1938) in Crato, as an important historical reference of resistance in Ceará.<sup>61</sup>

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meetings, putting rural communities in contact with one another in the fight for land rights, taking surveys, providing nutritional advice, etc.

<sup>58</sup> However, being a movement inspired by and drawing on Marxist theory, it has historically been more prone to negotiate with the Worker's Party (PT) and the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) than with other political parties. From the perspective of center-right and right-winged parties like Brazilian Democratic Movement (MBD), Social Liberal Party (PSL), and Democratas (DEM), the MST is portrayed and referred to as a terrorist organization. The MBD, PSL, and DEM are aligned with what could be viewed as the antithesis of the MST, the Democratic Ruralist Union (UDR). Founded in 1985, the UDR is an association of land-holding farmers opposed to agrarian land reform, and who have a very large representation in the Brazilian National Congress.

<sup>59</sup> For more information, see Thomas D Rogers, *The Deepest Wounds: A Labor and Environmental History of Sugar in Northeast Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> Tarlau, "Occupying Land, Occupying Schools," 9.

<sup>61</sup> Cosma dos Santos Damesceno, "Contribuições e desafios da Escola do Campo Francisco Araújo Barros para construção do projeto de agricultura camponesa do MST – Ceará," Masters Thesis, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2015.



**Figure 1.** To the left is a map of Brazil, showing Ceará in red. To the right is a map of Ceará, indicating where Lagoa do Mineiro is located with a black circle.<sup>62</sup>

## The Creation of Lagoa do Mineiro

The land that constitutes Lagoa do Mineiro today was occupied by the tenant farmers that lived on the estate and cultivated the land in 1985. It was in 1989, with its arrival to the Northeast, that the MST supported and offered organizational guidance to the new land settlement. Before expropriation, the land was a large estate belonging to a single landowner, senhor Francisco Teófilo de Andrade. His tenant-farmers cultivated cashew, coconut, banana, and manioc, and bred cattle and smaller livestock which he could then sell and profit from. They themselves were limited to cultivating beans, maize, and manioc for self-consumption on one hectare of the estate's poorest soils. In 1985, the land was inherited by his nephew who was a catholic priest, Father Aristides.<sup>63</sup> Not long after he inherited the estate, he announced plans to sell the estate to the large Brazilian company specializing in coconut

<sup>62</sup> “Anuario do Ceará,” <http://www.anuariodoceara.com.br/regioes-de-planejamento-do-estado-do-ceara/>.

<sup>63</sup> “Projeto Político Pedagógico de formação integral do campo da escola estadual do ensino médio do campo Francisco Araújo Barros,” Assentamento Lagoa do Mineiro, Itarema, Ceará, 2018, 1-76.

products, Ducoco. Ducoco still operates today and sells coconut food and beverage products globally.

Rumors had been circulating for time about what the exact consequences for the tenant-farmers were after Ducoco came in and took over large estates—as it had already done to other estates in the region.<sup>64</sup> In every case, those consequences lead to families being displaced without any compensation or prospects for future employment.<sup>65</sup> This is what motivated the landless workers to refuse to leave their homes, and to occupy the estate and pressure the government to expropriate the land with the help of the CPT. What was to follow was not uncommon, but dangerous: years of intimidation from Ducoco, violent threats, targeted persecution, and three assassinations. The first man assassinated was Francisco Araújo Barros, after whom the high school is named.<sup>66</sup> The other two young men, “Chico” Francisco Carneiro de Sousa Filho and Francisco Izaquiel Ferreira, have their names painted on pillars inside the school, as do more people who lost their lives in the fight for land and are now considered martyrs of agrarian land reform.

In 1986, the first Expropriation Decree was won, but the violence and resistance continued until more neighboring lands were also expropriated and deemed settlements of land reform. Lagoa do Mineiro organized its 135 original *assentados* or “settled” families into seven communities: Cedro, Lagoa do Mineiro, Córrego das Moças, Saguim, Mineiro Velho, Corrente, and Barbosa. In 2012, the total number of Lagoa do Mineiro residents was 1,028, still consisting of 135 original families plus 85 *agregados* (aggregates), which are the

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<sup>64</sup> This piece of evidence came in the form of an informal conversation with Dona Chiquinha. Lagoa do Mineiro, 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Dos Santos Damasceno, “Contribuições e desafios,” 40.

<sup>66</sup> He is also Alexandro’s uncle.

children of the original occupants and their own nuclear families.<sup>67</sup> With guidance from the MST, multiple agricultural cooperatives and labor associations were formed in the communities.<sup>68</sup> Today, the settlement still depends on small scale agriculture and there exists an internal economy based on the exchange of goods strengthening its autonomy.<sup>69</sup> Lagoa do Mineiro's land coverage totals 5,988 hectares.<sup>70</sup>

Residents of Lagoa do Mineiro still resist and engage in land occupation everyday—they live in the middle of a landscape of competing interests over natural resources. Ducoco still operates in the surrounding area, and one of its factories is located in the neighboring city of Itapipoca. Other large companies surrounding Lagoa do Mineiro include a watermelon distributor that depends on monoculture systems and the CPFL windfarms, which are controlled by Camargo Correa, one of Brazil's largest conglomerates handling construction and energy companies.<sup>71</sup> It was in the early 2000s that MST agronomists and agroecology-technicians became more visible and frequent at Lagoa do Mineiro. Until that time, farmers were practicing the same agricultural methods they had been as tenant-farmers. In conversations with Francisco, he told me, “Nobody knew how harmful the artificial inputs were. We didn't know how bad the agROTOXINS were for our health.”<sup>72</sup> When the agronomists arrived and organized workshops with the settlements' farmers, they encouraged individual farmers and the already-in-place agricultural cooperatives to decrease the number of slash

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<sup>67</sup> Dos Santos Damasceno, “Contribuições e desafios,” 43.

<sup>68</sup> For a full list of cooperatives, see Dos Santos Damasceno, “Contribuições e desafios,” 44.

<sup>69</sup> Field notes, November 2017.

<sup>70</sup> Field notes from November 2017. I was shown a copy of the original Expropriation Decree.

<sup>71</sup> If you ask people in Lagoa do Mineiro where the energy generated by the windmills visible from any spot on the entire settlement is sent, nobody will be able to tell you. Speculations range from São Paulo to France. But they will be able to tell you the names of the representatives from CPFL that appeared years ago attempting to negotiate windmills on Lagoa do Mineiro land. The representatives did not succeed in negotiating land with any Lagoa do Mineiro residents.

<sup>72</sup> Field notes, January 2019.

and burn treatments on productive plots, distance themselves from artificial inputs, and adopt practices that focused on soil health.<sup>73</sup> This is extremely important because Lagoa do Mineiro is coastal, meaning that the soil is sandy and poor in organic matter, creating a situation where soil amendments are a requirement. The traditional slash and burn practices, while able to enrich the soil before planting, deplete the soil after just a couple of plantings and leave the soil weaker with each season.

Lagoa do Mineiro has historically been an agricultural community in livelihood, culture, and identity. In a sense, agroecology is a reaffirmation of Lagoa do Mineiro's autonomy and resilience against the estate owner and agribusiness. Inserting this into the day-to-day of a formal education recognizes this identity and history as critical, and essential to the formation of a new generation. This is visible in the discussions Hilma has with her students about best-practices for smaller manioc lots at home, or in her prioritization of class trips to visit the settlement's farmers' production fields that showcase agroecology.

## **Agroecology and Education within the MST**

### *The MST and Agroecology*

The MST began to formally debate agroecology in the 1990s as a more energy efficient and nutrient regenerative farming method, but it was also discussed as the ideology counter to that of the increasing transnational agricultural investment that was taking over unused land all throughout Brazil for the sake of for-export goods or agro-fuel. Scholars, practitioners, and activists have also framed and presented it as the antithesis to the

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<sup>73</sup> As told to me by Francisco and Neide. Field notes January 2019.

ecological and social wastelands caused by agribusiness.<sup>74</sup> The fight for land and the fight for farming—first to have the ability to farm as a livelihood and then to be able to do it without artificial inputs that lead to soil degradation, chemical dependency, and eventually lower yields—both center around the right for autonomy and the right to be able to compete in a more equitable and just economy. These are central priorities for MST activists and for farmers on settlements, no matter how involved they are with the movement at large.

Miguel Altieri and Victor Manuel Toledo argue that agroecology, “empowers peasant organization and directly challenges neoliberal modernization policies based on agribusiness and agro-exports while opening new political roads for Latin American agrarian societies.”<sup>75</sup> This is because such methods of agriculture that are autonomous from external and artificial inputs splinter the global hegemonic agricultural system. Agroecology is also a path toward food sovereignty. Ensuring that landless families are able to live off the land and meet their present and future needs empowers the MST agroecology discourse and other rural movements like Via Campesina (LVC)—a global umbrella movement of over 200 million peasant farmers, indigenous people, landless workers, and rural youth defending small-scale farming from neoliberal agriculture policy which has outcompeted, displaced, and exploited small scale and family farmers. Throughout the 1960-1980s, Brazil’s production of soybean, wheat, sugarcane, and distilling of ethanol as a gasoline production skyrocketed.<sup>76</sup> All of this was for export, and in the case of distilling ethanol, for non-food production. In turn, production of staple crops such as beans and vegetables dropped sharply, creating food and

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<sup>74</sup> This is because agribusiness models are based in artificial fertilizers and additives in monocrop plantations that degrade the environment and economic possibilities for small farmers: Peter M. Rosset and Maria Elena Martínez-Torres, “Rural Social Movements and Agroecology: Context, Theory, and Process.” *Ecology and Society* 17, no. 3 (2012): 1-14.

<sup>75</sup> Altieri and Toledo, “The Agroecological Revolution in Latin America,” 588.

<sup>76</sup> Hall, “Land Tenure and Land Reform in Brazil,” 215.

nutrition insecurity. In 1990, 80% of the northeastern population suffered from caloric deficiency and severe food insecurity as a result of the combined land concentrations and not-for-domestic-consumption food production, agricultural modernization, and a dispossessed, landless, population.<sup>77</sup>

In 2005, the MST formally ratified agroecology as the movement's foundation for small-scale farming. This means the movement rejects input-dependent farming, which is one that uses chemical fertilizers and pesticides, genetically modified seed, genetically altered livestock, slash and burn methods, and instead of monocrop planting, embraces permaculture cropping. With the objective of educating farmers and expanding these practices, they sponsor national to local workshops, traveling agronomy technicians, and university students specializing in regenerative agriculture. The MST now also has twelve agroecology vocation schools throughout the country.<sup>78</sup>

Even more significant, the differentiated-curriculum public schools that have been won by the MST and partner movements teach agroecology as a core course, and the curriculum includes studying and working in experiential fields. The concept of “winning” schools for their communities comes from the way this process is commonly referred to by the interviewees themselves, who talk about the moment MST in which schools were legally recognized as a “conquest” for their communities (“a conquista das escolas”).<sup>79</sup> This integration of agroecology into the day-to-day educational space connects rather than separates it as a fundamental area of study, familiarizing more people with the concept and fortifying its relevance to education and the MST.

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<sup>77</sup> Hall, “Land Tenure and Land Reform in Brazil,” 216.

<sup>78</sup> Meek, “Movements in Education,” 12.

<sup>79</sup> Achievements in general are often referred to as conquests. Field notes November 2017.

The efforts to increase awareness and expand agroecology are also vital for the movement's reproduction. To this end, their efforts must go beyond established farmers and reach the next generation. In effect, agroecology is also one way young people can become interested and experienced in studying and working in their communities, settlements, or regions. As communicated and taught by Escolas do Campo affiliated with the MST, it also provides an opportunity for young people to create their own autonomy in how they choose to work their land, and push back against old family dynamics that could include simply doing as your father did on the family's plot of land, depending on slash and burn methods, or the use of chemicals. The movement encourages expanding understandings and discussions surrounding agricultural pursuits. To this end, in 2005, the MST instituted the *Jornada Agroecológica*, which is an annual meeting with changing locations where farmers, technicians, activists, and others to come together to debate the state of agroecology and to identify future directions.<sup>80</sup>

### *The MST Education Sector and its Pedagogies*

At first, most MST activists at the national level disregarded public education as an arm of the oppressive capitalist state, and influences of the public-school system were counteracted by organizing informal educational activities in MST communities.<sup>81</sup> However, as the MST gained more ground and new settlements, the importance of formal schooling and the necessity to negotiate a public-school system became undeniable. In 1987, the MST

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<sup>80</sup> David Meek and Ligia TL Simonian, "Transforming Space and Society? The Political Ecology of Education in the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement's Jornada de Agroecologia," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 3 (2017): 513-532.

<sup>81</sup> Tarlau, "How Do New Critical Pedagogies Develop?" 5.

held its first national seminar about education in the land settlements and created the Education Sector of MST. Movement representatives from the entire country attended to discuss the values, methods, roles of educators, and logistics for the new plan. In direct opposition to traditional schooling—which is one that exacerbates the inequality between city and country life, and keeps those who live in rural areas at the margins of Brazilian society—the movement’s educational approach would have to be one based in the collective and critical analysis of knowledge and its potential for social change. As David Meek and Ligia Simonian argue, the act of occupying would have to ring true through the day-to-day practice of learning, and the schools on MST settlements would have to occupy the space of traditional public schools physically as well as intellectually.<sup>82</sup>

By the 1990s, the idea of *educação do campo* was adopted and further developed by popular educators and activists. The political pressure put on the Brazilian government by social movements, including the MST, resulted in *educação do campo* becoming a nationally and legally recognized approach to rural schooling by the end of the decade. *educação do campo*, which can be translated as education in/of/for the countryside, is defined by Adaleide Ferreira Coutinho and Cacilda Cavacanti as a contextualized education for students living in rural areas, where the traditional notion of schooling is intentionally connected to the agricultural reality of those communities, and where agricultural work is valued along with communities’ rural histories and culture.<sup>83</sup> As a concept, *educação do campo* perceives its students as “protagonists of social and political processes.”<sup>84</sup> In contrast with the top-down

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<sup>82</sup> Meek and Simonian, “Transforming Space and Society?” 513-532.

<sup>83</sup> Adaleide Ferreira Coutinho and Cacilda R. Cavalcanti eds., *Questão agrária, movimentos sociais e educação do campo* (Curitiba: Editora CRV, 2012).

<sup>84</sup> Marília Campos and Lia Maria Teixeira de Oliveira, “Educação básica do campo,” in *Dicionário da educação do campo*, ed. Roseli S. Caldart, Isabel B. Pereira, Paulo Alentejano, and Gaudêncio Frigotto (Rio de Janeiro: Expressão Popular, 2012), 235-243.

approach characteristic of traditional educational practices, the curricula in *educação do campo* schools are developed collectively by the local rural population it serves in collaboration with local educators, who will have gone through specific pedagogical training. This approach to schooling is different than rural education because instead of planting an urban-centric school in the countryside, this type of schooling challenges those in historically impoverished tenant-farming communities to learn actively and critically, and to not passively accept the information being passed to them from the educator.<sup>85</sup> This sets *educação do campo* apart and politicizes the learning experience because it resists citizen passivity and the strong stigma against rural populations and tenant-farming communities that is still prevalent today.

Rosalie Caldart identifies one of the principle objectives of *educação do campo* and MST educational programs as “produzir gente.”<sup>86</sup> Translated literally from Portuguese, *produzir gente* means to produce people. In its socio-linguistic and historical context, it means to produce people *with value*. When people refer to *ser gente*, to being someone, there is a connotation that implies that person is worth something to society by implying a good job, respectable social status, and character. This education objective becomes particularly significant in the context of rural settlements and people associated with the MST because they are marginalized and disenfranchised groups within Brazil. Until FAB was opened, children from Lagoa do Mineiro and neighboring rural areas commuted into neighboring cities only to face discrimination and humiliation from their peers and teachers.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Paulo Freire theorizes on this educational social contract and compares it to banking: one party depositing information into the other without dialogue. For Freire, this is also a form of oppression. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 71.

<sup>86</sup> Caldart, *Pedagogia do Movimento Sem Terra*.

<sup>87</sup> Interviewees remember being called *lixo*, trash, *moradores da mata*, forest-dwellers and other names.

The prioritization of urban areas and blatant neglect of rural areas in public policies supporting education is evident in intra-regional analyses of education financing. These reveal that rural municipalities in Brazil's North and Northeast historically received one-sixth of the resources urban municipalities in the south did.<sup>88</sup> This allocation of resources has reinforced the strong, problematic dichotomy associating the city with progress and the country with ignorance and no value, seeping into the social, economic, and political marginalization of rural populations in Brazil. However, through the *educação do campo*, the MST rejects this narrative and establishes a place for students to think critically about their social, economic, and political reality and become empowered by the dynamic history of class struggle in their communities as well as rural areas nationally and globally.<sup>89</sup> This approach seeks to address not only spatial and regional imbalances, but also class and socioeconomic inequalities.<sup>90</sup> The role of the educator in this process is essential to its praxis, and is also inherently politicized.<sup>91</sup> The influence of Freire's theory of educators as facilitators for social change is evident here as is the connection between Freire pedagogy and Gramscian theory: In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that educators have the responsibility to enable social transformation through their students and their links to larger social movements, and the educators working at FAB and more MST affiliated Escolas do Campo complete trainings each year to reinforce this part of the job description.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Meek, "Movements in Education" 18.

<sup>89</sup> This is at the core of its educational ideology and many studies addressing critical education. For more information, see Coutinho and Cavalcanti, *Questão agrária*.

<sup>90</sup> Tarlau, "The Social(ist) Pedagogies," 7.

<sup>91</sup> This is a concrete example of Gramscian theory of cultural hegemony being the praxis of an emancipated education. The deliberate and self-aware actions taken in school settings with purpose for altering larger systems and realities is not given enough attention in the scholarly literature, and has immense value to scholarly conversations and to the application of social justice.

<sup>92</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 75.

Acknowledging school as a critical site for the valorization and empowerment of rural youth encourages fair and beneficial development in the countryside. In Brazil, migration from the countryside to urban areas has fluctuated throughout time, but has stayed high since the 1980s.<sup>93</sup> High rates of emigration will leave a rural population disenfranchised and, in turn, vulnerable to further marginalization and land exploitation. Amongst the variety of push and pull factors leading people to move to cities from rural areas, education is significant. Long commutes with unreliable transportation will lead many young people to move to cities and live with relatives in order to finish their schooling, find employment afterward, and permanently leave their community. Another outcome is students abandoning their education before graduating secondary school and finding themselves unprepared to work and further disenfranchised. A low community morale makes it easier for developers to come in and appropriate land that had previously been productive and vital to the local economy. It will also facilitate the transformation of rural communities into monoculture fields, or windmill farms, or vacant lots.

According to David Meek, educational institutions based in endogenous forms of knowledge and land management resist this transformation of the social landscape.<sup>94</sup> The intentionality of both interrupting the capitalist social production and resisting the emptying of rural communities through a critical pedagogy is apparent in MST texts published at the national level.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> From 1990-95, 54% of all of the country's rural migrants were from the Northeast and they were a part of the southwestern agricultural expansion toward Amazonia: Cláudia Souza Passador, *A educação rural no Brasil: o caso da escola do campo no Paraná* (vol 294, Annablume, 2006), 26. Rural migration out of the North and Northeast has a long history going back at least to the 1930s, in connection with urbanization and industrialization of the cities in southern Brazil. For a historical background, see Paulo Fontes, *Migration to Industrial São Paulo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

<sup>94</sup> Meek and Simonian, "Transforming Space and Society?" 520.

<sup>95</sup> MST, "MST 20 Anos – Balanço Setor de Educação," in *Educação no MST Memória: Documentos 1987-2015*, ed. MST (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2017), 81-90.

## **FAB and the Political Pedagogical Project**

The commitment FAB has made to critical pedagogy and agroecology is evident by reading the school's Political Pedagogical Project document (PPP). This document presents the history, identity, and purpose of the school and is intended to be a lively tool with which to orient the constant and day-to-day practices.<sup>96</sup> A content analysis of this document supports the assertion that agroecology and critical pedagogy are present in the ideals and practices of the school possible. It is updated each year during Pedagogy Week, a week dedicated to reflecting on the past school year and planning the school year ahead. The entire faculty and staff from all the escolas do campo in Ceará are expected to come together in one of the state's ten schools (rotating each year) and bring at least one student representative. This week-long gathering facilitates dialogue and solidarity among the escolas do campo and provides a space to refuel the political pedagogical project aligned with the national MST education goals. Each school has a unique PPP, but will be informed by the other schools in the region and their complementary experiences.

FAB identifies itself as the fruit of the struggle for a dignified education in the countryside and for the affirmation of peasant agriculture. A core characteristic that is addressed explicitly in the PPP is the school's social function: to intervene in students' realities and gear towards a social transformation. This principle resembles and closely aligns with the construction of an alternative agricultural model, which it identifies as its mission: to contribute to the education of a new generation committed to an autonomous agriculture and the valorization of the countryside. Additionally, the school adds that having a social function includes developing the school in such a way that it becomes a reference for the

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<sup>96</sup> "Projeto Político Pedagógico," 1-76.

whole settlement in terms of local culture, different types of work, research, popular traditions, collective memory, social movements, cooperativism, and educational possibilities.<sup>97</sup> This demonstrates the leading roles education and agriculture have in Lagoa do Mineiro, and it highlights how education and agriculture act as bridges connecting the different scales at which it is being presented and worked: a new educational and agricultural system is a national issue addressed at the national level by MST, and on a day-to-day basis at schools like FAB.

The PPP also states that FAB “must be a space of constant resistance against the estate owner and agribusiness, promote a life and production aligned to agroecology, which is the counterpoint to the capitalist agricultural model.”<sup>98</sup> This statement instantly politicizes the school’s function and its role in the community, and at the same time it politicizes the communities it serves which share authorship of the statement. It confirms the intention to interrupt the status quo and educate an active(ist) generation of autonomous and engaged citizens. It also gives education a concrete, practical direction, one that improves the quality of life for a community and reinforces the political quest of a national movement.

The PPP presents an educational approach that grows in dialogue with the community’s reality and needs. As the PPP states, the school exists to educate the community, but also to be educated by it. The school is self-aware of its ability to boost the effort of agrarian land reform, and positions itself as a facilitator to the quest, prepared to take on different issues than the traditional high school does. It does this by offering three differentiated-classes directly engaging in the political and agricultural processes the MST challenges, and the alternative it proposes: *Práticas Sociais Comunitárias* (Social and

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<sup>97</sup> “Projeto Político Pedagógico,” 11.

<sup>98</sup> “Projeto Político Pedagógico,” 11.

Community Practices: PSC), Organização de Trabalho e Técnicas de Produção (Organization of Work and Productive Technologies: OTTP), and Pesquisa e Iniciação Científica (Research Projects: PEP) and structures the school day to engage with MST values: *mística*, class time, collective planning for students and teachers, work, research study, cultural study, and finally, recreation.<sup>99</sup> At FAB, the educators are also committed to being present at different manifestations related to the social movement and participate in the *mística* at school every week. *Mística* is a moment of communal reflection and solidarity that will often include singing and chanting. It is performative and participatory, meant to inspire and refuel activists.

#### *Práticas Sociais Comunitárias (Communal and Social Practice)*

This class addresses cultural and traditional aspects of rural life. Local and regional popular knowledge is presented in an organized way, collecting and inhibiting cultural knowledge from becoming irrelevant and forgotten. This humanities class props up rural history and acknowledges the students' family histories as important historical events worthy of formal study and time separate from the more general History class also in the curriculum. The purpose of this class, as stated in the PPP, is to "promote social mobilization within communities, social and political participation, and enthusiasm for campesino culture."<sup>100</sup> Rural movements including the MST are studied and debated in this class as well.

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<sup>99</sup> For analyses of these practices, see Daniela Issa, "Praxis of Empowerment: *Mística* and Mobilization in Brazil's Landless Rural Workers' Movement," *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 2 (2007): 124-138.

<sup>100</sup> "Projeto Político Pedagógico," 59.

### *Pesquisa e Iniciação Científica (Research and Introduction to Science)*

This class goes beyond learning how to conduct a research project because each student, from their first year at FAB, will be responsible for an individual or group project that addresses a local issue. Project topics range from gender in agriculture to animal urine for organic fertilizer. The main objective of this class is to transform the students' everyday into a field of study.<sup>101</sup> It also requires students to work outside of school discipline boundaries, pulling from different subjects and forms of knowledge in order to identify and work through problems. The projects are often carried out with the help of community members or in a students' family production plot. At the end of the year, everyone must present their project at the school's annual science fair. The fair happens during the school day, cancelling classes so that everyone can participate together. It is also open to the public thus connecting the school with the community at large.

### *Organização de Trabalho e Técnicas de Produção (Work Organization and Production Techniques)*

This class has as its objective to bridge theory and practice. Students study how to plan, plant, and maintain agricultural production in a way that regenerates soil fertility and does not rely on chemical inputs. It pulls together biology, ecology, and chemistry to study their application in the school's experimental field that was created by a collective effort of volunteers from the community in what is called *mutirão*, an understanding that helping one person's project is helping everyone's project. The students split their time between in-classroom learning and working (and further studying) in the mandala. This is an

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<sup>101</sup> Expressed by Karol, Denilson, Cosma, Flávio, Hilma, Neide, and Ivaniza, January 2019.

experimental field consisting of 10 hectares total, dedicated to growing food such as manioc, maize, potatoes, beans, different vegetables, herbs, and fruits such as bananas, mangos, melons etc. and taking care of chickens, geese, fish, and ducks. Every class in each grade will work in the field over the course of the year, coordinating with the OTTP teacher and the mandala manager.<sup>102</sup>

Another priority of this class is to strengthen ties to the community and, in particular, to the Production Sector of the settlement, becoming in this way a tangible example of the school's social function. It does this by acting as a test-field for new integrated pest management methods, cultivation or breeding techniques, and disseminating this information to farmers. Students, faculty, staff, and families can also take produce home from the mandala on a pay-what-you-can sliding scale. Classes will take field trips to farmers and classmates' production plots to learn about their cultivation methods and techniques. This can empower students and farmers alike to acknowledge their knowledge-holder status and share it with others as opposed to looking outward for direction.

### **Agroecology and Critical Pedagogy Experiences at FAB and its Influences Beyond School**

As you walk through the front gates of the Francisco Araújo Barros high school, you are greeted with the word AGROECOLOGIA painted in large white letters over the main

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<sup>102</sup> The mandala as an agricultural model was first introduced in Paraíba, Brazil in 2005 by Brazilian agronomist Dr. Willy Pessoa Rodriguez, who based it on the concepts of the mandala that were original to India. For more information about the history, intention, and function of the mandala agroecosystem, see Jennyfer Paola Sánchez Pardo, "Sistema mandala de producción integral y soberana: experiencia en Brasil," Monografía de Grado, Universidad de los Llanos, Villavicencio-Meta, Colombia, 2010, 42-47.

corridor leading to the school's open gathering space. Ivaniza says this main corridor is named Agroecology because, "...aqui semeamos e multiplicamos agroecologia" (here we plant the seeds and we multiply agroecology). As you walk through the school, more symbolic words, phrases, and images span the walls of FAB, reminding you of the school's commitment to the critical growth of its students and community, and of the sociocultural and productive project that the community represents. Some of these include a mural stating *Juventude é Revolução* (Youth is Revolution), another one painted *Você tem Fome de Qué? Agrotóxico Mata* (What Are You Hungry For? Agrotoxins Kill), and a sign that reads *Chico Mendes: Um Homem de Acção, Pela Natureza Dedicou Seu Coração* (Chico Mendes: A Man of Action, Who Dedicated His Heart to Nature).<sup>103</sup> All of these messages point to two general themes: the connections between the school (and community) to the ideas of agrarian reform and history of struggle for social change; and the principles of agroecology. Both also echo Ivaniza's reasoning behind the main corridor being named Agroecology: Here they seed and multiply agroecology, with the social and political weight that it has for this community's present and future.

The banner makes each person entering the school recognize the central role agriculture plays in the school's pedagogy and it also reflects the school's vision about its role in fostering the principles and practices of agroecology for the benefit of the larger community. This banner sets the stage for those entering the school and its set the stage for the interviews I conducted at the school and my fieldwork in the larger community in 2017 and 2019. The main questions that guided my inquiry were: How did the teachers, students,

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<sup>103</sup> Chico Mendes was a Brazilian environmental activist and rubber tapper. He was assassinated by a rancher in 1988. Mendes mobilized masses to protect the Amazon rainforest from deforestation and labor exploitation.

and other members of the educational and larger community position themselves at the intersection of agroecology and critical pedagogy? How did people relate to the different aspects of the school's mission articulated in the PPP? How did people believe FAB contributes (or does not) to the movements toward agroecology and rural resilience?

### 1. *Place and Agroecology Curriculum*

Identity rooted in place emerged as a salient theme in many conversations. This was the first thing Cosma talked about during our interview, as she wove the creation of FAB's curriculum together with the importance of valuing the countryside and empowering a rural identity among the students, as well as developing robust agroecological technologies to support that identity:

Quando a gente conseguiu na luta negociar esta escola, em 2007, com o governador do estado, a gente começou a escutar a proposta de que escola a gente queria, né. Nessa construção discutindo com os agricultores com os camponeses que estiveram na luta que reivindicaram a escola, eles diziam assim o, 'A gente quer uma escola que tenha a ver com a vida da gente. Que ela esteja vinculada. Que o que seja trabalhado na escola fortaleça nossa identidade, nossos valores, nosso jeito de ser camponês aqui em nossos assentamentos,' A aí a gente começou a pensar a escola e o que deveria ser ensinado na escola. Existe a base comum com currículo nacional que tem que ser trabalhado, mas tinham saberes e conhecimentos que eles queriam que fosse trabalhado na escola e por isso a gente conseguiu inserir na construção da proposta três novos componentes curriculares que foi a Pesquisa, a questão da Organização do Trabalho e as Técnicas Produtivas. Todas as técnicas produtivas elas têm esse vínculo com a agroecologia, né, como é que a gente vai trabalhar técnicas produtivas agroecológicas para que possam multiplicar com a família, é? E a outra disciplina foi as Práticas Sociais e Comunitárias, trazer para a gente esses saberes e essas práticas sociais resistentes nas comunidades para as escolas, é.

Cosma defined the school's main purpose and starting point as listening to the community first, and then responding with an educational plan that values its place's identity in order to ensure a sustained and empowered future with technical and intellectual tools. As discussed earlier, this is the basis for *educação do campo*, which intentionally connects

curriculum to the students' daily and historical reality. Agroecology is identified as a technical tool to be worked within the school and extended into families. Parallel to this is the study of past and present resistance-organizing that occurs in the students' communities and MST settlement, acknowledging the rich history of rural resistance and legitimizing it as a source of formalized study. Following the lines of thought discussed in the literature review arguing that knowledge is not neutral, but rather embedded within relationships of power, Research (PEP), Work and Productive Technologies (OTTP), and Community Social Practices (PSC) are three differentiated courses that disrupt and challenge the dominant knowledge processes because they are courses developed from the concerns and demands of farmers rather than branches of the urban-centric state curriculum. Empowered identity, critical education, and agroecology connect as Cosma continued:

Eu lembro muito bem da fala de José Santa Ana, ele dizia assim: 'A gente precisa de ensinar a nossos filhos valorizar e gostar do campo. A ver que é possível construir alternativas de sobrevivência de fortalecimento do campo. De pesquisar e pensar nas tecnologias que possam diminuir a penosidade do trabalho,' O trabalho é sempre aquela coisa puxada penosa do agricultor, sempre do mesmo jeito. Mas como que a tecnologia possa nos ajudar a melhorar as condições de trabalho para diminuir a penosidade? Agregando valor a nossa produção e sem a gente implementar um pacote tecnológico que não seja na matriz tecnológica da agroecologia. Porque veneno, o veneno, a gente está morrendo o povo esta morrendo de tanto veneno. Estamos destruindo a nossas matas, as nossas florestas. Desmatando para fazer monocultura. Que isso, gente? A gente quer aumentar a nossa produtividade, mas com tecnologias que sejam de convivência com o meio ambiente.

Cosma linked the school and MST commitment to an organized and resilient countryside by quoting MST activist and educator José Santa Ana. Emphasizing the importance of self-reflective research relating to agricultural ideology and practice, "trabalho penoso do agricultor" (the farmer's painful labor) is re-framed and posed as a critical point of reassessment that impacts the community and larger ecosystems. Cosma continued to pull

out the critical content in her PP class and how it is relevant to the different facets of the lived reality in Lagoa do Mineiro and society as a whole:

Eu trabalho a pesquisa. A disciplina da pesquisa. E saíram várias temáticas bem legais que os meninos estudaram este ano. Por exemplo, teve um grupo que pesquisou a questão da soberania alimentar. Como que a gente afeita a autonomia alimentar? Teve outro grupo que pesquisou os alimentos transgênicos e o perigo, né. E aí conseguiram identificar, fazer levantamentos de todos esses alimentos transgênicos. Teve grupos que pesquisaram sobre a questão dos agrotóxicos. Teve diversos temas. Teve outros temas que foram a violência contra a mulher. Como é que você discute a agroecologia sem discutir a questão dos valores de gênero do respeito, e esses temas de violência contra a mulher. Teve um grupo que pesquisou essa questão das drogas dos entorpecentes e na influência na vida dos jovens, né. Teve temáticas que foram a questão do lixo o impacto ambiental pelo lixo a partir de nossa comunidade de Patos.<sup>104</sup> Porque lá tem um lixão que esta afeitando a comunidade. Como é que fariam uma intervenção? O projeto foi bem legal. E aí teve outros grupos que pesquisaram a questão do óleo do batiputá. Semente de planta nativa que é medicinal. Outro grupo estudou os usos de gergelim eles foram aos agricultores e trouxeram os saberes dos agricultores e fizeram essa troca. Aprofundando também como é que esses produtos servem para saúde.

PEP covers a wide range of concrete and abstract issues that are visible in the students' lives but can (and do) also function to question the systems that make those issues possible and further the society in which they exist as a whole. The quotidian is brought into the classroom and challenged, questioned, studied, scaled from the local to the societal level. As Cosma notes, food autonomy, genetically modified food, gender violence from an agroecology perspective: these issues are part of the countryside's daily politics, agriculture, and food systems. Understanding Cosma's curriculum through a political ecology of education lens enables us to understand the centrality of political resistance in agriculture and food systems within *educação do campo*. Freire's idea of pedagogy through dialogue is also apparent in what Cosma says, one which is "critical and liberating".<sup>105</sup> This dialogic

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<sup>104</sup> One of the seven communities on the settlement.

<sup>105</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 65.

approach involves schools and communities, but also teachers and students as members of the community. Reflecting on her experience as a student in PP, Karol said she did not get as much out of it as the students do now because her class did not have the dialogue component and could not apply what they learned in the community:

Hoje eu vejo que os meninos conseguiram avançar mais porque eles têm que desenvolver um projeto. A gente ficou mais nas normas, eles têm que desenvolver um projeto e apresentar no final do ano. Então isso já foi um avanço. Então é a oportunidade que os alunos olharem para a comunidade como campo de pesquisa. Então isso aproximou sim, na minha época não aproximou tanto porque a gente não conseguiu avançar tanto. Hoje os meninos já conseguiram avançar porque têm que fazer um projeto e aí eles têm a comunidade como campo de pesquisa aonde eles têm que pesquisarem realmente que está acontecendo, qual é o problema então conseguiram avançar nisso. Então posso dizer se hoje estudasse, se eu fosse estudante hoje, eu poderia dizer que tinha contribuído.

Karol's reflection emphasized the impact applied place-based learning has on students and underscores Cosma's intention within her class. The way Karol referred to the class being an opportunity for the community to be a site for study also reinforces David Meeks's argument of educational institutions being sources for larger institutional change because Karol recognized that "what is really going on right now" in the community is worth organized, formulated research that solves real problems. Not only does it do this, it also advances *educação do campo*'s centering of students as protagonists in that larger institutional change.

When discussing OTTP with Hilma, she framed her agroecology praxis from the perspective of community building within a national agribusiness paradigm that dominates Brazil. She also makes connections beyond Brazil to talk about the larger implications of political change in other places, like the United States, and the impact on local communities.

In this way, Hilma shows that there are larger forces at play and that her community is shaped by them, as well:

Uma das coisas que fez foi que houvesse a evolução e organização das comunidades, né, foi a agricultura. A agricultura mudou tudo, basicamente. Nessa perspectiva, da formação das comunidades, não tem como estar desassociada, de jeito nenhum. Então a gente hoje, tanto os Estados Unidos como aqui, quando você tem um governo que ele tem uma visão do agronegócio a gente pode sofrer muito. Porque uma das atividades que mais impacta é a atividade agrícola. Você tem a questão da irrigação, da utilização de maquinário com combustíveis fósseis, essa coisa todinha. Então você pode impactar negativamente a questão climática. Então quando a gente trabalha com a agroecologia, aí tem duas questões nossas que eu sempre coloco isso, o respeito ao saber popular, as práticas e os saberes nos ancestrais, e a questão da ciência. Que é que a gente quer unir. Quando a gente tem um regimento científico pode potencializar aquele saber popular a gente tem como melhorar a qualidade de vida das pessoas que estão ali no campo. Nossa perspectiva é essa.

For Hilma, a possible alternative for these challenges can be found in the synergy resulting from combining local traditions with outside ones. The forces Hilma aims to unite through her teaching are popular/local and ancestral knowledge with western science. She stated that by using science to boost popular/local knowledge, the lives of those in the countryside are improved. The agroecology praxis is a clear response to industrialized neoliberal agriculture systems pushing out small farmers, which, she states, also negatively impact the climate through fossil fuel intensive machinery and water intense irrigation systems, and threaten communities like Lagoa do Mineiro. Hilma then positioned the collective perspective at the school in opposition to the top-down and hierarchical perspective of agribusiness. She also positioned the everyday realities within the greater context of a country's government and its relationship to agricultural processes. This is critical to highlight because it emphasizes just how significant an administration's ideology and policy perspective is to issues as seemingly abstract as climate change and to issues as

seemingly simple as schoolwork. Relating the above to the day-to-day struggles of her class, Hilma said:

E os educandos, como que eles se mostram dentro disso? Têm muitos que, quando você fala no trabalho, eles se identificam mais à questão prática. Outros, não se identificam tanto, mas a maioria, como é algo do dia a dia deles, sempre têm essa identificação. Agora, há uma resistência mesmo de alguns à questão do trabalho agrícola como algo negativo porque infelizmente culturalmente os pais sempre dizem, ‘Se você não quer estudar, vai à enxada’. E pela questão do trabalho penoso mesmo, se você não se identifica minimamente você vai tornar aquele trabalho mais árduo, mais pesado, então assim, a juventude não quer mais trabalho pesado, eles querem, hajam uma identificação, e a gente está procurando isso, são identificações simples, são técnicas simples, que a gente pode estar trabalhando, inclusive para não impactar tanto negativamente. Então diante disso, a gente tem esse cotidiano com os educandos. Se incentivar, de alguns não quer ir, mas da gente estar movimentando, chamando, vai desenvolvendo. Terminam participando.

Children and teenagers are hit from above and below with negative connotations of agriculture as the hard, intense manual labor it is, but doubled down with the false stereotype of agriculture as “intellectually irrelevant” or empty. This dichotomy, addressed in Rosalie Caldart’s introduction of *Escola é mais do que escola*, emerges clearly in the testimonies I collected in Lagoa do Mineiro. Parents’ reinforcement of this separation is also visible in Hilma’s assessment of the generational challenges in the community. But the intentional and carved out separation of intellectual and manual labor only functions to disempower youth and young adults from identifying themselves in their surroundings. Historically, it has justified the enormous gap in school financial resources between urban and rural areas. By bringing the quotidian into her classroom and reinforcing her students’ identification with work, Hilma changes the perception of her most hesitant students’ around agriculture and introduces the notion of agroecology. However, as signaled by the Agroecology banner at the entrance to school, and Hilma’s assertion that agriculture is the foundation for community.

Agriculture has a greater meaning than just manual labor and food production. (Above: Uma das coisas que fez foi que houvesse a evolução e organização das comunidades, né, foi a agricultura. A agricultura mudou tudo, basicamente. Nessa perspectiva, da formação das comunidades, não tem como estar desassociada, de jeito nenhum). For Hilma, agriculture acquires a foundational quality—it creates and transforms community. In this way, agriculture, and agroecology in particular, is present in different aspects of local cultures

Flávio, who teaches PSC talked about how he structures his class and how he connected it to OTTP through agroecology, and its different expressions through work and local culture:

A PSC eles falavam que era a questão da valorização da cultura. Aqui, tinha nos assentamentos, tinha grupos culturais magníficos, de teatro de dramistas de rezado,<sup>106</sup> a questão religiosa também, e da cultura mesmo, e eles viam que seus filhos estavam perdendo isso por causa dessa indústria cultural que o capitalismo impõe para nossos jovens e pelo fato de migrar também para a cidade quando chegar lá ver uma cultura totalmente diferente. Eles diziam que voltavam pra cá e perdiam toda aquela prática. Aí a gente foi e pensou numa disciplina que resgatasse essa cultura. E foi a PSC. ... A OTTP trabalha com o sistema de agroecologia, a base da agroecologia, e a agroecologia é um modo de vida também. Agroecologia não é só forma de produzir, né. Por exemplo, o agronegócio, a base do agronegócio é produzir com veneno e produzir em grande escala, a agroecologia não é um modo um produzir, é um estilo de vida. E você defende o seu território. Então o OTTP trabalha com a agroecologia, e a PSC trabalha com esse estilo de vida que a agroecologia proporciona a essas pessoas então tem uma conexão muito, muito forte.

Agroecology is once again placed as a response and resistance to the agribusiness mode of production and economic dominance at the large scale. Here, agroecology is also verbally identified as a way to defend territory every day through practical production systems and a way of life, paralleling the literature about the concept of territorialization as the ideological transformation of a landscape as well as, and built upon, a physical

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<sup>106</sup> Folk theater groups.

occupation. Flávio did not explicitly expand on the lifestyle that agroecology enables but he talked about the local culture imbedded in historical customs that were being lost in favor of a “capitalistic industrialized culture”. In doing so, he paralleled the competition between local rural cultural with the city to the tensions and conflicts between agroecology and agribusiness. For this reason, and because he expressed that he built his praxis of agroecology from the definition and practice of agroecology worked in OTTP, the agroecological lifestyle Flávio refers to can be situated within the agroecology framework discussed by scholars like Altieri, Toledo, and Sevilla Guzmán and discussed by Hilma and Cosma earlier in this section. In this view, agroecology emerges as a practice of empowerment and resistance firmly rooted in local traditions and culture.

Place emerges as a key factor, as it creates specific practices and traditions. How do we understand place within its historical struggles and resistance over land, and defend it through productive and cultural systems based in collective identity? This is what the Escola do Campo Francisco Araújo Barros questions and practices as pedagogy. Reflective dialogue, applied study, and diverse expressions of agroecology are the tools with which students work through this question. Freire stated that, “Critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action, must be carried on with the oppressed at whatever stage of their struggle for liberation. The content of that dialogue can and should vary in accordance with historical conditions.”<sup>107</sup> Thus, in Freire’s view, reflective dialogue is the first step in enacting change and must be present in whichever stage or moment of struggle for liberation. This speaks to the importance of studying the everyday actions and struggles of critical education. Freire also states that this struggle is unique to each place’s historical context.

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<sup>107</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 65.

This is what Flávio was alluding to when he referred to the importance of culture and traditions. In the context of FAB and the MST, this is important to highlight for two reasons. Firstly, because one of the reasons the MST has been so resilient through different political administrations and multi-scaled efforts to obliterate it as a social movement is its heterogeneous makeup.<sup>108</sup> Just like ecological systems, heterogeneity boosts a community's resiliency against change because greater diversity will mean greater chance of survival. Since the movement has developed differently in different parts of the country and at different time scales, it is more flexible and adept to respond to blows. Secondly, MST rejects the narrative of a homogenous Brazilian countryside, and the escolas do campo are a testament to and dynamic example of that.

The diversity of needs connected to specific local realities and traditions is visible in the way schools develop their curriculum, even at the regional level. There are ten functioning Escolas do Campo in Ceará today. Every year, they come together during Pedagogy Week and over the course of seven days they critically reflect, share experiences of successes and failures, and refine the curriculum for the incoming school year. Each Escola do Campo has differentiated curricula and three courses like PP, PSC, and OTTP. Although these courses stem from the same curricular foundation, since each settlement is located in different parts of the state, their agricultural, research and community demands are different. And yet, at the same time each school is fine-tuning their own academic plan, the escolas do campo are strengthening their political and social vision by coming together in solidarity and refueling the Political Pedagogical Project that ties the schools, settlements, and MST

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<sup>108</sup> Wolford, *This Land Is Ours Now*, 9.

together. This is the result of a collective, bottom-up approach, but one that continuously intertwines and connects scales of analysis from local to national.

## *2. Reinvigorating Camponês Identity*

Connection to place stood out during curricular discussions, but interviewees also stressed identity as another foundational component to FAB pedagogy that they need to recognize, cultivate, and reinvigorate. This reclaiming of camponês identity is in the face of aggressive negative media coverage of the MST, deep rooted stigma from city dwellers and rural dwellers alike, and decades of rural to urban migration. Subthemes that underscored the importance of empowering camponês identity were combatting harsh stigma coming from all directions and the everyday fight many people consider leading with and defending their identity.

Karol, who commutes to Itarema every day to take classes for her BA in Geography, illustrated the preconceived notions her classmates projected onto her when she told them she was from a land-reform settlement:

Eu era a única que morava em assentamento de reforma agrária e eu deixava bem claro que eu morava em assentamento de reforma agrária e tal porque quando a gente tem uma identidade construída né, e eu sou grata a escola por ter conseguido isso, minha identidade. Então quando chegava o professor novo na sala, apresentação né, nome, aonde mora, e eu dizia, ‘Sou Karoline e moro em assentamento de reforma agrária’ e tal, e aí meus colegas não conheciam, né, então eles tinham uma visão. Qual era a visão deles? Aquele que e passada pela mídia né, ‘Ahh são os vândalos, ahh aquele que está ocupando aqueles que estão roubando terra ahh tal’. Então essa era a visão que eles tinham. Aí as vezes quando a gente tinha debate dentro da sala, eu defendia muito, e muitos como não conheciam, então eles ficavam assim, alguns me defendiam outros não, eram muitos preconceituosos tal, e outros me defendiam até.

Karol gives credit to FAB for cultivating her identity. She is now also able to defend it in spaces that are not land reform settlements. She is aware that the preconceived notions

people have toward her and her community come from the media, and she seemed to even feel compassion for that. She later reflected, “Porque quando a mídia coloca aquilo realmente né, derruba qualquer um.” Her view of the media’s power to undermine her legitimate position as a member of a land reform settlement (and, by extension, the settlement’s legitimate position) is clear in this statement. But equally important, in Karol’s view, is the school’s role to build settlement’s dwellers empowerment and sense of place. Denilson also gave credit to FAB for “his formation” as a MST activist and as a person. On the relationship between camponês identity and MST identity, as opposed to Karol who said there is a separation, he said, “Eu nunca parei para pensar. Para mim não tem diferenciação. Porque o movimento atua no campo e aí a gente, eu quem estou no campo e direto no Movimento, não sinto a diferença. É a mesma coisa, Movimento e campo.” He was also more optimistic that more students are identifying with the MST. As a young farmer, he perceives that the new generation is passionate about agroecology.

A difference in identity in farmers and their experience with agroecology and the MST is noticeable just from the three interested parties I interviewed. Denilson, Francisco, and Alexandro have different perspectives. A still relatively young farmer but a generation older than Denilson, Alexandro is proud to be a farmer, “Eu adoro ser agricultor” he said, and then told me he is proud to have learned it from his father who learned it from his father, thus signaling the importance of family tradition. But when it comes to identifying with the MST, although his father and uncle participated in the Lagoa do Mineiro land occupation, Alexandro said:

Eu não fui muito a fundo ao Movimento, né. Eu até iniciei, numa época, mas não me adaptei. Sempre falam nos mártires e sempre falam do meu tio, aí isso eu não gosto muito é uma coisa pessoal minha. Eu falei até para o pai já eu disse que não gosto

muito quando falam o nome do tio. Não me sinto a vontade. Também não sou contra. É só coisa minha. E ele também representa muito, né.<sup>109</sup>

He also said he observes how the school's ideological and programmatic proximity to the MST turns some parents off from sending their children there. This is especially the case if they are not from the settlement, although some residents of Lagoa do Mineiro are not fully behind all that the school represents in ideological terms, in particular its apparent connection with activism that can lead to confrontation with authorities:

A escola do campo e o MST são muito próximos. Até eu percebo que pode ser que alguns pais que não são muitos próximos as vezes se esquivam um pouco de colocar seus filhos aqui. Porque eles vêm daquela cultura que escola é para aprender a estudar e não aprender a trabalhar. E como a escola é diferenciada e tem a disciplina, a Técnicas Produtivas, que pega toda essa parte da agricultura: como plantar, como cuidar da área do terreno, como adubar sem adubo que faça mal os seres humanos em sim. Eles não vêm muito por esse lado. Alguns pais. Porque eles dizem que os meninos deles trabalham em casa então não precisa mais trabalhar na escola, não precisa mais aprender como trabalhar na escola, entendeu. ... Pode ser também um pouco de medo dos pais o filho chegar e gostar e entrar no Movimento, e ir para a luta. Muitos pais não sabem diferenciar a luta. Eles pensam que a gente está aqui, disse assim, 'Vamos para a luta', eles pensam que vão por uma guerra, batalhar. Eu acho até assim, pensando desse lado, eu acho que eles até têm um pouco de razão, né. Eles não são muito próximos. Mas a gente que está agora conseguindo trazer mais eles para explicar, realmente como é a luta e tudo. Mas a televisão está aí. Quando acontece uma, 'Vamos para a luta!' Sempre ela vai mostrar aquela correria, aquelas

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<sup>109</sup> As stated in the Methods section, Francisco Araújo Barros is Alexandro's uncle. When Alexandro said, "When they talk about my uncle, I don't feel that uplifted/I don't like it so much. I'm not against it either. It's just something personal. He also represents a lot, you know," he was referring to his uncle's status as martyr to the movement and to his discomfort around that. He told me that he is a proud camponês, but that he does not feel connected to the MST itself, even though he did participate in it for a short while. This could represent a personal struggle to reconcile the personal and individual relationship he had with his uncle with his uncle's symbolism in the social movement. This tension could be a source of distancing or could add to the discomfort Alexandro already feels around the movement. After asking one follow-up question, I decided not to press him. However, in regular unrecorded conversations, personal relationships and the strain that the MST can put on them did present itself as a factor in people not wanting to participate in the MST. One woman I spoke to told me she believed that the MST "took over lives" and made it difficult to prioritize family. This came from her own experience, since she struggles to co-parent with her ex-partner who is a prominent MST activist and travels often. From conversations and observation, I believe it is arguable that people close (in proximity) but not connected (through participation) to the MST view it as something that absorbs people, and in Alexandro's case, even after they are gone. This project does not delve into this issue, but does recognize it exists.

fumaças, essas coisas, e eles ficam com um pouco de medo, eles ficam assustados, não tenho dúvida que ficam. Quando vão para a luta sempre têm esse negócio aí. Policiais. Correria. Muitos fogos, essas coisas. O pai ele tem medo. Por exemplo, eu posso, como aluno, posso vir gostar e querer ir à luta. Aí, ele “Meu deus, meu filho, vai pela luta, nossa” Eu acho que também pode ser isso, né.

Interestingly, the separation of intellectual and manual labor is again highlighted in Alexandro’s account of some parents’ perception of what type of education the school provides (or should provide). This is deep rooted and a general disassociation that is present in people more generally. But agroecology is knowledge intensive and requires technical innovations as well. During an informal and unrecorded conversation with Francisco (the manager of the FAB’s experiential field), he told me that he thought it was critical for the school to teach the students how to work because from his perspective, manual labor and what could be termed “agricultural intelligence” are being lost in every generation. He credited the MST-affiliated agronomists, who have visited the settlement regularly since the early 2000s, for educating him on the human health threats of artificial pesticides and fertilizers, and now encourages his farmers who are not so close to the MST to do the same.

Another important element that emerges clearly in Alexandro’s discussion is the negative effect of the media depiction of the MST activities and the communities it creates through occupation and violence. Alexandro’s reflection echoes Karol’s depiction of urban images of MST communities as the result of people “stealing land” through illegal occupation. In both cases, negative media attention was discussed in parallel with identity. People’s notion of the MST is equivalent to one of fires, chaotic protest and fighting. This view has gained political strength since the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president in late 2018. Bolsonaro has said in multiple interviews for different media outlets that MST land occupations will be considered acts of terrorism and he has accused the schools as a training

place for *guerrilheiros* (guerrilla fighters).<sup>110</sup> Hilma's response to the harsh stigma coming from today's most powerful person in Brazil is fighting through her identity and her actions. She compares the challenges created by recent political changes with the previous political situation during the government of Lula da Silva (2003-2011) and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) whose political views embraced the ideas of social justice and reform represented by the MST. It is a long passage but it is important to read in full because Hilma's lived experience unveils all the connections and, in the interview, she did so with a growing emotional tone that affected her words:

A gente teve em outros momentos da história dos governos brasileiros, reconhecimento desse perfil: jovem, mulher, e aí eixo da geração. Mas hoje não temos nada. Hoje o Ministério para as mulheres é um ministério machista. Direitos humanos sem ter o negro, sem ter o homossexual, a onde estão esses direitos humanos, o índio, o camponês? Então a gente se preocupa muito. Este momento é um momento que a gente vai ter que se reinventar, mas vai ter que encontrar nossa essência de fato com essa questão de identidade. Acho que é um momento crucial em quanto a gente se ver como camponês e fortalecer mesmo. Nós talvez sofreremos menos, porque a gente pelo menos tem a produção camponesa. Mas a gente teme muito por nossos companheiros que estão nos centros.

Already, Hilma placed the practical and basic yet essential question of food production at the center of the tangible and ideological threats the Bolsonaro administration poses to her and to the camponês identity. She continued to talk and to compare the realities of being excluded from an administration based on ability for food production. Then, she talked about her own positionality and how she perceived her role in the current administration in her community:

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<sup>110</sup> "Agrishow- Bolsonaro," *Sucesso no Campo*. Youtube, May 1, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8Y4aWJWB1E> and "MST, as várias faces de um movimento que Bolsonaro quer criminalizar." *El País*, Youtube, December 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24Wkbe3nefE>.

Aqui nesta escola é momento importante da gente estar fortalecendo essa identidade esse processo produtivo. Essa questão política é muito forte, digo técnico-político: técnico porque não tem como se desassociar. Por mais que me digam, ‘Ah o professor ele não pode ter esse viés porque ele tem que ser técnico’. Ele é gente. E sendo gente não dá para desassociar. Podem me empreender hoje como se fosse num governo ditador, que infelizmente a gente talvez esteja, ‘Porque tem que ser teórico. Teórico, você não pode expressar o seu pensar’ Não, pode me empreender. Porque eu sou gente. Eu como mãe, de três filhos, eu jamais posso me omitir da educação dos educandos e educandas que estão comigo também. Porque eu estou dentro da sociedade. E eu quero uma sociedade melhor. E quero uma sociedade justa. Quero uma sociedade com dignidade para as pessoas, e em quanto eu tiver vida, eu vou lutar por ela. Vou. Dentro do meu conhecimento técnico, dentro do meu conhecimento político, dentro do meu conhecimento filosófico espiritual. Porque eu acredito. E eu acredito na ancestralidade, eu jamais desassocio esta Hilma que está aqui da minha ancestralidade, do que eu acredito como ser humano, do que eu acredito como energia. A gente trabalha.

The implications the Bolsonaro administration has for Hilma’s ability to teach and live in a manner that is secure and dignified is evident in this passage. Furthermore, when Hilma defends that there is no way to disassociate her role as a teacher from who she is as a person and how her identity affects the way she is able to exert rights, she is also saying the same thing about her students. This is a live example of Freire’s theory of educator as example of social change that is, of the educator basing the learning process in the social and historical context of the student (which is connecting to the educators’ as well), and his theory of liberation as praxis.

O MST traz essa filosofia, é muito mais do que se coloca aí. Porque o que se coloca aí é preconceito. O que se diz como é que se fala é que vamos ser tratados como uns terroristas. E essa, minha tristeza, é muito olhar e acharem que a gente é um bando de terroristas, que a gente só quer a vida. Só quer ser feliz. A gente quer qualidade de vida para as pessoas. Dizer que a gente é terrorista porque a gente quer dignidade para a família da gente? A gente é terrorista por querer comer? A gente é terrorista por querer ter saúde, quer ter educação? Pois vou morrer terrorista, sabe. Eu me emociono muito porque é uma luta diária, cara. Dentro dessa questão, é muito desumano, as pessoas são desumanas de mais, as pessoas são malvadas demais, as pessoas só pensam na questão do capital, não pensam na humanidade, não pensam que existe

coisas para *além* de um acúmulo, além de só *o ter*. No *ser*. [pause] É assim, eu me emociono nesse sentido, de sempre lutar.

Hilma's last reflections allude to Bolsonaro vowing to "finish with the MST" and to legally declare all their public activity as acts of terrorism. This is also presented in a way that aligns Bolsonaro to "pessoas malvadas" (evil people) and those who "só pensam no capital" (who only think of money). Money is, in fact, a common argument used by both sides of the argument. MST and social activists defend their land occupations by pointing out how exclusionary and unjust it is for so few elites to have so much when so many people have no land at all. On the other hand, Bolsonaro has stated that "private property is something sacred in democracy" and that the MST terrorizes and threatens those very principles of a free state.<sup>111</sup> This painting of the MST threatening governmental *democracy* (which is conflated with economic capitalism) and the characterization of MST as a group of home invaders did not begin with Bolsonaro, but has only continued to be exacerbated by him. It is this deeply entrenched and constantly fomented perception of the MST that Hilma expressed to face as a "luta diária" (daily fight/struggle).

Continuing to talk about constructing a proud identity at school in the face of so much discrimination, Cosma expressed:

A gente fica chateada quando um novo presidente disse que tem que filmar o professor se o professor vai pregando ideologia. Vamos filmar as experiências que têm sido feitas com muito esforço. Eu tenho clareza que o nosso projeto é baseado num protejo comprometido aos trabalhadores e os trabalhadoras que estão aqui em nosso assentamento, então [Bolsonaro] quer filmar que filme, mas é comprometido. Não é comprometido na burguesia com o projeto do Bolsonaro e tal que quer fortalecer os ricos e miséria para os pobres, não existe essa historia escola sem

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<sup>111</sup> "Jair Bolsonaro: O que fazer com MST, MTST e ONGS," Youtube, July 7, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xDw7\\_Ew02I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xDw7_Ew02I).

partido. Escola para trabalhar só que eles querem? Dá licença. A nossa realidade é outra. Vamos filmar.<sup>112</sup>

Like Hilma, Cosma expressed the inability to disassociate learning from ideology. She stated it explicitly, however, that whatever your ideology is and your educational model, it is not free from a political vision. She positioned her ideological and practical commitment to the working class. She also positioned Bolsonaro's recent calls for "school without ideology" as an ideology in and of itself to keep the rich and poor in their respective, hierarchical relationships. Cosma elaborated:

Vamos filmar todo. Vamos filmar as experiências, mas nosso objetivo é fortalecer as comunidades para que as pessoas reconheçam que tem uma identidade que elas são sujeitas que elas têm capacidade que elas devem aprender e precisam ser sujeitos com dignidade. Qualquer canto do país, não só em nosso assentamento. Esse reconhecimento. A gente precisa de ser democrático. ... Eles [FAB students] têm dito, 'Aqui na escola, eu tenho aprendido gostar do campo. A valorizar o campo. Porque na escola da cidade a gente aprendia que o campo é lugar do atraso. Dos matutos. Das bestas. E aqui não, a gente aprende que o campo é um lugar digno. Dá de viver. Que a gente tem valor. Que o campo tem valor. Que a gente é capaz, aprendi aqui na escola.' Então politicamente falando, fortalece uma concepção de gostar do campo, de valorizar a sua realidade, de sentir-se sujeito, de sentir-se sujeito capaz de intervir sua opinião, seja uma questão política seja cultural, na questão social, do município, sem se minimizar porque mora no meio rural, no campo.

The social repercussions of the historical processes that justified such meager resources to rural areas in the Northeast are present here in Cosma's reference to what the students have told her. Rural areas are considered empty, and whoever is living there must be

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<sup>112</sup> This debate was sparked last year when Bolsonaro expressed, "teachers must teach and not indoctrinate." This is meant to suppress any discussion of inequality and factors that contribute to it, or anything that could be seen as a critique (or critical thinking) about Brazil. This is a form of policing. To read more about this debate, see Michael Fox, "Education Is in the Crosshairs in Bolsonaro's Brazil," *The Nation*, November 18, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/brazil-bolsonaro-education-repression/> and Renata Agostini, "Ministro da Educação diz que filmar professores em aula é direito dos alunos," *Política, Estadão*, April 28, 2019, <https://politica.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,ministro-da-educacao-diz-que-filmar-professores-em-aula-e-direito-dos-alunos,70002808189>.

“besta” (an animal), giving an idea of a territory without “people” that is only fit for animals, it means uncultivated in the broadest sense of the term. This gaze with which the Brazilian countryside is referenced is another significant part of the high school’s resistance. Although it may not seem revolutionary or even exciting or effective to institutional change, it is the only first step that can be taken in order for there to be tangible policy change. And it is significant in its own right, because the gaze over rural areas and small-scale agriculturists is discriminatory. This is clear in what Cosma said next:

Eles diziam assim, os meninos que vieram da cidade diziam assim, ‘Lá a gente é tratada como os bichos da mata. É o povo da mata. Como fosse pano de bicho,’ E a gente acaba multiplicando isso, e não querendo gostar de ser do campo. Querendo ir para a cidade. Tem que fortalecer viver no campo porque o campo, tem construção de dignidade. Na cidade não cabe mais. É tanta favela. É tanta gente. É tanta marginalização. Se a gente fosse aí, não tem espaço para todo mundo. Então tem que gostar e valorizar. Isso é fazer política. Se escutar uma concepção diferente. Não a política partidária, mas a política contendente que a classe faz parte, que é a classe trabalhadora.

Here, Cosma not only demonstrated how important it is to *unlearn* such harsh stigmatization, but she linked it to tangible social and environmental landscape processes. Because people internalize the stigmatization of rural areas, they reproduce the cultural messages and actions that make them migrate to cities. Concrete, economic reasons are also a real factor in rural to city migration, but here Cosma highlighted the societal messages about what and where *gente* live (as opposed to *bichos*, people as opposed to bugs) and how those messages then influence so much.

To consider a different argument Cosma noted, is already participating in contentious politics. In this context, the transformative power MST communities like Lagoa do Mineiro have in rural Brazil through education and through the challenging of heinous stereotypes is

great and absolutely essential to fight for rural peoples' right to exist in a dignified manner. The fact that Cosma and other teachers in rural Brazil must spend so much time with their students unlearning the hate projected at them and then reconstructing a fair and positive self-reflection exposes the problematic city/country dichotomy, the power of rhetoric, and the danger of a President as discriminatory in speech and policy as Bolsonaro. That Bolsonaro would threaten teachers engaging their students in critical thinking by vowing to film them because what they were doing was indoctrinating, as Cosma expresses, is annoying, but something she would welcome him to do—to, “film everything, everything that has been done with a lot of effort.”<sup>113</sup>

### 3. *Scaling Up: From the School to the Community and to the Country*

The ripple effect of lessons learned at school making their way into the community is made clear in the interviews. Hilma and Ivaniza stressed that what is learned and challenged at FAB is not confined to the school building or school day, but intended to transcend school walls and make a difference, starting in family circles and growing from there. During our recorded interview, I asked Cosma about her research class, and she spoke about the different ways in which the agroecological lessons resonate with the students in a useful and practical way. She told me about how one of her students was able to persuade his father to stop buying chemical pesticide when their guava trees were being plagued by caterpillars and instead made him an organic pesticide using neem and chili pepper after having learned how to in class:

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<sup>113</sup> Quote from page 57: “A gente fica chateada quando um novo presidente disse que tem que filmar o professor se o professor vai pregando ideologia. Vamos filmar as experiências que têm sido feitas com muito esforço,” Cosma in interview, January 2019.

Nos temos um aluno aqui, o Igor, eu sempre gosto de falar dele. Ele estuda aqui com a gente e na pesquisa e no trabalho ele aprendeu a fazer defensivos naturais para combater as formigas e as lagartas. E na casa dos pais dele, tinha uma plantação de goiabeira que estava sendo afetada. Estava sendo atacada por uma lagarta, que a gente chama de praga, mas não é, é um inimigo natural da planta. E aí o pai dele comprou veneno para a goiabeira. Só que aí ia contaminar o solo tanto como a fruta que iam consumir. Então Igor disse, ‘Não pai, não faça isso, não águe com esse veneno que eu vou fazer o defensivo natural. E vou fazer o defensivo natural a partir do nim,’ que é essa planta que tem muito aqui, ‘com pimenta. Vou fazer o defensivo natural e vou aguar as goiabeiras.’ E a gente perguntou, ‘E Igor deu certo?’ E ele, ‘Deu. Deu certo e meu pai gostou porque inclusive tinha sido muito caro o veneno que tinha comprado, e não vai mais comprar, e a gente vai comer as goiabas sem veneno. E aí a gente percebe que aos *poucos* essas intervenções, por mais que não sejam grandes coisas, fazem diferença. Faz diferença. Porque conscientiza os educandos e eles aprendem, aprendem a fazer defensivos naturais.

In this example, Cosma highlighted how Igor was able to take what he learned at school and apply it skillfully to his own experience with an agricultural system at home. But she also highlighted how he did not just apply what he learned in school to his own life in a neutral sense, he also interrupted hegemonic social, environmental, and economic relationships by doing so. First, he learned the skills of making organic pesticides at school and the environmental and the health reasons for its use: chemical pesticide, what Cosma and Igor refer to as poison, contaminates both the soil and fruit by drowning them with harmful chemicals that alter their natural environment. They are also linked to health issues in humans, and Igor avoided any family member consuming any chemical residue on the guava fruits. He was then able to change a behavior in his father, an elder and “experienced” farmer compared to him. Igor was also able to break his father’s dependency on an external input for his guava trees and achieve a greater autonomy over his production. In this way, Igor’s father saved money, does not plan to buy chemical pesticide in the future, and can make use the plentiful neem and chili pepper that grows on the settlement. As Cosma reflects on this

example, small changes can have a big impact: “por mais que não sejam grandes coisas, fazem diferença. Faz diferença” (Although they are not big things, they make a difference. It makes a difference.) She admits this particular intervention is small in scale, but defends its significance. She recognizes that these changes take time and must be multiplied many times over, emphasizing *aos poucos*, but its tangible impact is clear.

In the same vein, Neide expressed that parents appreciate their children’s interest in food production at home, another example of small changes that could lead to a wider impact in peoples’ behavior and in the community at large: “A gente vê manje de família que não é de área de reforma agrária que ela vem para escola aqui e ela diz, ‘A minha filha, ou meu filho, já esta me ajudando fazer o canteirinho lá no quintal da minha casa. Que aprendeu aqui na escola do campo.’ Isso não é importante?”

Hilma echoes these ideas when she discusses the significance of small interventions in the context of healthy food production for self-consumption at home and its fomenting food sovereignty:

A gente trabalha fortemente desde o 2015 dentro da questão da soberania de segurança alimentação e nutricional, então nessa perspectiva, se você conversar com qualquer educando aqui da escola, você vai ver que há um conteúdo nesse sentido. Quando a gente vai para a questão prática também, a gente também encontra, mas como jovem ele não é o chefe de família, para ele modificar essa questão mais prática, há um embate familiar, há conflitos, e uma coisa que a gente coloca é assim: peça para fazer só uma parte, para mostrar como é que faz, e aí ao passar do tempo vai se modificando. Então a gente tem isso fortemente, eu acho mesmo a questão pautável, concreta, essa questão de consciência e sensibilização ela é muito forte nesse aspecto da produção e alimentação.

The intentional relationship between theory and practice is again made clear. Holding to Freire’s perspective, students are learning about their world of food production and access

in a critical way and through small and multiple interventions change these systems, however small scale at first. Hilma also talks about the intergenerational conflict, like Cosma mentioned, and the methods she suggests to her students to deal with this tension. Another important idea that underscores both quotes is that of an education geared for agricultural and food sovereignty.

These examples show how students are empowered to take what they have learned in a school setting that is significant for their lived experiences and apply it at home to slowly alter or enhance current systems. However, the weight of connecting school and community is not burdened solely by the students. Each of the teachers I interviewed spoke about their role as educators coming with the responsibility to be leaders and liaisons in the community. Every teacher at FAB is committed to facilitating change at the local level as well as participating in demonstrations in other municipalities or in Fortaleza, the state capital, as opportunities arise. This commitment is central to becoming a teacher at FAB. Flávio explained that this was an expectation made clear to each teacher candidate during their job interview.

Teachers meet with parents to discuss curriculum and planned activities. This is significant because it reinforces the notion that formal learning does not exist or happen in a vacuum and that families' realities are relevant to the learning processes. During my 2019 research visit, Ivaniza and other teachers were preparing a meeting with different families at their home to check in and discuss the soon-to-begin school year. In this meeting, they would discuss the school curriculum, projects that were in the works, and some over-arching objectives for the coming year. As opposed to simply being a moment for the teachers to present their objectives to an audience, Ivaniza explained this was a moment of dialogue

where parents' concerns and ideas have the possibility to affect the curriculum. Meetings like this regularly precede the start of the school year.

FAB not only influences the agricultural systems enacted in homes within family circles, but also the planning, developing, and executing of collective agricultural systems on the settlement. Scaling up, Flávio, Ivaniza, and Hilma spoke of FAB's role in the construction of a new manioc cooperative and agroindustry being built on the settlement for which FAB offers resource support, research, and consulting. This community-based agroindustry is set to start running in May 2019 and will allow farmers that are part of the cooperative to process their manioc together to increase their profits. At present, farmers are either processing their manioc in smaller processors or selling their manioc to large food processing companies in the area. Hilma expressed the importance of this project in securing a future and a motivation for young farmers on the settlement, and stressed the close association between it and the school's mission:

A gente tem a perspectiva da agroindústria da mandioca aqui, essa indústria da mandioca ela não está desassociada, não está livre, ela caminha junto com a escola. Então assim caminhar junto com a escola é a gente conhecer todo projeto da agroindústria e a gente inclusive participar de algumas pesquisas que pode também melhorar. Porque quem vai ficar, quem vão ser os futuros agricultores, e quem já estão também que não são vistos, são os jovens. Eles estão lá junto com os pais. Eles só não têm essa visibilidade. Porque não, quem tem o nome no cadastro é o pai, só que os pais não são sementes, não vão durar o resto da vida, que vão assumir futuramente são eles. Então nossa ideia é a gente traçar aqui dentro da escola, e a gente vem traçando algumas pesquisas, de alguns consórcios inclusive de usar manopoeira para adubação e para algum de insetos, né, testando também outras variedades de mandioca para a gente poder estar mais próximo a essa plantação. Isso é um fato. A gente tenta fazer isso. A gente está dando passos ainda lentos de certa forma a gente está fazendo. E a escola vem com essa perspectiva da juventude assumir esse protagonismo.

This is another relatively local intervention, but a significant step toward agricultural empowerment on the settlement and an example of the school's social function. Right now, students are learning about cooperative food processing and taking actions to implement a cooperative based in the community's production needs and technical knowledge together with experienced farmers, agronomists, the MST, and other social groups supporting the project. Furthermore, Hilma also identifies the next generation of farmers as "seeds," as the ones that have researched and practiced agroecological methods at school and have begun to experiment at home and that will "assume protagonism" of agriculture in the near future. The shift in agricultural practices is then impactful at a community scale and has temporal continuity.

Scaling up agroecology and lessons from the school day includes strengthening the potential for food sovereignty. All of the connections of scaling up through the day-to-day struggle, food sovereignty, and identity come together as Hilma said:

Há uma preocupação nossa muito grande, 1 de janeiro de 2019, o governo do Jair Bolsonaro, ele extinguiu o programa (CONSEA) de segurança alimentar e nutricional nacional.<sup>114</sup> Era uma política pública, programa do governo que era pautado dentro do governo do PT, desde o início foi um dos grandes programas que teve visibilidade muito grande, que traz essa perspectiva da alimentação, atrelada a questão produtiva, e houve a formação dos concelhos, na perspectiva da segurança alimentar, nem era a perspectiva da soberania, e aí a gente infelizmente teve uma perda agora. E nos preocupamos muito. Mas a gente tem essa perspectiva de continuar nos trabalhando nessa linha. Porque faz parte do dia a dia da gente. Eu procuro sempre estar trabalhando e praticando. Porque a gente vem dessa perspectiva que a minha prática seja mais forte que a minha fala. Eu acredito que a gente mostrando, fazendo, modificando nosso dia a dia, a gente consegue mudar muito mais e consegue sensibilizar muito mais que a gente só teorizando. Dentro dessa perspectiva da alimentação a gente vai continuar nisso, embora a gente não tenha uma política pública que fomenta e vá atrás. A gente tem as perspectivas, a gente vai continuar.

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<sup>114</sup> Governmental entity monitoring, evaluating, and promoting public programs and supportive policies geared toward food and nutritional security.

Hilma again began elaborating on why day-to-day, intentional applications of practices that will ensure wanted benefits by framing them within the larger, national context. In this passage, she explained that Jair Bolsonaro has pulled the safety net of food and nutritional security under families' feet. Individual and family food security is also collectivized through her use of "we" and "ours" when she talked about the implications of Bolsonaro taking this program away.<sup>115</sup> Agricultural decisions are then given extra weight because they are indeed a collective response to a public policy erasure that affects groups of people. The role of school in teaching families about food and nutritional security as well as agricultural autonomy is therefore also amplified.

#### 4. *Reflection for the Future*

When reflecting on the work they do today and their vision for the future, the interviewees who shared their experiences and perspectives as residents of Lagoa do Mineiro with me stressed various aspects of rural life that they want to see valued. Although they want large-scale shift, the importance of the continuation of everyday struggle was essential. It was also essential for young people to see dignity and employment in the countryside. As Ivaniza said:

A minha visão é que nós já desconstruímos muitas coisas que não eram boas, então nós tínhamos um êxito rural muito grande, os jovens terminavam ensino médio e iam para a cidade. Hoje não existe tanto, esta tendo o contrário, os jovens que estão na cidade voltando para o campo, porque eles também foram para a cidade por uma necessidade, uma necessidade seria ela de estudo, de trabalho e tudo. Quando se pensou na forma de agricultura então os jovens já passaram a dizer, "Olha a agricultura está dando certo," então nós estamos no assentamento hoje conquistando já na luta do movimento não só a escola como também a agroindústria, naquela época pensavam "A mandioca não é futuro, não" e hoje já é. Preservando o meio ambiente,

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<sup>115</sup> For more information, see Inês Rugani Ribeiro de Castro, "A extinção do Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional e a agenda de alimentação e nutrição," *Cadernos de Saude Pública* 35 no. (2019): 1-4.

e as nascentes, e organizando o terreno onde vai se plantar, e a forma da agricultura onde vai se diluir aquilo ali, deu certo. Então como está dando certo, o jovem está dizendo, “Ah, a cidade não é futuro para nós não, é o campo,” então a minha visão é que essa futura geração, ou essa presente geração, são presentes, eles possam ter consciência e direito e dever de seu papel de lutar de viver e de permanecer no campo e saber que aqui tem qualidade de vida, de se viver. E também do potencial da sua luta. De dizer, “Eu pertenço a uma identidade camponesa, que ela está localizada dentro do meu município dentro do meu Estado dentro do meu país e que ela tem respaldo para a sociedade.” Acho que a visão para o futuro é essa, né. Que de aqui também pode sair o jovem médico, como já saiu daqui das comunidades camponesas, o Mauro foi estudar em Cuba medicina, hoje é médico esta trabalhando aqui na região, como também daqui pode sair o veterinário, também pode sair o professor.

Ivaniza cited that young adult migration to the cities used to be much higher than it is now. She also observed that this was when “we thought about the forms of agriculture,” not permitting its relevance to dignity and employment in the countryside go unnoticed. As opposed to seeing agriculture as something of the past, something similar to the narratives Cosma said her students were internalizing at school in the city, agriculture and a rural life dependent on it can be a bright future—and, with it, the source of a proud rural identity. Something important to stress here is that Ivaniza did not suggest that agriculture was the only future or the only path for which the school is constructing avenues. She highlighted how “a doctor came from here, teachers can come from here”. This only strengthens the notion that the countryside is just as capable as any place to offer different avenues of life to its youth. This is important to *feel* and *enact* so that a person’s *worth* be supported and not neglected. Ivaniza also linked it to political struggle, demonstrating yet again that the processes of learning cannot be isolated from those of political struggle.

It is only the beginning of Francisco Araújo Barros’ resistance against President Bolsonaro and his administration that has declared war on the MST and its affiliated schools, but this analysis of a group of Lagoa do Mineiro residents involved with the school gives us

critical hope. FAB has been able to strengthen its ties to critical education praxis and agroecology since it opened its classrooms in 2011, and as a school it has proven to be self-reflective and dynamic, making it resilient against threat. Its students respect and admire the school, and the two students I interviewed (Karol and Denilson) gave credit of their empowered and firm sense of self to FAB.

Predictable actions Bolsonaro could take to weaken the Escolas do Campo school network are several: cutting funding to differentiated-curriculum schools, attempting to restrict teachers from presenting alternative views in the classroom by different sorts of policing tactics, cut social assistance programs serving children in those areas, and more. But this study has reaffirmed that rural Brazil is historically grounded in struggle, that rural populations have reassessed and reshaped their organizing as they have faced challenges, and that they are protagonists in history making. It is because of this and everything else discussed in this thesis that we should be confident in Ivaniza's vision for the future of her students. I do not believe those are general or simplified claims because this thesis has demonstrated how the local case study in Lagoa do Mineiro reflects this larger reality of resistance with specific examples, personal testimonies, and scholarly evidence.

## **Conclusions**

Lagoa do Mineiro community members and FAB teachers discuss at length identity formation, food sovereignty, place-based learning, and a vision for social justice. They confirmed that agroecology teachings are not passive or politically neutral, rather they combat neoliberal food systems and agricultural paradigms openly and through implicit behaviors. This study is an example and analysis of the ways in which agriculture and

agricultural education are at the forefront of a liberated society and social transformation. Furthermore, it is not enough to know everyday struggle exists and needs to be supported, and this thesis sheds light on the need for more analyses of the different methods, expressions, constraints, and hardships of the everyday political processes within larger movements.

This thesis has demonstrated that people in Lagoa do Mineiro are mediating sites of cultural production everyday through school, agriculture, agriculture in school, and through the organization of their daily lives. At the same time, this study has articulated how Francisco Araújo Barros teachers employ concepts of territorialization and agroecological praxis at school. As this study shows, their actions prove absolutely necessary to understanding how these practices interact beyond school and in the struggle for developing just alternatives to hierarchical and exploitative structures of education, agriculture, and society. This analysis reaffirms that an understanding of place and its history is fundamental to critical knowledge processes, and that the empowerment of rural identity is a politicized resistance in and of itself and drives the Francisco Araújo Barros teachers. By looking at a particular community in context through ethnographic work and oral history interviews, this thesis has also contributed to filling a gap in the scholarly literature, one that calls for more oral history incorporation and analysis into the scholarly conversation because it advances the theories and practices of critical pedagogy and agroecological processes.

This study and the first-person testimonies shared for it force us to reflect on our own notions of the city/country dichotomy and how that has been influenced by the hierarchical, capitalist society we live in. Furthermore, we must reflect on our relationships with learning/knowledge and food production. We may not think of these three concepts together

very often, but once we do we see how intertwined and inseparable they are. They are also perhaps the three most seemingly fundamental things we know: where we live, how we obtain and consume our food, and how we are influenced to see the world by our educational possibilities.

## **Appendix**

### Glossary of Acronyms

**CONSEA**.....Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional

**CPT**.....Pastoral Land Commission

**FAB**.....Francisco Araújo Barros High School

**LVC**.....La Vía Campesina

**MST**.....Rural Landless Workers Movement

**PEP**.....Research Projects Class

**PPP**.....Political Pedagogical Project document

**PSC**..... Social and Community Practices

**OTTP**.....Organization of Work and Productive Technologies

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