

RURAL EDUCATION AND AGROECOLOGY: THE EXPERIENCE OF MST SCHOOLS IN THE STATES OF CEARÁ AND PARANÁ¹

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This research was developed in the Postgraduate Program in Agroecology and Sustainable Rural Development, at the Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul (UFFS), in a thesis entitled “Rural Education and Agroecology: Production of Knowledge in the Rural Schools of Maria Nazaré de Sousa and Iraci Salete Strozak.” The present article synthesizes a militant practice and collective experience shared by members of the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) in Ceará, who participated in a training course in which rural education and agroecology acquired a new meaning within an academic context.²

Over the last 10 years in Ceará, and over the last 20 years in Paraná, education efforts in rural middle and high schools located on settlements have developed intersectoral and interdisciplinary learning methods within the Education, Production, and Youth sectors of the MST. One such example of this work, developed in the Iraci Salete Strozak school in Rio Bonito do Iguaçú (PR), is discussed below.

It is important to emphasize that the aim of the present research is to add to the ongoing debate on the theoretical and practical work that occurs within the MST regarding issues related to agroecology, especially in the light of the ways in which the MST’s work has been articulated internationally through Via Campesina. The increase in propaganda and marketing campaigns by agricultural multinationals, regulatory agencies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), and national governments, has intensified the rural class struggle on an international scale.

Given geographically distinct realities and specific socio-political dimensions, we were confronted methodologically with a great challenge and a political task. However, it became possible to understand the curricular debate over introducing agroecology into the classroom space and into students’ daily experiences through having

2 → In 2000, the author was a part of Class I of the Magistério da Terra/Norte e Nordeste, called Elizabeth Teixeira. This course was a pioneer in forming agrarian reform educators and in granting qualifications to educational collectives. It was funded by the National Education Program in Agrarian Reform (PRONERA) in partnership with UFPB – Campus Bananeiras/PB. In 2009, the author continued in Class II of the Licenciatura em História – Programa Estudante Convênio para os Movimentos Sociais do Campo – PEC/MSO in the UFPB campus João Pessoa/PB.

them observe and learn about the conservation practices of environmental management. This understanding was enabled by reflections on the development of the practices in each school, and on their attempts to realize the goals of rural education.

Burgacov's studies on the *comparative method* maintain that it is the path and mechanism for identifying complex phenomena, such as the performance of organizations from different sectors or between organizations in the same sector.³ In the present essay the research involves the study of the same organization in the same sector, Education in the MST. Following Blau, Burgacov also affirms that this methodology grounded on qualitative comparisons makes it possible to determine relationships between organizational attributes.⁴ In essence, this paper seeks to identify those organizational attributes which can strengthen the political strategy of *cultivating camponesa* youth identity, to aid in the struggle for popular agrarian reform.

It is because of the desire to monitor the ongoing practices through participatory observation and the analysis of the school documents that this research is limited to the two school regions and their relations with the school community. This further enables reflections, learning outcomes, and possibilities of the pedagogical construction of practices to be identified. At the same time, it facilitates observing the effort to consolidate a rural education project, grounded on agroecology's productive matrix and the humanization of work through the teaching-learning of *camponesa* youth in the schools and their relations to the communities' daily life.

To carry out the field research, we delimited two educational and social regions of agrarian reform, one in Ceará and the other in Paraná. The first, in Ceará, is currently consolidating the monitoring of 12 centers/schools in the agrarian reform settlements. The Maria Nazaré de Sousa High School, at the Maceió settlement in Itapipoca (CE), was chosen because of the researcher's identification with the location and

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3 → Sergio Bulgacov, "Estudos Comparativo e de Caso de Organizações de Estratégias," *Organizações & Sociedade* 5, no. 11. (Janeiro/Abril, 1998): 56, <https://portalseer.ufba.br/index.php/revistaoes/article/view/10375/7394>.

4 → Peter M. Blau, "The Comparative Study of Organizations," *ILR Review* 18, no.3 (April 1965): 323-338.

his professional experience there as an educator and manager. The choice was also made based on the political gains made through sharing the experience with families, groups of young people, and cultural and training activities, among others. The second region included in the research is located in Paraná, at the state rural school Iraci Saete Strozak, chosen because of guidelines in the qualification exam, given that the University conducts outreach and research there. The similarities between the two regions and contexts was essential to highlight relevant dimensions in the practices and experiences of both approaches. In order to refine and support the analysis, we carried out bibliographic research on the theoretical categories and their respective authors: on Environmental History,⁵ Sustainable Rural Development,⁶ Agroecology,⁷ Rural Education and Rural Schools,⁸ and Agroecological Practices.⁹

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As a research objective, we work with the aim of mapping and analyzing the experiences of agroecology practices developed in the investigated schools, emphasizing the production of agroecological

- 5 → John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000); John R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000).
- 6 → Guilherme Costa Delgado, *Do capital financeiro da agricultura à economia do agronegócio: mudanças cíclicas em meio século* (Porto Alegre: Editora UFRGS, 2012); Sergio Schneider "Apresentação," *Sociologias*, 13, no. 27, (May/Aug 2011): 14-23.
- 7 → Carlos Armênio Khatounian, *A reconstrução ecológica da agricultura* (Botucatu: Agroecológica, 2001); Stephen R. Gliessman, *Agroecology: The Ecology of Sustainable Food Systems* 3rd ed. (New York: CRC Press, 2014); Moacir Roberto Darolt, "As principais correntes do movimento orgânico e suas particularidades", in *Agricultura Orgânica: inventando o futuro* (Londrina: IAPAR, 2002): 18-26.
- 8 → MST, "Caminhos da educação básica de nível médio para juventude das áreas de reforma agrária," in *Documento final do 1º seminário nacional sobre a educação básica de nível médio nas áreas de reforma agrária* (Luziânia - GO, 2006); Luiz Carlos Freitas, "A escola única do trabalho: explorando os caminhos de sua construção," in *Caminhos para transformação da escola: reflexão desde práticas da licenciatura em educação do campo*, ed. Roseli S. Caldart (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2010); Roseli S. Caldart, "Pedagogia do Movimento e Complexo de Estudo," in *Caminhos para transformação da escola: organização do trabalho pedagógico nas escolas do campo: ensaios sobre complexos de estudo*, ed. Roseli S. Caldart (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2015).
- 9 → Ana Maria Dubeux e Alzira Josefa de Siqueira Medeiros, "A construção de conhecimentos em agroecologia no semiárido brasileiro: intelectualidade e diálogo de saberes na sistematização de experiências," in *Agroecologia na convivência com o semiárido: Sistematização de experiências vividas, sentidas e aprendidas*, ed. Alzira Josefa de Siqueira Medeiros, Ana Maria Dubeux, e Maria Virginia Aguiar (Recife: Editora dos organizadores, 2015).

knowledge in the school, meetings, experiences, and actions developed in both approaches. At Iraci Salete Strozak, we see interactive work with the community through exchanges, and meetings and experiences led by the school's Agroecology Center, which takes care of the school garden. At Maria Nazaré de Sousa, we see the approach of the integrative curricular component of the *Parte Diversificada da Organização do Trabalho e Técnicas Produtivas* (OTTP – Diversified Section of the Labor and Productive Techniques Organization), which is associated with practices that take place in the Experimental Field, an area of agroecological experimentation in the school.

Both approaches follow the path in the struggle for life in the community and attempt to recover the patterns of *camponesa* culture in its dimensions of mutual help and reciprocity, as is seen in the sharing of tasks and collective responsibilities. A methodology of popular education is organized on the basis of the Camp, taking into consideration a reality marked by illiteracy and the absence of school for young people and children without land.¹⁰ Finally, we present the two school regions, fruits of the struggle and resistance on the land, with dreams of sharing and the desire for a world with justice and dignity. The struggle for schools in these regions involved a confrontation against the State for rights, since these rights were not recognized before the organization of the social movement. Breaking through fences, the MST conquered land, labor and schools, to provide literacy to people for the struggle and for life, in the defense of the popular agrarian reform and against agribusiness and its defenders.

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The approaches of the two schools give us a sense of the pedagogical work of a group of educators, in the broad sense of the word, as the teacher Paulo Freire taught us so well. They work daily to transform the school, into a place for the formation and production of knowledge and writing of the people's *camponesa* culture.

The movement's pedagogy has taken over the school, but we

10 → A wide range of studies and research can be found in the *Jornal Sem Terra*, as well as in the countless primers and documents generated as part of the permanent action of the educational sector of the MST. This should be noted here, since the construction of the Political and Pedagogical Projects of the schools studied in this text should be understood as part of the development of the right to education in the MST.

must still fight against educational policies that turn students into mere quantitative equations. Our young people are much more than numbers: they are subjects with their own struggle and are heirs both to their own history and to the social and community memory of those who fought to conquer the land. We witness this constructive presence of history, when the majority of these young people continue to struggle to live in the countryside with dignity, in many situations such as in camps, in the resistance for the defense of popular agrarian reform.

We can thus affirm that ongoing practices are producing knowledge in agroecology, and that they are doing pedagogical work to advance the teaching-learning process of the students, far beyond the limits of the contractual time of education. In agroecology, they are working on tackling the harmful practices of agribusiness, and the MST, through its Education sector in connection with the other sectors, has been leading the process of training subjects within the scope of interdisciplinarity and integration.

2. ELEMENTS OF THE MST'S EDUCATIONAL PROPOSAL

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During 2017, debate intensified on the approaches of the rural schools in the MST, given that its presence was now established in several regions of Brazil.¹¹ This debate started from a concrete need: to update the schools' political pedagogical projects. This expanded the meaning of the debate in view of two major axes of reflection defined in the sector of education and the movement as a whole. This expansion was made possible by the contents of history and memory, in connection with the construction of pedagogical principles; one came from updating the memory of the revolutionary process in Russia in 1917; the

11 → We highlight the MST's Pedagogy National Course – Class V, with 224 participants, in São Mateus (ES), from January 16 to 30; the seminar *The Historical Construction of the Socialist Pedagogy: The Legacy of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and Current Challenges*, at the Florestan Fernandes National School (ENFF) in Guararema (SP), with 335 participants, from May 24 to May 27; Class II of the introductory course *Education in Agroecology in the Northeast*, in Paraíba, from July 3 to July 12; the *Legacy of Paulo Freire National Seminar*, in Caruaru (PE) with 200 participants, from September 18 to 22; and the Class II Agroecology Seminar in the Rural Schools of the South, held in Chapecó (SC), in partnership with INCRA and UFFS, from October 24 to October 26 with 120 participants.

second resulted from updating the legacy of Paulo Freire's pedagogy, twenty years after his death. In relation to the Russian revolution, the debates on socialist pedagogy brought together several experts to help think about the current challenges of rural education in Brazil.¹² In relation to Paulo Freire's legacy, in addition to debating and updating issues in the Pedagogy of the Land, attempts were made to strengthen the educational processes in the MST. This was also pursued in order to also reflect on the ideological tools used to deepen the 2016 coup in Brazil, as in the case of the fascist offensive called "school without a party [*escola sem partido*]."

One of the questions that guided some of the ongoing debates revolved around understanding the theoretical and philosophical bases that ground the current project of the capitalist school. In order to understand this issue, it is necessary to observe the movement of capital as it looks to extract an increasing profit rate. To do this, neoliberal measures are applied more deeply, as is the program to dismantle public policies valued in the republican promises of bourgeois democracy. This is what can be seen most recently in Brazil, with the approval of a wide range of measures that destroy the public sector: introducing the mechanisms of outsourcing, and the precariousness and privatization of public goods, especially those of health and education. In the case of education, the evidence indicates a deepening of the corporate model for higher education, with the presence of large conglomerates of educational enterprises, the counter-reforms aimed at middle and high school, such as the "school without party" project and the promotion of Distance Education (EAD).

In this context, the MST joins the working class in their struggle for the democratization of public education as a universal right, and deepens the debate surrounding education as a tool for social

12 → To discuss the current status of socialist pedagogy, an important seminar was held in São Paulo at the National School Florestan Fernandes. It aimed to debate central issues related to the struggle and construction of socialist pedagogy since the historical legacy of the Russian revolution of 1917, undeniably considered one of the most important historical events of the contemporary age. It also sought to identify the main challenges of human formation in the confrontation between capital and work at the present moment. This seminar led to the publication of the edited collection Roseli S. Caldart and Rafael Villas Bôas (eds.), *Pedagogia Socialista: legado da revolução de 1917 e desafios atuais* (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2017).

transformation, with multifaceted education, having labor as an educational principle. In theoretical terms, the challenge is to know and update historical approaches and learn from socialist pedagogy. In this sense, and in terms of rural education, the path points towards the creation of educational spaces of resistance, as opposed to the abstract space that promotes homogeneity and social accommodation. The path also points to the need to advance in the processes of critique and self-evaluation in ongoing practices, in order to overcome the obstacles faced.¹³

The history of the struggle for education in the MST is associated with the struggle for land and dignity. The record of the MST's history shows that since the beginning of the organization, the struggle for the right to education has been continuous, with the Itinerant School constructed at the first camps. According to one of the educators from the time of the occupation at Encruzilhada Natalino,¹⁴ *the challenge was to explain to these young people why they were living in a camp, to organize them into groups, to sing, run, live with them...*¹⁵ At the camp, the struggle for land was concomitant with families demanding that children and adolescents have the right to education and schools, and the right to exercise citizenship often denied to the rural workers whose lives are punctuated by the absence of social rights. Now, through the struggle and collective organization, the MST seeks the realization of these rights, understood as fundamental to the new social form of life in community.

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In this sense, the debate on education in the MST has been present since its beginning, when the need for schooling and education of the

13 → Some of the ideas developed here are based on the lecture "Education, School and Class Struggle: Historical Process and Educational Purposes," given by Professor Célia Regina Vendramini (UFSC), in August 2017, at the meeting for the preparation of the Political and Pedagogical Projects, Juazeiro (BA).

14 → In 1981, Gaucho settlers camped in Encruzilhada Natalino and inaugurated a "new" phase of the fight for land in our country. Occupation and camping are the ways the landless people pressed the government to solve the agrarian problem, which each day was becoming more profound. This "new" way of organizing in order to make their claims would fuel the constitution of the MST in Brazil.

15 → Roselie S. Caldart and Bernadete Schwaab, "Nossa luta é nossa escola: a educação das crianças nos acampamentos e assentamentos," in MST, *Dossiê MST Escola Documentos e Estudos 1990 - 2001* (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2005), 13.

landless people, through an appropriate pedagogy, was identified. Therefore, the MST makes the continuous effort of forming new subjects part of its daily work, based on the experience of struggle of men and women seeking to overcome their former life. This was a life without rights, bound to the subjection of the land ownership system, which left marks on each individual. Today, the construction of new paths based on dignity and social justice is sought collectively.

As a result, the mechanisms for a culture of resistance have been built, confronting the serious social problem of illiteracy and ignorance regarding rights. Such is the way in which one tries to forge new emancipatory values, and work against hegemonic ones, refusing the capitalist system's worldview based on individualism, self-interest and competition. The education in the MST aims to provide landless youth with the love for study and work as a way to build their autonomy as subjects with rights.

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According to the final document of the First National Seminar on Basic Education for Middle and High School Levels in the Areas of Agrarian Reform,¹⁶ rural schools must be “more than schools” when they make themselves a sociocultural focal point of the community:

either by being involved in solving local problems and allowing students to advance in scientific knowledge by taking ownership of technologies and in their capacity for concretely intervening in reality; or by offering opportunities for social interaction, for recovering the memory of families, or opportunities for contact with books, films, debates, and diverse cultural expressions.¹⁷

Those students' acts of appropriation share, as their premise, a pedagogy that asserts itself in order to carry out the necessary transformations in rural schools. Accordingly, the same document lists as

16 → Seminar held in Luziânia (GO), September 18 to 22, 2006. This event gathered 500 participants, including educators, managers and representatives of Via Campesina Brazil organizations (MAB, MPA, MMC, PJR), as well as guests from universities and municipal Departments of Education.

17 → MST, “Caminhos da educação básica de nível médio para juventude das áreas de reforma agrária,” 10.

its foundations:

a) reality as the basis for the production of knowledge and study as training for the critical reading of reality, formation of a worldview, intellectual emancipation and exercise of a reflexive examination of the different dimensions of human life; b) education for work and through work; c) participation in processes of democratic management that include the challenge of student self-organization and the building of an educational collectivity; d) collective work and the continuous training of educators.¹⁸

Because of the demands of the Movement, establishing the school was a struggle in the first camps. However, once the first schools were founded, some challenges emerged regarding the education proposal. These were generated by the dialogues and debates with settlers and campers, and mediated by readings of Paulo Freire's pedagogy and other models of education as an emancipatory practice. The main challenge lay in the fundamental differences between the current form of traditional education and the proposal of popular education, as mentioned in one of the main documents¹⁹ of the MST's education sector for the formation period in 1987. Regarding this challenge:

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The traditional school aims to keep the dominant classes in power, preserving the current order of society; popular education seeks to transform this social reality, not through persuasion or imposing ideas, but by raising awareness, through the concrete reality, experiences, practices, existing knowledge, deepening that knowledge, looking at causes, analyzing, always returning to practices, tasks and commitments.²⁰

18 → Ibid., 11.

19 → Summary document of the 1st Seminário Nacional de Educação em Assentamentos, São Mateus (ES), July 27 to 30, 1987.

20 → MST, "Dossiê Educação," *Caderno de Educação* 14 (2017): 10.

In building the MST's education sector, two major issues challenged the collective. The first was to normalize and systematize ongoing practices, mainly in Santa Catarina and Espírito Santo. The second was the need to generate consensus on the MST's popular education proposal for settlements, one based on a common methodology to be adopted in other regions of the country. Powered by the energy of the Movement, connected to the social and political struggle for access to education and a new type of school, it was a matter of observing the reality of the families who had camped and settled. In this sense, the demands' agenda took into account significant absences: trained educators; material and human resources; spaces suitable for the functioning of schools; as well as the presence of governmental interference preventing further implementation of the popular education proposal.

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Examining the documents prepared by the MST's education sector shows us a set of questions related to educational practices and the kind of school required for social transformation. The first question is: *Which school do we want for the settlements?* This issue arises from understanding the settlement as a concrete way to territorialize the struggle for agrarian reform, and, in this, to expand the agenda of the demands, placing education as one of the main demands in constructing the autonomy of the settlers as subjects of rights. Hence, the school, taken as a historical demand of the struggle, must be guided by a conception of education resulting from the changing reality. Here the dialectical perspective of cooperative learning and teaching mediates the social roles shared between educators and students. In sum, "a school that seeks a new man and a new woman, for a new society and a new world."²¹

In 1990, the MST formulated the basic features of the Movement's education proposal for the schools of the settlements and camps. Of these features, we highlight a diagnosis of schools in the settlements as a "space for the systematic and scientific education of new generations, strengthening the foundation of their knowledge" in order to deepen strategies of organization and struggle.

21 → MST, "Caminhos da educação básica de nível médio para juventude das áreas de reforma agrária," 31.

A reading of that time places the history of the struggle for school in the MST in two major periods, which are not delimited by strict dates, but by a certain convergence in actions. The first period runs until 1984 – the genesis of the foundation – and *flies under the flag: In the fight for land, education is a necessity*. In other words, it was a phase of resistance and creation in the Movement’s way of being, developing the characteristics of the social pedagogy of struggle, grounded on the political need to transform society and to build new social forms based on solidarity, communion, and social justice. The second period – 1985 to 1990 – is *guided by the need for education when trying out alternative solutions*. That is, it seeks to give structure to an education proposal, based on principles and values for a school committed to the agrarian reform proposal and in recognition of the class struggle in the countryside. We can then understand the relationship between education in the MST and the strategies for organizing production, exercising cooperation and sustainability in the regions conquered.

According to Bernadete, one of the coordinators at the time from the education sector in Rio Grande do Sul, the sector’s main goal during the 1990s was to ensure that the school followed the debate about cooperation,²² and that these experiences constituted the core of the relationship between school and production in the settlements.²³

Among the pedagogical principles that guide the assumptions of education as a practice in the MST, we highlight that for the school to be truly educational it must be:

integrated in the settlement’s organization. That is, the process of forming knowledge that is developed in the school

22 → “The application of cooperation to the labor process allows: a) a reduction in the time needed to produce a certain product, in other words, more products are made in less time, since it is possible to distribute the various operations among different workers and thus execute them simultaneously, reducing the time needed to produce the total product; b) an extension of the space in which the work can be carried out; c) a production increase in a shorter time and reduced space of action (as in the case of agriculture).” Pedro Ivan Christoffoli, “Cooperação Agrícola,” in *Dicionário da Educação do Campo*, ed. Roseli S. Caldart, Isabel Pereira, Paulo Alentejano, and Gaudêncio Frigotto (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2012), 159-60.

23 → MST, “Caminhos da educação básica de nível médio para juventude das áreas de reforma agrária,” 24. Caldart and Schwaab, “Nossa luta é nossa escola.”

must have a direct relationship with the reality that is experienced there; settlers must take over the school, by collectively taking part in decision-making regarding its organization, functioning and pedagogical processes; in settlement schools, it is fundamental to emphasize at the same time the issue of labor, starting from the practical experience of production in the settlement and providing scientific and technological preparation that helps to advance the group's productive and organizational practice.²⁴

In this context, education in the MST has been challenged to break the paradigm of the traditional school, and for that reason, the curriculum is the 'heart' of the school, and must be built and continually assessed so as to verify that it meets the objectives outlined in the organization's policies. While historicizing the construction process of the Movement's pedagogy, Caldart affirms that the struggle to transform the school did not happen because of the school's objectives in themselves, but because of the goal of forming concrete subjects, for whom the transformation of the school was won in the struggles of the movement:

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Since then, we have claimed that it is necessary to train landless militants, who can continue the struggle for land and agrarian reform, as well as more broadly continue the collective struggles for the transformation of society. These militants need to be trained as workers capable of dealing with the challenges of production in the conquered areas, in order to carry out new social and economic relations (collective land ownership, cooperative work, building communal agro-villages), which in turn inform the perspective of the larger struggle.²⁵

According to Camini's reflection,²⁶ we want a public school in the

24 → MST, "Dossiê Educação," 27.

25 → Caldart, "Pedagogia do Movimento e Complexo de Estudo," 22.

26 → Isabela Camini, "Palestra - A educação no Movimento do Trabalhadores Rurais Sem

countryside and for the countryside, close to those who want to live, work and build a dignified life. A school that values the knowledge of the people, respects the reality of children, a school that is different in its planning, curriculum, assessment, educational time, and teacher training, and whose community participates in all phases of the educational process.

According to the Political and Pedagogical Project (PPP) of the Iraci Salete Strozak school, rural education was born out of the “need for a school that would meet the goals of the rural people, of a transformative logic, from whose practices and reflections one can understand and create education based on humanizing principles, always focused on social transformation.”²⁷

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In this sense, the process of preparing and formulating the curriculum is connected to the active participation of the community, and the school is created dynamically and in struggle. This is the case of the rural schools in Ceará where we observed some successes, such as the expansion of the school curriculum, incorporating the curricular component of the diversified base, including Projects, Studies and Research (PEP, for its acronym in Portuguese), Community Social Practices (PSC, for its acronym in Portuguese) and Organization, Labor and Productive Techniques (OTTP, for its acronym in Portuguese). Regarding the latter, the present research focuses its attention on the curriculum and course plan, as well as the levels of interaction between theory and practice in the school and within the community. The OTTP's curriculum is based on agroecology as a productive model and guide for the world of labor. In the school that was studied, we observed a space for experiments, in which students, through a guided praxis, developed the habits of agricultural research oriented towards the reality of the region's agro-ecosystems.

Terra (MST)”, *Jornado de Educação Popular 1* (2007): 41.

27 → Paraná, Governo do Estado, “Resolução 714/99,” Documento de criação do colégio Iraci Salete Strozak, published in the *Diário Oficial do Estado* on 04/02/1999.

3. THE EXPERIENCE OF AN EDUCATION PRACTICE IN AGROECOLOGY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Informed by debates on education in agroecology, the MST has made an effort in recent years to understand the importance of this approach for the process of the humanizing formation of subjects. In Brazil's southern region, the topic has increasingly gained momentum, with annual seminars debating and deepening the theme, and guiding the work in schools engaging this approach in agroecology. In the Northeast region it has been the same: schools training students in agroecology have marked a milestone in the articulation of experiences and the exchange of knowledge.

We here recall the seminar "Education in Agroecology in Rural Schools," held in 2016 in Veranópolis, in Rio Grande do Sul, highlighting the main points related to the central theme of this text. According to the basic organizational documents of this seminar, its objectives were: to establish an understanding of the basic elements of the concept of agroecology in relation to the class struggle in the countryside's current moment and the demands of training new generations; to deepen the understanding of the main foundations of our educational project and our concept of school; to discuss the political and pedagogical importance of developing processes of education in agroecology in rural schools; to discuss the content and form for building relationships between agroecology, education, school and the socially productive work of new generations; to normalize and discuss on-going educational practices in agroecology; to start building guidelines for a program of study in agroecology in rural schools, connecting specific practices and content to the study of the natural sciences and society in the different stages of elementary and high school; and to adopt lines of action to enhance the national cultural day "Healthy Eating: A Right for All!" in schools.²⁸

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28 -> The seminar "Education in Agroecology in Rural Schools," held from June 16 to 18, 2016, at the Josué de Castro Institute of Education, Veranópolis (RS), was promoted by the MST in partnership with the Dean of the Federal University Fronteira Sul Extension (UFFS). The seminar involved educators from elementary and high schools in the southern region of Brazil's camps and settlements, including pedagogical coordinators and natural and social science teachers; coordinators of State education sectors; some agrarian science professionals with training in agroecology, who work in the settlements and/or in rural schools; organic advisors from the education sector; the political-pedagogical group of

In this research, we highlight, among the seminar's discussions, the education foundations approach and the formative matrix, which deepens the relation between school, labor, and production. Agroecology was studied conceptually, emphasizing the history of agriculture and its historical context. The clashes with the logic of industrial agriculture were taken up in dialogue, as were agroecology's challenges in asserting itself in relation to *camponesa* agriculture, food sovereignty, and popular agrarian reform.

The theoretical and practical aspects of the development of education in agroecology in the rural elementary and high schools have been approached as an exercise in reflection and questioning about its content and form. In this sense, some syntheses were pointed out regarding the understanding of agroecology as an approach, which requires the rural schools to target interdisciplinary pedagogical work involving the natural and human sciences. The valorization of popular experience and know-how in the production of knowledge, and in the strengthening of the *camponesa* identity of rural teenagers and youth, is equally important. Hence, the inventory of the reality of the region in which the school is incorporated is the main mechanism for articulating knowledge and ensuring effective community participation in the educational processes built in the rural schools.

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The struggle of the MST is based on organizing the *camponeses* expropriated from the land, by occupying unproductive land holdings in order to achieve agrarian reform and make profound transformations in the structure of society. Observing the process of the conservative modernization of capital in agriculture, whose effect is seen in the adoption of technologies of the so-called "green revolution," the organized struggle of the MST grows towards combating agribusiness and its destruction of the *camponesa* culture and way of life. At this point of our work, we returned to the conceptual framework of the Pedagogical and Political Project of the Maria Nazaré de Sousa school, in Itapipoca (CE), to understand its formulation regarding the dispute among projects in the Brazilian countryside:

the Educational Institute Jácome Cavalcanti (IEJC, for its acronym in Portuguese); and invitees from partner institutions. The Iraci Salete Strozak School was also present.

If, on the one hand, we affirm the need for the development of the countryside as the place of life, food production, and land of the rural farmer; on the other hand, another project antagonistic to this one is rapidly advancing – agribusiness, a new expression of capitalist agriculture under the control of international financial capital. The latter sees the Brazilian countryside as a place to make profit; a place to harvest monocultures for exportation, based on the use of the latest technology; a place of large areas of land, with reduced human labor, the excessive use of pesticides, genetic manipulation, the privatization of transgenic seeds, and food standardization.²⁹

Capital encounters various obstacles when planning its profit rate in agriculture: due to the autonomy of the *camponeses* in their family planning, which most often is connected to their ties to the land; due to its dependence on nature, agriculture is a risky activity exposed to natural phenomena: frosts, floods, drought. For this reason, agribusiness always needs the *hand* of the State to have, among other benefits, the control of price policy and the credit associated with agricultural insurance.

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The dynamics of agribusiness are linked to the introduction of financial capital and technology through the entrepreneurialization of agriculture. Its logic of reproduction requires the control of knowledge by educational and research institutions, not only in order to control human labor, recruited from the reserve army of labor, but also to produce consensus in society on its hegemonic model. Another side of agribusiness' action and control lies in its power to decide what we eat, through the dominance of corporations.

The MST understands that its struggle and claims will not take place according to the conventional mold of agrarian reform, the model dictated by the bourgeoisie. In this sense, it built a proposal of popular agrarian reform out of the preparatory debates of the Sixth National Congress, with the aim of extending the struggle into the defense of

29 → Escola de Ensino Médio do Campo Maria Nazaré de Sousa, *Projeto Político Pedagógico* (Itapipoca, CE: 2016), 23-24.

camponesa territories against the capitalist offensive.

In this context, the MST understands that the land that was won must serve the production of healthy food available to society; hence the statement: “if the countryside does not plant, the city does not eat.” In this sense, the struggle takes place around the democratization of the access to the land, building a process of resistance at the same time as it carries out the theoretical-practical debate on the principles of agroecology. As a result, the commitment to care for nature's goods is strengthened in order to uphold and deepen the achievements of the movement, even as it is under constant attack by agribusiness. In this process, agroecology is understood as a social relationship, as seen in the Experimental Fields in schools, and their relationship to communities.

For this purpose, one of the greatest challenges in the process of building rural schools is the militant dimension of the educators in their praxis aimed at the transformation of social reality. This requires ongoing training, so that the educators' commitment and adherence to the project of social transformation lives in their daily activities, as social subjects engaged in historical change.

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In terms of development of the MST's strategic project in the face of the advance of capital over the *camponesa* territories, working at an international scale, the struggle to implement popular agrarian reform has been the main rallying cry. In this sense, the expression *making oneself a movement* in the educational dimension is relevant in the effort to promote the building of foundations for a new productive model, based on agroecology and the principles of food sovereignty.

This can be seen with the launch of the campaign *Healthy Eating: A Right for All*, in September 2016, at the Second National Meeting of Educators in the Areas of Agrarian Reform in Brazil. This campaign was carried out in conjunction with the National Cultural Day, mobilizing the Movement's social base for the debate about healthy food and rural schools, based in the areas of agrarian reform camps and settlements, which constitute one of its main organizational vectors. In this way, holding the National Cultural Day had a large impact, and we identified some practical results, including the performance of several actions in

which we were glad to have participated as researchers.

In this sense, the socio-educational dimension of food in our lives connects with the school's objectives in the training of subjects, especially young adolescents who today are more intensely suffering from the assault of food empires, through marketing and mass advertising by means of corporate media. Thus, informed by the *Healthy Eating* campaign, the task of the rural schools' educational project is to face the daily avalanche of advertising stimulating consumerism, so that one also learns to value traditional knowledge aimed at collectively building a dignified life.

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In the National Cultural Day in the rural schools, supported by the movement's education sector, the main goal is to *strengthen and disseminate practices developed in our fields around the issue of food*.³⁰ The objectives of the campaign are:

To contribute to the food education of our families and to the general struggle for the right of all to good, healthy food; to strengthen initiatives to reorganize school meals; to study and debate the relationship between healthy eating, food sovereignty, agroecology, *camponesa* agriculture, and popular agrarian reform; to introduce ecological farming practices and the debate on agroecology into schools; to take up in schools the debate on how to link socially productive labor with the question of what educational content needs to be guaranteed; and to develop different forms of cultural/artistic language regarding practices and their dissemination.³¹

In this way, the achievement of these objectives affirms the purpose of the cultural journey as a *“human experience of participation in the processes of work, struggle, and collective organization...”* Its aim is to normalize the way of life as we produce and reproduce *“a knowledge and worldview, which becomes a shared heritage of values, objects,*

30 → MST, *Jornada Cultural Nacional: Alimentação saudável: um direito de todas!*, *Boletim da Educação* 13 (2017).

31 → *Ibid.*

sciences, arts, technologies, and symbols.”³² From that same period is the Education Bulletin N° 13, which discloses significant research contributions in the Dictionary of Rural Education.

The campaign *Healthy Eating: A Right for All* also made it possible to bring the social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of food to the debate. This acknowledges that the act of eating is endogenous to living beings in the natural ecosystem, wherein the species cycle is balanced between prey and predator. However, in the case of human beings, this natural relationship has changed. Humans started to intervene in nature to remove, collect and manage their means of subsistence. The emergence of agriculture resulted from the domestication of animals (grazing/livestock) and the selection of seeds and management of crops (agriculture).

In the course of the historical process, food has become more than food, since, in addition to biological satisfaction after the ingestion of nutrients at each meal, food has become culture. It is therefore a social act associated with ecological, historical, cultural, social, and economic factors.³³

Food metabolism occurs by memorizing the sensory activity of the brain, where the senses of smell and taste register and send the signals. This individual process is mediated by the community's sociability, in its relations to the agro-ecosystem to produce food, in culinary preparation, in ceremonial rites, and in the different moments when sociability is reinforced by the sharing of food.

The formation and development of the individual's psychic personality takes place during childhood. Accordingly, it is in this phase that we encounter the genesis of adult identity. This is why the agri-food producing empires have heavily invested in advertising for children and youth. It explains, for example, the media campaigns associating food with toys. According to Dias and Chiffolleau, campaigns evoke affection, kindness, and care, elements that are part

32 → Ibid.

33 → Maria Eunice Maciel, "Identidade Cultural e Alimentação," in *Antropologia e nutrição: um diálogo possível*, eds. Ana Maria Canesqui and Rosa Wanda Diez (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fiocruz, 2005).

of food culture, in order to attract consumers.³⁴ Historically, food is linked to cultural ties, and the relation production/consumption was mediated by exchange relations within short distances. In other words, consumers maintained identity ties in addition to consuming fresh and healthy food. With the advent of capitalism and the technological innovations triggered by the industrial revolution, food was changed and transformed into a commodity in space and time. This resulted in the separation between production and consumption, and the distance between the two was consolidated. Since then, the cultural ties have been gradually destroyed, by the technological advances of “development” and “modernity.” Industry, at its peak, subordinated agriculture to its interests, and the cultural ties of *camponesa* culture have changed, leading to the gradual abandonment of the countryside, which shifted from being a place of people to a marketplace. As a consequence, social relations deteriorate and the population is increasingly expelled from the countryside to the city.

Such phenomena, generated by the capitalist system, explain the tragic social dimension of the issue of hunger. The classic studies by Josué de Castro (*Geography of Hunger* and *Geopolitics of Hunger*, among others) present a vigorous analysis of the global problem of hunger as a social issue to be fought and overcome. After the end of World War II, the war industry was animated through adaptations to agriculture, with the State’s support in adopting the public policy called the “green revolution” and new technologies (machinery, agrochemicals and credit). The core of this model has always been technology of precision and efficiency: producing an ever-larger number of products in the smallest space possible.

The ineffectiveness of this agricultural model can be understood through a few variables: one concerns access to food, when food is available but global food policy and economic vectors block access to it; another variable concerns environmental impacts and the quality of the food produced, with implications for the emergence of diseases associated with poor diet; and, finally, the model favors the conglomerates of agricultural companies, controlling the production

34 → Juliana Dias and Mónica Chiffolleau, “Comida, patrimônio o negócio?,” *Jornada Cultural Nacional: Alimentação saudável: um direito de todas!*, *Boletim da Educação* 13 (2017).

chain of agri-food products.

In the Brazilian case, this model was implemented through a conservative pact that involved the agrarian elites, with the State's support, and was managed by the military during the years of dictatorship, from 1960 to 1985. More recently, modernization in the countryside has intensified, with the expansion of the agricultural frontier, and the intermingling of land ownership with multinationals, in the well-known pact for agribusiness. Today, we find ourselves hostages of this hegemonic agribusiness model, which has generated serious social and environmental consequences, where Brazil is even included in statistics marking the problem of childhood obesity, mentioned here to measure the size and scope of the problems arising from this perverse agri-food model. In Brazil, problems are even greater for several reasons inherent in the hegemonic model of agribusiness. It is enough to understand the uneven population density in the regions, causing an ongoing state of food insecurity; and in the semi-arid region, where the greatest number of *camponeses* are concentrated, new and old problems surrounding the so-called "coexistence with the semi-arid" demand concrete and specific actions by the *camponesa* struggle in its ongoing demand for adequate public policies.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In conclusion, this text results from academic work, mediated by militant experience and, it should be noted, by the serious cyclical problems present since the coup in 2016 in Brazil, whose repercussions are seen in the removal of workers' rights in the countryside and in the city. At the same time, this text also marks the MST's commitment to reflect on the major issues arising from agroecology, as a possibility of animating and strengthening the program of struggles for agrarian and popular reform in Brazil. We also hope that this text can be read as a possible contribution to the strengthening of pedagogical practice in the many rural schools scattered in the regions of *camponesa* struggle for the right to education. Finally, this text is also a tribute to the group of educators and students from Iraci Salete Strozak and Maria Nazaré de Sousa schools. ■