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Land Reform in Brazil and Lula's Neoliberalism

By

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B.A., International Affairs, LAU, 2004

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of
Masters in International Affairs

Beirut- Lebanon

January 2009

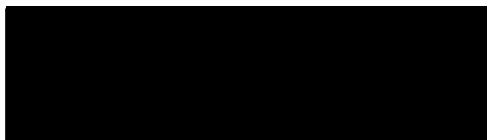
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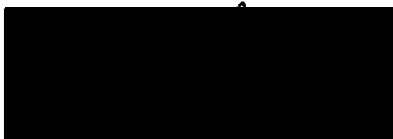
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To my Mother

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Paul Tabar, Advisor for his guidance and patience throughout my thesis work. Thanks also to Dr. Traboulsi for his support and to Dr. Sami Baroudi and Dr. Bassel Salloukh for their remarks and for being on my thesis committee.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Lebanese American University whose financial support during my graduate studies made it all possible.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and my friends Mirna Mneimneh and Safia Khonji who were keen in proof reading my thesis.

Abstract

This thesis analyzes an important Brazilian Social Movement called the “Landless Rural Workers Movement” or “MST” that has emerged in the early 80’s following an already existent history of Brazilian Social Movements struggling against the injustice of land concentration in Brazilian rural areas. The MST has surpassed the role of being just an anti-capitalist, anti-globalist or revolutionary movement, to become a massive popular movement that has dominated its space, set its principles and assimilated its role in society in a national and international sphere.

The thesis has a twofold purpose: on one hand it examines the MST struggle for land and on the other hand, it explores the existence of a government that does not abide by its obligation and fulfils its role in what has already been conceded in its constitution in regards to the question of land reform in Brazil. The corrupt political system in Brazil has proven to the movement that only the governance of a radical regime would serve their interest and finally implement a just and viable agrarian reform. Thus, the highlight of this study is to explore the present Brazilian government under President Lula, whose background and leftist ideologies had disillusioned the MST’s expectations and hopes with his neoliberal and market oriented policies. Accordingly this thesis will discuss the Brazilian history and political system in order to better understand the political trap and disillusionment of the MST and other social movements.

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Glossary

Acronyms

CEBS- Comnidade Eclesial de Base, Christian Ecclesiastical Base Community

CNBB- Conferencia Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil; National Conference of

Bishops

CPT- Comissao Pastoral das Terras; Pastoral Comission on Lands

FUNAI- Fundacao Nacional do Indio; National Indian Foundation

INCRA- Instituto Nacional de Colonizacao e Reforma Agraria; National
Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform

IMF- International Monetary Fund

NSM- New Social Movements

NPM- New Peasant Movements

PMDB- Partido do Movimento Democratico Brasileiro; Party of the
Democratic Brazilian Movement

PNRA- Plano Nacional de Reforma Agraria; National Plan for Agrarian
Reform

PT- Partido dos Trabalhadores; Worker's Party

P- SOL- Partido Partido Socialista, "sol" meaning Sun. Socialist Party.

WSF- World Social Forum

Portuguese Terms

Abertura: a policy of political “opening”

Acampado: encampment dweller

Assentament: settlement

Banco da Terra: Land Bank

Campones: peasant

Chimarrao: large decorated gourd in which erva mate is brewed

Favela: urban slums

Fazenda: rural estate

Fazendeiro: rural landowner

Latifundio: large rural landholding

Marcha: a peaceful walking demonstration.

Município: county

Quilombo: settlement of runaway slaves

Sem-terra: landless people

Introduction

The struggle for equal rights has historically been one of the main underlying objectives that have caused social movements around the world for centuries. In the same light, eagerness to claim injustice, fighting for a better world and often denial of reality, have become means for coping with the world for the under privileged. Similar to the various social movements by the people of the world, the MST which stands for “Brazilian Landless Workers Movement” has also emerged as a reaction to the desperation for social change.

Being the fifth biggest country in the world in terms of geographical area (8,514 887 km²), Brazil represents the “largest gap between rich and poor of any sizable nation on earth.”¹ In terms of land, “more than fifty percent of the nation’s agricultural land is controlled just by four percent of landowners.”² These figures of exclusion and inequality have induced the Landless Movement or as it is called in Portuguese Movimento Sem Terra (MST), not only to seek social change, but to exhaust every means possible to attain this change.

The MST is considered today to be one of the most important and promising social movements in Latin America. It has also served as a successful case study and live example to many other social movements around the world and attracted the attention of many writers and researchers interested in the subject. Political scientists like

¹ Angus Wright and W. Wolford, To Inherit the Earth: The Landless Movement and the Struggle for a New Brazil (Oakland: Food First Books, 2003) XVI.

² Ibid., XVI.

Noam Chomsky and historians like Eric Hobsbawm who have described the MST as the most exiting popular movement in today's word, are among the number of reputable social scientists that have dedicated part of their career to the exploration of this movement.

This splendid movement have manifested its role in Brazilian history as for being the most successful and prominent movement to tackle the land and agrarian reform question in the country. Officially founded in 1984, the MST today is organized in 23 out of the 27 states and involves more than 1.5 million people directly involved in the movement's chain. Land by itself is not the utmost aim of the movement who had gone far beyond this limitation and engaged itself in the role of a potential social actor for a more just and progressive society. They have committed themselves in environmental conservation, in health and educational systems for their members and most importantly, have spread hope and optimism for a better world.

In addition to the rest of the world's interest on the topic, Brazilian literature and research specialists themselves have dedicated their time to trace the MST history, claims and achievements through books, editorials interalia. Joao Pedro Stedile, a member of the National coordination of the movement and one of the most reliable Brazilian sources explored, could be considered to be the specialized author on this movement and on the Brazilian agrarian history. His recently published six books collection, written in collaboration with the MST covers the Brazilian Agrarian question since 1500 till present date. The books' main question is to trace back the

root of the problem of land in Brazil and to refer to all its phases to better highlight the question of land and Agrarian reform in the country. Their main hypothesis states that the land problem is not contemporary issue instigated by the appearance of the MST, rather a historical struggle dating back to the XVIII century.

Another important author in Brazilian literature is professor Bernardo Macano Fernandes, a fellow Geography professor at the University of Sao Paulo and the coordinator of the research and project program of agrarian reform (Nera). Fernandes has written and co-written a considerable number of books and articles in Portuguese and English, and one of particular interest to our subject is MST Formation and territorial. This book is vital for tracing the MST in its regions and in the camps by comparing the different areas that the MST had extended itself in Brazil. It deals specifically with the geographical perspective (space and place) of the MST. Furthermore, he has also worked into encouraging researches on MST; by publishing a guidance book that facilitates the work of researchers into assessing the movement from different angles. Fernandes also conducted an interview with Joao Pedro Stedile which was published as a book under the title Brava Gente (Brave People). This interview is viewed as one of the most important sources on the subject, since it raises polemic and key questions regarding the history and identity of the movement through a dialogue between two experts on the subject.

As for the English sources, To inherit the Earth by Angus Wriqth and Wendy Wolford published in 2003, is a well detailed book which places the MST in its

regional context in Latin America and also within an international scope related to the dominance, exploitation and influence that third world countries in general face from outside major and influential powers. The authors explain the story of the MST, their causes and struggles, and consider the Agrarian Reform as the only effective and successful measure to reach stability and solve the issue of land.

Liam Kane in his book Popular Education and social Changes in Latin America has dedicated a whole chapter to the MST and its special concern about education and the role the movement plays in educating and guiding the population. Sue Barford and Jan Rocha, in their book Cutting the Wire, assess the history of the MST and focus on the challenges the movement face and their ability to overcome them. In reviewing their book, Eric Hobsbawm had approached Cutting the Wire as an important coverage of the movement “the fullest account of what is probably the most ambitious social movement in contemporary Latin America...” Moreover in the anti-capitalism book We are everywhere there is a special acknowledgment of the MST portrayed as a movement of global anti-capitalism, that resembles other significant social movements around the world that had paved their ways and surpassed all boundaries in search for equality and social justice.

It is interesting to note that not all reviewers or researchers come to consider the movement as justifiable and honorable. A great deal of criticism has been directed towards the movement and their ideology. For instance, Tim Padgett, a reporter for the Time.com online magazine, has described the movement as “Brazil’s landless

Rebels” that have adopted “guerrilla capitalism” to transform and end the stability of the nation. In fact in Brazil itself, the movement is also condemned and attacked by many. This criticism and distortion through the media plays a strong role in alerting a certain segment of the people against the movement by exposing it as a rebellious and vandalistic group that aims at gaining power within the country.

Far from being a rebellious movement, the MST is a very well structured and systematic organization that has its own objectives, principles and ideology. Its initial goal is the mobilization towards a democratic type of government would be representative of all factions of the country and halt the elite’s exploitation of the poor. Analysts have also suggested that one of the problems of the country, like many other third world countries, is rooted and dates back to the colonization period in 1500 and to the exploitive system that was implemented. Even after its independence from Portugal, Brazil had not been able to rid itself of the elitist government that has been imposed on it for centuries.

Many scholars believe that the inheritance of an aristocratic government, whose agenda was to serve the interest of the metropolis, is Brazil’s reality today. The MST and other social movements work towards changing and implanting a new reality. What the MST mainly claims for in terms of lands, is that the government follows up with its obligations and roles and abide by what already had been written in its constitution for solving the land question and reaching an agrarian reform.

Prior to the government of the actual president Jose Inacio da Silva, popularly known as “Lula”, the politics of the country were clearly defined as operating under the influence of aristocrats land lords and working to attend their interests. With the coming of Lula to power, the poor in general and peasants specifically, have held their hopes up in the new government for attaining their rights and for finally experiencing a fair and just agrarian reform. However, Lula’s government was not able to break through the class domination of these land lords and yield to the MST and the peasants their rights to land or to perform agrarian reform.

The aim of this study is to track Lula’s trajectory and understand how and why this so awaited leftist regime, came to break its promises and deceive its supporters.

Moreover, it is important to note how this failure was shaped by the politics of the country and the endorsement of the President in the political game. To approach our claim, it is extremely important that we review the movement and its emergence along Brazilian land history in a first instance, and in a later stage to cover its challenges, its proposal of agrarian reform, and the different political stages that the country went through and their effect on the movement. And finally the hardship MST presently faces vis-à-vis the leftist government that they had awaited for so long.

This study will be divided into six chapters and a conclusion. The following chapter presents the theoretical and methodological approach used to perform it, locating the movement under the umbrella of social movements in general and specifically under

Latin American social movements that had raised a great debate in the theoretical realm due to its uniqueness and growth.

Before initiating our exploration of the movement itself, their achievements, and their role in Brazilian society today, in the second chapter we will recapitulate the agrarian question in Brazil, and to better understand it, rely on the country's historical roots and geographical circumstances, which without any doubt are the contributors to the problem. In the third chapter, an historical overview of the country is presented to help the reader better understand the MST's remarkable journey and the factors that have had an underlying impact on the movements' feelings and actions. The paper will prove that politics, economy and interests in general are controlled by the few influential minorities in power that manage the country to serve and assist their own needs. In this sense, the question of land dates back to the period of independence, the systems of land division, of land laws and of constitutional amendments are important themes to be covered to better understand the origin of the problem. This leads us to the core argument of this thesis which revolves around the difficulty of any government, highlighting here the leftist government in power today, to break the class domination and work through new patterns to overthrow this embedded political system

Chapter three begins with the history of the struggle by explaining that the MST is not and was not the first and only movement to struggle against the injustice of land. Struggles of such character had taken place in a first instance in the country since

1888 with the slave abolition till 1964 with the military coup. These struggles could be distinguished in three forms; the Messianic struggles, the radical and spontaneous struggles and finally, the struggles organized with ideological character. All these forms of struggle that have passed through different and marked times in Brazilian history have screamed against inequality and exploitation.

The fourth chapter deals with the MST's emergence as an institution, by assessing its principles, objectives, organization and funding system. The forms of struggle and resistance will also be explored to better understand the scope of this unanimous movement that had explored land occupation or invasions, encampments, marches and manifestations throughout the country to pressure the government for action.

Although the question of agrarian reform has practically taken place after the establishment of the Brazilian constitution, in a way or another all these previous movements have contested against the Brazilian land system and have fought for a change. However, no previous movement has gone as far as the MST in terms of militancy, organization and accomplishment. The movement has a clear, though difficult role of pressuring the government to abide by its own rules and laws entrenched in the constitution.

Chapter five addresses the agrarian reform question and the proposal raised by the MST. When assessing the matter of Agrarian Reform, three different forms of Agrarian Reform will be presented among which Brazil is one of them.

The first form is the classical or capitalist form of agrarian reform, and the United States of America is one example or case study. The second form is the radical agrarian reform, which is the form that the MST and other social movements struggle to adopt. Last but not least is the oscillating model between Agrarian Reform and Settlement policy, which is the case of the Brazilian government working along this vague idea.

In the final chapter, the study will move towards picturing the movement in the present political situation of the country, by tracing back the government attitudes, its relation with the MST and how it is dealing with the question of land. In the concluding chapter, some theoretical analysis as to test the validity of the theory in use will be concluded and some general remarks about the MST and their perspective for the future will be drawn.

Chapter I- Theory and Methodology

While describing the historical events that led to the current situation of the MST, an argumentative style will be explored in order to provide a platform for the thesis. The technical procedure will be elaborated and based on primary and secondary sources through previous researches, studies and publications both in English and Portuguese. Of the sources explored for this thesis, there is a considerable variety of works in Portuguese language due to its availability and importance and my acquaintance with the language.

As for the primary sources, important documents, such as their congress plan that is drafted every five years, the movement's magazine and own newspaper are important sources to speak out and represent their actions and plans. Furthermore, the website of the movement was of extreme help and clarification as it offers a variety of articles and publications mainly in Portuguese. The most thorough source for this study is the lengthy interview which I had conducted with an important member of the Directory of the MST, Geraldo Fontes, who is responsible for the International Relation sector and a member of the National Coordination of the movement. The interview took place in the headquarters of the movement in the city of Sao Paulo on the 21st of November 2006. This lengthy interview of approximately three hours, had provided me with extra and important information about the movement its organization and its reality on the ground.

The secondary sources are basically in the form of articles, online journals, books and magazines which were accessible in both English and Portuguese. The most important sources were the numerous interviews conducted with central members of the MST or expertise on the subject. In addition to the previous, some questionnaires and statistics conducted by newspapers and important centers were relied upon to compare numbers and draw conclusions. .

Since we are dealing with a social movement, the best theoretical approach is that of the *New Social Movement theory (NSM)* from which we will borrow the paradigm of the theorist Clause Offe's in analyzing and structuring social movements in the post industrial society. The NSM belongs to the "Structuralist Approach" which is also referred to by other scholars as "European debate"³. This theory explains why these non-class based movements had risen and how they affect and change society, instead of focusing on the nature and the requirements for the success or failure of these movements. These issues instead, are the focal point of the "Social Action Approach" also known as "U.S theoretical debate"⁴. The latter, has developed in light of the *Resource Mobilization Theory* which focuses on how movements are organized, and why

³ Debates in Western Europe began a little later than in the US - mainly in the 1970s. From the start, the debates were very different from those in the US. This difference reflected the big difference between the two continents in political history and in the traditions of political theory. In Pasuk Phongpaichit, "Theories of Social Movements and their relevance for Thailand"

⁴ In the US there has been no tradition of social democracy, or trade union corporatism. The labour movement has been less important. Social movements are thus explained not by big societal change, but by the continuing ability of outsider groups to mobilise resources and gain political representation within the system. Theorists are not interested in why social movement arises. The answers to this question seem to them self-evident. They concentrate on why some succeed and some fail. Ibid.

some of them were more successful than others. Although the *Political process Approach* is similar in some aspects to the previous one, it distinguishes itself mainly by relying on the political rather than on the civil realm. “They focus wholly on the interaction between the movements and the state and on ways in which the political system frames the failure or success of the movements.”⁵

Primarily the New Social Movement theory is a reaction to the Marxist economic and social reductionism in their explanation of the emergence of the class based social movements. . “The *NSM* theorists argued that new collective actors have moved to the center of contemporary conflicts and displaced traditional working-class struggles.”⁶ According to Offe, these new actors were not class based actors and have raised non-class related issues, arguing that their identity was defined in relation to these issues and not by class position. However, many important theorists have explored the NSM theory in distinctive ways. Allan Touraine, an important scholar of the NSM theory, and perceived as the main representative of the *action identity paradigm*, explains the emergence of social movements as the counter reaction to the ruling class which portrays them as class counter actors.

Eduardo Canel, a further important social theorist, in his article New Social Movement Theory and Resource Mobilization Theory tries to compare Offe and Tourain’s paradigms along distinctive lines. By further analyzing the emergence of these social movements and the relation of these new actors with the old ones,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Eduardo Canel, “New Social Movement Theory and Resource Mobilization Theory: The Need for Integration” The international Development Research Center, 3.

Tourain considers that these actors belong to different economical or cultural types of society. Alternatively, Offe is more lenient concerning this topic, he argues that although contemporary social movement values are different, yet they are not new, they have only changed in their nature or in their implementation adjusting themselves to the actual world.

The theory in hand is the most successful relating the dynamic nature of the MST as a new movement. However, the movement cannot be solely placed as such; it defends an ancient cause that has only accommodated itself to the new social order and parameters of the world. Furthermore this theory clearly locates our social movement in hands to the parameters of social norms and identity where the struggle takes place in the realm of civil society rather than in the realm of politics. Except in regards to their politicization, Offe, unlike Tourain, places them right in the middle of the political and of civil society spheres, instead of excluding NSMs from the political arena. "The action of SMS, Offe argues, politicize civil society but in ways that do not reproduce existing forms of control, regulation and state intervention."⁷ These movements, he explains, come to fill the gap which government institution or political parties have failed to represent; however, they maintained their autonomy and their distance from institutionalization or formation of political parties.

Another applicable claim about the MST which is explored by the NSM approach is these movements' emergence and overall existence. It is a direct response to the democratic system's failure to guarantee equal individual's freedom and opportunity.

⁷ Ibid., 14

These theorists perceive democracy as the disintegration of the system into an authoritarian, technocratic state that is controlled by the market forces and its regulations. The NSM theory improve our understanding of the MST's ongoing refutation of the Brazilian political and economic system that as a core of the problem of the ongoing inequality and injustice in the country. Offe considers the notion of '*crisis*' that the state falls into, as essential to the formation of social movements who deny the states role of a capitalist state, that has to ensure the conditions for capital accumulation and bourgeois legitimacy. Offe perceives the political system as operating based on satisfying the needs and demands of the interest groups or of those sectors integrated into the political or economic system. Thus, Offe comes to explain the emergence of social movements "as a reaction against the deepening, broadening, and increased irreversibility of the forms of domination and deprivation in late capitalist societies."⁸ Beside its emergence, Social movements according to this theory have come to advocate the values of equality and participation, autonomy of the individual, democracy, plurality and difference, rejection of manipulation, regulation and bureaucratization.

As for the MST's organization and chain of command, it is worth recalling the movement's ideal of participation and inclusion of all its members with equal opportunities in terms of gender, age and race. However, the movement also emphasizes the role of those who have more experience and in other cases more intellectual capabilities to lead and be part of the coordination in a regional or national perspective. Offe is very peculiar in his paradigm differentiating himself

⁸ Canel, 6.

from other NSM theorists, when dealing with the leadership matter. According to Offe, the importance of leadership is distinguished “between leaders and led, members and nonmembers, private and public roles, means and ends instrumental and expressive action.”⁹

Before accessing the theory and its validity to our case study, which will be covered at the end of this study, it is important to stress how other scholars specialized in Latin American social movements had challenged the theory as being flawed when specifically addressing the region and its social movements. Experts on Latin American studies, explain that the region being different than Europe and U.S had experienced its peculiar phase and social conditions for the emergence of social movements on the 70’s and 80’s. Henry Veltmeyer and James Petras in their book The Dynamic of Social Change in Latin America have pointed at this phase in terms of four assertions: (1) “debt crisis, economic stagnation, and the decline of economic conditions for the majority of the population”¹⁰, (2) the weakening of the military and authoritarian regimes and the emergence of newly elected and democratic regimes, (3) the implementation of an economic model SAP¹¹, designed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to boost and stabilize the economy of the region, (4) “the

⁹ Claus Offe, “New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries in Institutional Politics”, in Canel, 15.

¹⁰ Henry Veltmeyer and J. Petras, The Dynamic of Social Change in Latin America (Great Britain: Macmillan, 2000) 106.

¹¹ An amalgam of stabilization and austerity measures (currency devaluation, anti-inflation) and structural economic reforms (outward orientation, liberalization, deregulation, privatization, downsizing) in *ibid*, 106.

refoundation of the capital accumulation process based on a radical change in the capitalist-labor relationship and the associated class structure”¹².

Judith A. Hellman in covering the similarities and differences of the NSM theory in advanced industrial societies and Latin America, states that NSM in advanced industrial societies “mainly represent a response to postindustrial contradictions, and those in Latin America primary arise in response to clearly material needs.”¹³ As for their similarities, Hellman highlights that in both areas, NSMs at least share one defining characteristic which is “their fundamental distrust of the traditional parties and formations of the left”.¹⁴ The left in turn would appreciate in some circumstances the success of these movements as to explore their image for their own, as in the case of electoral campaigns.

These social, economical and political conditions of the region, associated by a different degree of restructuring process in each country, have given base to a similar complex of social actors aiming for resistance and social change.

Veltmeyer and Petras, have identified their features in four criteria which are “their social base, their demands, the arena and specific form of struggle, the specific methods for realizing the goals of the movement; and in postmodernist terms, the identity assumed or constructed by participants in the course of their

¹² Ibid., 107

¹³ Judith Hellman in Escobar, A. and S. Alvarez, eds, The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy and Democracy (Boulder: Westview, 1992) 53.

¹⁴ Ibid.

struggle.”¹⁵ “NSMs are believed to give expression to ‘new popular interests’, to practice ‘new ways of doing politics’ and even to embody the possibility of creating a “new hegemony by the masses”¹⁶

When applying the NSM theory to peasant and grass root movements, it is worth mentioning that in principle, this theory is essentially related to contemporary urban wave of movements that are believed to have emerged in the developed countries. Such urban movements include the feminism wave, human rights movements, and gay rights movements. Many Latin American theorists believe that for this reason, this theory does not apply to the Latin American region and its specific issues. Orin Starn, when linking the literatures of NSM and Peasant Protests, has criticized that “most scholarship on new social movements ignores peasants and this misses some of the most vital new politics of the planet”¹⁷. However, it is essential to point that although Latin American grass movements have a different orientation of culture and strategies, they have slowly accommodated their structures and course of actions. With the globalization wave that the world was exposed to at the end of the 80’s, we could easily place these movements in the realm of contemporary society. Veltmeyer and Petras clearly explain this notion, by claiming that these peasant movements of Latin America are not the traditional version of peasantry, New Peasant Movements (NPMs) as they refer to them “tend to have

¹⁵ Ibid, 107

¹⁶ Artur Escobar and S. Alvarez, eds., *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America* (Boulder: Westview, 1992) 2.

¹⁷ Orin Starn in Artur Escobar and S. Alvarez, eds., 90.

a much greater consciousness of the existent of a global empire, of a policy programme (neoliberalism) that is tied to the world economic order.”¹⁸ These movements are not detached from urban life; their leaders have cosmopolitan view and invest in the formation of cadres. Another peculiarity is that organization and coordination is maintained among these movements in the entire region as to discuss and share their experiences related to the rural struggles. A clear example is the Via Campesina¹⁹, where movements like the MST work actively with like-minded organizations around the world and share experience about reform.”²⁰ In terms of their political orientation, it is essential to note, that these movement in general are autonomous. Although they maintain a good relation with the left, yet they are detached from political parties, and they are not involved in the electoral process. “NPMs are influenced by a mixture of Classic Marxism and the ideas of ecology, and, in particularly, the issues of ethnicity and nationality”²¹.

The coming chapter will tackle the question of land in Brazil and prepare the reader to better understand one of the most exciting social movements in Latin America. As we will notice, the problematic of land has been existent along the existent of the country itself, and this leads us to conclude that the MST, that is relatively new in its existence, is just another segment struggling on the unending battle for land and justice.

¹⁸ H. Veltmeyer and J.Petras, 2000, 134.

¹⁹ An international alliance of family farmer organization created in 1993 and acting worldwide.

²⁰ A. Wright and W. Wolford, 331.

²¹ Ibid., 118.

CHAPTER II- The Agrarian Question in Brazil

A brief history of land in Brazil dating back to the country's colonization.

To fully understand the land challenges in Brazil, it is of extreme importance that we trace the problem's roots. The problem of land that the country has been facing is undoubtedly the result of the colonial system that has been imposed on the country since its discovery, and has prevailed till present date. This is the reality of all Latin American countries that share together the same history and same difficulties.

Brazilian land was discovered in the year of 1500, with the arrival of the first Portuguese troops commanded by Pedro Alvares Cabral within the context of the capitalist European commerce expeditions around the world. The role of these expeditions was to exploit these new territories with their economic and military supremacy and impose on them the laws and political wills of their monarchies. The capitalist model imposed by the crown, has transformed the means of production and natural resources that exist in the form of lucrative and commercial goods. This model of colony is defined as colony of exploitation, "where all the good and services exploited are to serve the European metropolis as a form of capital accumulation."²²

²² Joao Pedro Stedile, ed. *A questao Agraria no Brasil 11: O debate tradicional: 1500- 1960*. (Sao Paulo: Expressao Popular, 2005) 20.

Initially the Portuguese crown was more focused on the extraction of mineral resources like gold, iron, platinum, and precious stones in general; “however, soon they realized that the prosperity of that land was the fertility of its soil and the possibility of cultivating tropical products that back then were products only grown and commercialized in Asia and Africa.”²³ In this manner, the colonizers organized the Brazilian territory as to produce tropical agricultural products to be consumed and commercialized in Europe. Such products include sugar-cane, coffee, cotton, spices in general, and cattle creations and the exploitation of native plants like the tobacco, the cacao and the so famous Brazilian wood “pau- Brazil”.

This type of production, under the laws of the capitalistic system, which produced agricultural products and minerals solely to supply the European market, was called by the Brazilian historians as agro exportation model. “According to the first macroeconomic statistics of the national Brazilian Bank in mid nineteenth century, in that period, the Brazilian colony was exporting more than eighty per cent of all what it has been produced in our territory.”²⁴

The model adopted for organizing the units of agricultural production was called *plantation*²⁵, a word of English origin developed by sociologists and historians to summarize the functioning model used in the colonies. In terms of property of land, the Europeans had adopted the monopoly of all territory under the exclusive control

²³ Ibid., 20.

²⁴ Ibid., 20.

²⁵ It is the agricultural process implanted in the huge and continuous farms by exploiting slaves for cultivating the land with the production of a unique type of agricultural product designated for export.

of the monarchy, the crown. In this manner, as there was no private property of land, and all the lands were under the ownership of the monarchy, it can be stated that there was no such capitalistic and commercial system in the acquisition of land. However to implant the agro exportation model, and stimulate the capitalist to invest their capital in production, the Crown had opted “concession of use”²⁶ with the right to inheritance. Such concessions despite the fact of being inheritable, could not be bought or sold, and the king could revoke these rights at any time, if the “owner” have failed to pay his duties and revenues to Portugal. “In this way, the king set up Portuguese rule in the colony at little or no expense to himself- and in this way, inequality was introduced into the very core of what would become Brazilian society, economy and politics.”²⁷

Land Property and the laws negatively affecting slavery and the underprivileged

The second phase of Brazilian land history is marked by the slave abolition and the world’s campaign against slavery and their right for freedom. Within this context of the end of slavery and the pressure by countries like England to end the slavery in Brazil, Dom Pedro II²⁸ had passed the “law of number 601” in September 18th of 1850, known as “the first land laws”. This law had legally defined the means of land

²⁶ The Portuguese Monarchy allotted huge territories to powerful nobles and royal favorites, who in return should cultivate the land for export means.

²⁷ A. Wright and W. Wolford, 113.

²⁸ Portuguese representative of the Colony.

acquisition in Brazil and at the same time emphasized the old concept that only those powerful and influential would have access to the land. This new law had “determined that it would only be considered landowners, those who had legalized their property in the notary’s offices and paid a certain predetermined amount to the Metropolis.”²⁹ This led us to understand our earlier discussion about the exclusion of those less fortunate such as the poor and the liberated slaves who would never have the opportunity and thus never have the resources to buy and acquire these lands.

Another direct social consequence of this new law was the consolidation of the big land proprietaries as the basic structure of land distribution in the country. Those who had already received their *sesmarias*³⁰ would regularize its possession and transform it into private property. Meanwhile, the colonization process was being mobilized. European families were encouraged to migrate to Brazil (especially to the south region) to acquire their piece of land by paying for it the proper amount to the metropolis. These immigrants and the area to which they migrated from (mainly south) have distanced itself from all other regions of the country. “... in the settler South the economy was more diverse and robust than in plantation denominated regions, both city and countryside were on average more prosperous than most of the rest of Brazil.”³¹ In those regions, the workers were not allowed land possession, restricting the payment to the landowners’ preferences.

²⁹ Joao Pedro Stedile, *Questao Agraria no Brasil*, 10th ed. (Sao Paulo: Editora Atual, 2005) 11.

³⁰ The plot of land divided and distributed by the landowners or representatives of the Metropolis to those who presented interest and resources to exploit it.

³¹ A. Wright and W. Wolford, 45.

The Land statute of 1964

The land Statute of 1964 (*Law number 4504*) deserves special attention for being the first law of agrarian reform in the country. Issued in 1964 by President Marechal Castelo Branco, this law, although promulgated under the military coup (1964-1982), still carried in it progressive and positive characteristics. Many drafts of laws or proposals for an agrarian reform law have been designed during the period of 1946 to 1964. However none of them had passed.

Although this law was never adopted in practice by the military government, who had rather encouraged the colonization of the precarious areas of the country like the Amazon region, yet this statute came to be entrenched in the constitution and to become the legal framework for the agrarian reform in the country.

Simultaneously this land statute played a central role in defining land according to its size, utilization and productivity. Land, according to certain parameters, (of size and or productivity) would then be defined as viable or not for expropriation and land reform. This period was also and for the first time in history, subject to taxes “it is worth reminding that till that moment, the big Brazilian landowners have never paid a cent in form of taxes over the property of land.”³² Aside these central aspects, the statute also held its importance as for establishing for the first time in history an official document on rural property legislation, and the creation of a specialized

³² Mitsue Morissawa, *A historia de luta pela terra e o MST*(Sao Paulo: Expressao Popular, 2001) 99.

institute for regulation, known as (INCRA) Brazilian National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform.

In order to understand why such a radical document was drafted in time of military dictatorship, when peasants' leagues and leaders in favor of the agrarian reform were being prosecuted or sent to exile for their ideological and revolutionary thoughts; it is important to refer to Stedile's book The Agrarian Question in Brazil Volume 3. In this book, some possible explanations that might have led to the creation of the land statute even in the least expected times are drawn. Stedile borrows the analysis of the historian Jose Gomes da Silva, who claims that in the first instance the government was being influenced by the studies conducted by important government members and economists who claim that agrarian reform among other indicators is the strength needed to develop capitalism and production in the country. The second claim relates to the U.S president John Kennedy's initiative to create a progressive American alliance over the continent in a meeting in 1961 in Punta del Leste, Uruguay. "...he defended the necessity of restructuring the land property as a form of consolidating capitalism, frightened by possible influence of the recent Cuban Revolution that had strong social base among landless peasants, and in a first instance, had decreed the expropriation of the big extensions of land of American companies."³³

³³ Joao P. Stedile, ed. A Questao Agraria no Brazil 3 Programas de reforma agrarian:1946- 2003: (Sao Paulo: Expressao Popular, 2005) 149.

Constitutional Amendments

As stated above, the Land statute is the first document as to place the agrarian reform in a legal and constitutional framework. Although it was not the first nor the last document drafted about the agrarian cause in the country, this document is the ultimate source for further legal amendments in the constitution.

In 1988, the Congress started to draw up a new constitution. Social movements all around the country took the chance to express their hopes for changes. The MST along other peasant groups has also engaged in these calls for equality and access to land. They have collected over million signatures in a petition calling for a just and fair agrarian reform. Although many successes were acquired in the social realm, the hopes of the landless were once again torn apart. Stedile is quoted in Sue Brandford and Jan Rocha about this episode “Practically the only social defeat that occurred in the new constitution concerned the agrarian question. Everywhere else there were advances.”³⁴ The new constitution, still in force today, does not exclude agrarian reform, as it had included some social aspects that should belong to all sectors of society and are not a peculiar matter of agrarian reform. In its *article 186*, it maintains the government’s right and power to expropriate any large rural property provided that it is not carrying out its “social function” .Moreover, it endorses that just payment be guaranteed to the landowner. “The social function of the land is met when the rural properties follow simultaneously, according to the criteria and degree of demands

³⁴ Sue Branford and Jan Rocha, Cutting the Wire: The Story of the Landless Movement in Brazil (London: Latin America Bureau, 2002) 51.

established by law, the following requisites: I- Rational and adequate use of land; II- Adequate use of the available natural resources and preservation of the nature; III- attention to the norms and atmosphere that regulate the work relations, IV- Exploitation that favors the well fare of both the owners and workers simultaneously.”³⁵

However, numerous criticism were raised, as Branford and Rocha further analyze, “this article is less advanced than the provision under the military regime’s old Land Statute, which had permitted the government to expropriate *latifundios*, defined either by size or by land use, without any reference to ‘social function’.”³⁶ This ambiguous concept has greatly benefited estate owners, as the big and influential landowners of the country have pressured INCRA to define ‘social function’ “in a very lax way, so that almost entirely unproductive estates were saved from expropriation.”³⁷ The issue of payment on another level also deserves serious criticism, since it declares payment for the expropriated lands, at the cost of government or people’s money, to titles that in many cases are fraudulent or illegal.

A further and important achievement of the 1988 constitution is the formal recognition in this constitution for the right for title of lands for descendants of

³⁵ Mario Maestri in Joao P. Stedile, ed. *A Questao Agraria no Brazil 2 o debate da esquerda: 1960-1980*: (Sao Paulo: Expressao Popular, 2005) 273

³⁶ Branford and Rocha, 51.

³⁷ Ibid.

Quilombos³⁸ (referring to former slaves and indigenous people of the land) as long as they can prove the legitimacy of their existence and progeny.

In 1993, *law number 8,624* was promulgated as to mainly support the law of expropriation of lands for the agrarian reform ends. However this law has introduced some new criteria in favor of the landowners and in this manner dissociating it each time more from the ideal plan of agrarian reform. The “social function” of the land was reinforced; they have redefined the size of the land and determined that no property with less than 300 hectares could be expropriated. Furthermore, payments for the owners of these lands should not be paid anymore in form of titles and in the long run, now they should be paid immediately and in form of cash.

The struggle for land in the country since 1888 -with the slavery abolition till 1964- with the military coup.

Different eras of struggles for land happened in Brazilian history since the slavery abolition. Before this turnover in Brazilian history, slaves were the only working force of Brazilian rural society, and practically had no right or voice to claim over land. However, slaves of Northeastern Brazil, specifically from the state of Pernambuco, have marked an important passage in the country’s history for their repugnance and their revolutionary character. These slaves, who used to run away

³⁸ African word meaning hidden or -maroon- communities in A. Wright and W. Wolford, 124

from the landowners, came to form sort of fugitive communities known as Quilombo. The most known of these Quilombos, is Palmares, a community formed around the year of 1605, which had saved as many as 20,000 people between slaves and Indians. The colonial government, aware of the grandiosity of such community and the threat it represented, had sent its military forces many times to exterminate it with no success. By the third time, the forces being more prepared and with better skilled tactics, had conquered the Palmares community; many were killed, some captured and some others opted for suicide than surrendering.

Even after the slavery abolition, slaves and indigenous people were marginalized by the government that has considered their independence sufficient. No particular rights or any kind of protection were guaranteed to these communities till the end of the 1980's, when the government became aware of their numbers and had finally offered them some legal protection. "In 1988, this recognition was written into the federal constitution, guaranteeing land title to the descendants of quilombos who could prove that they still occupied areas dating back to the original quilombos."³⁹

Nowadays, remnants of quilombo communities, as they are identified, ally themselves to other movements for the preservation of their lands against the construction of dams, mines and timber operation. Movements such as the MST and the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) work side by side with Quilombos to help them ensure and maintain their rights to land.

³⁹ A. Wright and W. Wolford, 125.

The Messianic struggle

The struggle of religious or spiritual character started after the slavery abolition decree in 1888 and lasted till the 1930's decade. This movement was peculiar for holding a social rather than an economical character which does not mean that this problem has not elevated to a major problem of all sources. However it is important to accredit that "Social tensions had originated especially from the desire to acquire lands, reach social welfare and security to all people"⁴⁰ at the same time when the European colonizers were being brought to the country with the promise of their piece of land

This era is also characterized by an era where religious and magic values were more important than any other ideology. Religion had such a pragmatic meaning that people or followers used to pray on the land and believed that they could cure the devastation by praying on them. Religions held also an important task of conformity with their social and economic reality, to justify the existent inequality and injustice. However, this same religion that has convinced them to accept their status had also instigated them to act and revolt against exploitation, abuse and oppression.

The Messianic struggle is conveyed as the first collective manifestation against the extreme exploitation and violence of the colonizers. These movements, always lead by religious figures with revolutionary characters, have found in the essence of

⁴⁰ Joao P. Stedile, ed. A Questao Agraria no Brazil 2 o debate na esquerda: 1960- 1980: (Sao Paulo: Expressao Popular, 2005) 135.

religion the right for equality, of justice and brotherhood to accomplish their revolt against those who have deprived them of their natural and divine law.

The most renowned case of messianic resistance, also in Northeast Brazil, is the war of Canudos (1896-1897) called as such after a settlement built by people who followed the preacher Antonio Conselheiro.⁴¹ Conselheiro used to travel from town to town to spread the message of God and help people with his pacific and constructive words. People started to follow him, and in the 1890's he settled with his followers in a place in the northern state of Bahia called Canudos. Although this community was of peaceful character, the government felt threatened by the ideological and progressive messages spread around its people and responded to them with violence. After previous unsuccessful attacks, the government sent its armed troops more prepared and outfitted than previous ones, and in this final attempt, Canudos was cruelly exterminated. However, the memories of Conselheiro and his alternative community remain alive as a hero and a model of inspiration to other social movements including the MST.

Radical and Spontaneous struggles

This next phase of struggles held from the 1930's decade till 1954 is marked by a violent phase which would be distinguished along two classes. In a first instance this struggle had emerged in a higher level among the big landowners and colonels in a

⁴¹Conselheiro, meaning "counselor", was a name given to Antonio by his followers and picked up by others in A. Wright and W. Wolford, 126.

violent monopolized system in a dispute for land possession and power “It emerged from the political relations of effective dominations in a region where the public power is inexistent; or, perhaps, it exists only symbolically.”⁴² In this sense, these frictions express the tensions and conflicts of the landowners among themselves in the process of land concentration, or to the struggle for areas of great influence.

These radical and spontaneous struggles also expressed the reaction of the “lower class” against the economic conditions and miserable social life in which they had lived. The discriminated workers had adopted violence as the final and utmost solution in areas where the landowners were in absolute charge.

The struggles organized with ideological character.

Interestingly, this last phase had emerged in the political, economic and social context where the peasant, the foreman and the landowners were disintegrated from the same universal environment.⁴³ This phase is marked by labor unions and syndicates that have emerged when the real frontiers (economic, social, cultural, political and ideological) were defined as to separate the landowners and the rural workers in different categories; and when the peasants had become a proletariat.

⁴² Joao P. Stedile, A questao Agraria No Brasil:2 o debate na esquerda: 1960- 1980 (Sao Paulo: Expressao Popular, 2005) 136.

⁴³ All the characters cited are members of a unique and collective body, under the rules and laws of this archaic and cast system.

Three important organizations emerged in this transitory phase; ULTAB (Union of the peasant and all agricultural workers in Brazil), Master (Movement of the landless workers) and Peasants Leagues. These organizations have suited the needs of those peasants and landless people who were living a precarious and unfair life without any recompense or recognition.

The first Peasants League was formed in mid 1950's also in northeast Brazil when a group of rural workers united to protect their rights and fight for justice. Their official aim was to promote land redistribution, by carrying out the slogan of 'Agrarian Reform by law or by force'. These Leagues won a major victory when the government expropriated a 'Plantation'⁴⁴ in 1959 and distributed land to the rural workers. "This victory contributed to the rise of the associations through he Brazilian northeast and beyond. By 1964, over 2000 leagues had been formed in twenty different states."⁴⁵

The four phases discussed above help us trace back the different types of struggles for land that have emerged and their different aspects. It's worth saying that problems and solutions in each phase of Brazilian land history had developed and prevailed to help form what we have today, well structured and organized movements like the MST that with its clear and defined objectives remains strong and alive to its cause. The next chapter will introduce this movement in all its aspects; its emergence, its history, its trajectory and strategy throughout all these years.

⁴⁴ Closed societies in which the "owners" were the employers, bankers, shopkeepers and father-figures and the laws. A. Wright and W. Wolford, 114.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 129

CHAPTER III- The MST emergence

National and Regional indicators

As we discovered from the above historical overview, Brazilian history has always witnessed the peasants struggle for land and precisely for agrarian reform; however never in history a movement had been so powerful and influential in its accomplishments and in the capacity of people involved as is the MST nowadays. The explanation of such peculiarity relies on the historical and political context in which the movement has aroused and on the social and regional indicators that has played an important role in its favor.

Political context

Brazil, from 1964 till 1984, experienced as elsewhere in Latin America a cruel and repressive atmosphere of military dictatorship. “The military took power in 1964 in response to fears by Brazilian elites that Brazil’s poor were finally getting organized, demanding land reform and expanded rights for urban workers.”⁴⁶

Heavily influential on the politics of the region and working aside with the bourgeoisie, was the United States government who had connived with the military of the country and overthrown the president in power and declared a military

⁴⁶ A. Wright and W. Wolford, 4.

dictatorship that had lasted for twenty years. The years of military oppression led to the dismantlement of the Peasants Leagues, and of students and workers organizations. This cruel regime also attacked these organizations and imprisoned, tortured and exiled their leaders. Protests against the military regime in 1968 resulted in more repression from the government which had passed the Institutional Act No.5, banning all forms of criticisms and resistance to the government. The press was censored, mouths were shut and life was strictly controlled by the police and military intelligence.

The Church as a social consolidator

The Church in Brazil which has always aspired to enliven and strengthen its role in society has come to assume the responsibility of an important social consolidator during military dictatorship. During the sixties the term “Liberation theology” was widely used, it “offered an interpretation of Christianity that was potentially revolutionary: a call for social justice in the name of Christ.”⁴⁷ The church, or more specifically socially minded and progressive priests, organized themselves in what they called Christian Ecclesiastical Base or CEBs.⁴⁸ These CEBs represented a place where the people, especially the poor, in search for better life conditions, could meet to openly discuss politics and social problems. At the same time, they were induced to think and act by themselves. These priests held the task of social consolidators that

⁴⁷ Ibid, 8.

⁴⁸ In the CEBs meetings, Priests and parishioners would place themselves in circles, with no clerical garb that could differentiate them and place them in a higher rank, and engage into discussion instead of ceremony.

could unite the poor on their causes for justice, freedom and equality. They were also concerned about spreading the thought that these measures were commands of the Christian ideology and not necessarily of Communism. Although the military government had been also supported by the Christian church against the godless communism, the government felt trapped by their initiative and had also persecuted, exiled and tortured these priests that had engaged in such activities and challenged its power.

As for the influence of the Church and some radical priests on the issue of land and agrarian reform, it is of fundamental importance to highlight the character of the Pastoral Commission on Land (Comissao Pastoral da Terra or CPT)⁴⁹ that, along with its theological character, played an important task for the reorganization and unity of the peasants struggle. According to Stedile, the articulation of these priests and bishops linked to the problematic of land in the country had represented, in the ideological perspective, an important advance in history. "In a certain manner, it was an auto criticism to the previous support of the Catholic church to the military regime, especially in relation to the peasants."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Organized in 1975 in Brazil during a Bishop and pastoral agents meeting along the Land issue in the North and mid-west of the country and lately spreading all over Brazil.

⁵⁰ Joao P. Stedile and Bernardo M. Fernandes, Brava Gente: s Trajetoria do MST e a luta pela terra no Brasil (Sao Paulo: Fundacao Perseu Abramo, 2005) 20.

The Downturn of the Dictatorship Era and the reemergence of Social Movements.

The Government's violent repression has led to a wave of counteractions and willingness of people to unite and break the silence. Oppositions and internal splits in the regime began to plague the government. Plenty of events took place at the end of the 70's – student strikes, important businessmen meeting asking for political liberty, prominent industrialists calling for democracy and most notably, the famous 1978's autoworkers strike. This strike for better wages and work conditions had serious outcomes, since it was putting at risk the central source of growth of Brazilian industry.

This strike had a dual meaning; first it represented a powerful and significant move by the poor and working force who was demanding for shares of the economical benefits that the country was going through. Secondly, it meant “a symbolic victory for the right to raise a voice in opposition to the military government, as well as a coalition of foreign and domestic businessman and landowners who supported it.”⁵¹ Under the leadership of Luis Inacio da Silva (Lula) the autoworkers strike attracted over a hundred of thousands of active people, who marched and backed the strikers morally and financially. (In October 2002, Lula would become the President of Brazil).

⁵¹ A. Wright and W. Wolford, 13.

Although this military era is considered even by critics as the flourishing economic era of the country, yet it is important to emphasize the deepening gap that those 20 years meant to the economical and social status of the country. Big investors were making their money based on maximum exploitation of labor; workers, without education, remained poorly qualified, their life conditions were miserable before the insignificant wages. With all these indicators, economic growth, could no longer excuse social repression as it seems to have done for many years. The Government could not ignore people's claims anymore, not only were the poor fighting for social justice, but important ideological characters of society were fighting for democracy and for better life conditions for all. In late 70's a policy of decompression and political opening was adopted by the government, so it could stabilize the regime. This opening era or as called in Portuguese (*abertura*), would give rise or bring back a number of organizations and protests which were previously repressed.

The Movement's History

Following the line of thought of Brazilian land resistance, it is important to relate to the NSM theoretical approach when categorizing the emergence of the movement. The MST which emerged in the 80's does not represent a new cause, but as relating to Offe's paradigm, we could allege that their values have changed by incorporating some 20th century values. Veltmeyer and Petras in "The Dynamics of Social Change in Latin America" explain these changes by encoding these movements as New

Peasant Movements (NPM). These NPMs are not traditional peasant movements, “...in many cases the peasants are not divorced from urban life. In some cases they are ex-miners or displaced workers”.⁵² “In other cases, the militants had religious formation but abandoned the church to enter the struggle for agrarian reform as leaders of the movement of landless workers and peasants”.⁵³ Thus this makes them eligible for carrying out other prominent Human Right values that previous peasant movements could not be aware of.

Going back to the history of the emergence of the MST or to the first aggregation of people prior to the official formation of the movement, it could be stated that their History had started in September 7 of 1979, in the period of Military repression, and with the occupation of Macali and Brilhante farms in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in south Brazil. This occupation had led to different outcomes, some people were successful or lucky in acquiring their piece of land, others were expelled to other unproductive areas and some others had lost hope. However, the importance of this occupation is that the government could not face the rebellion and the persistence of these families that had stood firmly and decisively till they reach their ultimate purpose. After some significant delay, the farms were eventually redistributed to the settlers. As Telmo Marcon considered, Macali was an important psychological victory for the landless people “it boosted their confidence, showing them that, with organization and struggle, they could win land in their own state.”⁵⁴ The main leaders behind it had agreed that only united and organized they could reach their objectives

⁵² Evo Morales quoted in an interview in Veltmeyer and Petras, pag 117

⁵³ Interview with regional leader of the MST *ibid*, 117

⁵⁴ Branford and Rocha, 13.

of a just and fair agrarian reform through occupation and pressure towards a government that had done little or anything on their behalf. These kind of occupations were happening constantly in all states of Brazil; however with no link or contact among these different cells.

Another important fact preceding the official emergence of the MST was the repercussion of the encampment famously known as “Encruzilhada Natalino” (Natalino Corssroad) named after the nickname of the first landless man that had simply put up a primitive camp in the Road next to a land whose ownership and use had a long and disputed history.⁵⁵ In a less than expected period of time, this encampment had gathered plenty of families and independent landless people who had joined the camp to fulfill the dream of a piece of land. “By April 1981, when INCRA carried out a survey, there were 469 families living there.”⁵⁶ People were organizing themselves along their necessities and although they have not yet organized themselves in a mass-based movement to campaign for agrarian reform, yet it could be considered that events were following and gaining their own momentum.

The government’s response to the encampment was violent and repressive; several and constant attacks along with arrests and threats were the tools used by the officials to contain the people. However, “the attacks were not successful in breaking the spirit of the acampados; on the contrary, they seemed to lead to further growth of the

⁵⁵ Encruzilhada Natalino was located in the area of two fazendas that had a complicated history, dating from the military coup in (A. Wright and W. Wolford, 32.)

⁵⁶ Branford and Rocha, 13.

encampment.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, they had organized themselves and had built a structure of committees to govern the camp and negotiate with the government. They had approached a very well planned structure with a General Assembly with representatives from smaller groups of families, and also a central committee pertained as the executive body to perform all the duties related to the security and decisions of the camp. These central committees had met with representatives of the government several times, and had made it clear that they were following what has been stated in the “land statute of 1964” (detailed in chapter one of this thesis) and that they were not asking for land for free, but to reach a common agreed and reasonable deal with the government line of credit.

Not only the government had its rough feedback toward these people, but the landowners and farmers of the region that felt threatened, had decided to act independently and by themselves. On the other side, the encamped had also attracted the support of plenty of organizations “On June 25, Encruzilhada Natalino was able to show support from more than one hundred organizations throughout the country.”⁵⁸ The settlers, with all the difficulties of the weather, the sanitary condition, the lack of access to safe drinking water and the disease related problems, had prevailed confident and optimistic about fulfilling their objectives.

The importance of the Encruzilhada Natalino, as Joao Pedro Stedile has defined it, lays in the challenge of “the reunion of over thirty thousand people for a peasant

⁵⁷ A. Wright and W. Wolford, 34.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

struggle in the middle of the military dictatorship that the country was living.”⁵⁹ He adds that the demonstration intended not only to fight for agrarian reform, but also to rebel against the political repression that the country was experiencing for over seventeen years.

When focusing on the movement’s emergence, some factors are considered to have played their major role given the timing and the situation of the country. Stedile, in the interview conducted with professor Bernardo Mancano Fernandes, published as a book commemorating the 20 years anniversary of the movement, had discussed in the first section of the interview about these forces and their importance. He had stated that the emergence of the movement is related to three main factors; the first and maybe the main is about the socioeconomic transformation that the agriculture of the country had suffered from in the 1970’s. “The mechanization of the plantation (lavoura) and the introduction, let’s say, of an agriculture with more capitalist characteristics, had expelled from the land (campo), in a fast way, huge contingents of people in that time.”⁶⁰ Stedile adds that these people, expelled from the camps, had found difficulties in the cities, in this manner, modernization had meant a challenge to the workers that had to try to resist in the camp and engage in other forms of struggles for land in their region. Notably, Stedile considers that this was the social context that had generated the MST.

⁵⁹ J. P. Stedile and B. M, Fernandes, 22.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 15.

The second factor highlighted by Stedile, is the ideological factor that is closely correlated with the pastoral work, especially that of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church. He adds that the emergence of these religious organizations was very important in shifting from a role of conformity to the peasants to a new role of encouragement. Instead of saying: "Wait and you will have land in heaven" they had shifted to say: "You have to organize yourselves to fight and solve your problems here on Earth."⁶¹ The population had started to see themselves united under a common and blessed right, that of pursuing their right for a piece of land and staying in their regions. This action of the Church for uniting the peasants, led Stedile to assert that this was an important and decisive aspect for the emergence of a unique and powerful movement with national character.

The last factor is related to the political situation and the process of democratizing the country. He explains that the emergence of the MST could not be separated from the political situation of the country at that time, meaning that the movement did not emerge out of the will of the peasants alone. "The movement had the power to become an important social movement because it had coincided with another major important process of struggle for the democratization of the country."⁶² The struggle for agrarian reform had summed up to other strikes and worker's demonstration in the late 70's, and to the overall struggle for the democratization of the Brazilian society all around the country. This is why the huge demonstration at the Encruzilhada Natalino had represented the base of the MST; it happened at the heart of the military

⁶¹ Ibid., 20.

⁶² Ibid., 22.

dictatorship and merged together the political situation of the country to the will of the peasants and the Brazilian population to challenge the unaccepted reality they were living in.

The results of this demonstration were positive. By June 1983, they had acquired what they had been fighting for; the 164 families remaining in the encampment received approximately 4.620 acres of land. This measure was adopted by the government after combining some state owned land, and some other private land that according to the Land Statute's did not meet its requirements for social function.

By the spring of 1983, similar results as the positive outcomes of Encruzilhada Natalino, were happening all across the country, people were all optimistic and hopeful for their own piece of land. The movement was not restricted to the south region anymore; on the contrary, it was so widespread and pragmatic around a common ideology that it had shaped itself all around a familiar organization under the name of Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, the Landless Workers Movement. "A year later, the first national congress of the MST met in Curitiba, in the southern state of Parana, bringing together twelve hundred men and three hundred women as delegates from assentamentos (settlements) from twenty- three states."⁶³

⁶³ A. Wright and W. Wolford, 73.

Principles

Joao Pedro Stedile, one of the main founders of the movement and present in its history since its creation, had pointed in the interview in the famous book “Brava Gente” the main principles of the movement and their explanation. The first principle Stedile sheds the light on the Collective Management. Collective management explains that there is no singular or particular stratum of society that would be more eligible to coordinate and take the lead of the movement. In this sense, it is worth recalling what Stedile had classified as one of the peculiarities of the organization. This organization is unique by being a popular movement that represents all members of the family, which comprise not only the man, but the woman and the children. Moreover, he adds that the movement is not restricted for any faction of society “meaning: as a peasant movement originated from the land, its ideology calls upon anyone who is willing to struggle for the agrarian reform.”⁶⁴ In other words, people showing interest in promulgating their ideas and contributing to the fulfillment of the movement’s strategies are welcomed beside the major members: peasants.

The second principle is the division of labor. It assigns to each individual the quality of work where he can best perform in, provided that it is his area of interest and specialty within the organization. This gives all members the chance to feel comfortable and at ease within the movement’s environment so they can contribute

⁶⁴ J. P. Stedile and B. M, Fernandes, 32.

effectively and efficiently to the achievement of the overall projects on the one hand and self-actualization on the other hand.

Discipline, the third principle of the organization, is another main characteristic raised by Stedile as a norm that bonds together a set of rules to be respected and abided by the members of the organization. He insists that discipline is not performed in an autocratic manner, but in a very democratic way in which the members have to submit themselves to its internal organization so as to maintain order and respect, not only for the rule but for the others as well.

The fourth and fifth principles, deal with the importance that the movement places in education and the formation of figures. He adds that “if you don’t learn, it is not enough that the struggle is just. If you do not study, consequently neither you nor the organization will go far.”⁶⁵ The movement grants lots of effort and dedication to this subject, they are concerned to literate every kid and illiterate adult in the movement, to guide them and make of them important and solid figures able to represent the organization as a whole.

The sixth principle revolves around the means to reach their ultimate objective of land struggle and agrarian reform. Stedile assures that the movement has to be solidly based on the popular struggle and not to be only of façade. He adds that without social mobilization, and action, nothing could be achieved. “The rights assured by the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 42.

government in the constitution, do not guarantee any achievement for the people. It is only attended when there is popular demand and action.”⁶⁶

Finally, the last principle focuses on the importance of communication and interaction among all elements of the base. The “base” also includes those less enlightened people that basically form the core of the organization and are as important in the decisions of the organization as those enlisted to take decision and front actions. The idea is that for more educated and well knowledgeable someone might be, no one is more acquainted of the needs that the people themselves live and experience.

Objectives

Although the movement had emerged in the concept of struggle for land since their first encounter, they also had reached a consensus that there are other important causes that should not be excluded or distinguished from this whole struggle of land and justice. Among these causes, it is highlighted the idea that the struggle for land was not, and would never be enough. Aside the struggle for land, there was the major idea of the necessity of agrarian reform and social changes. A further central issue raised by the movement deals with the necessity of protecting the natives’ lands and maintaining an assurance of their protection and demarcation of their lands. Other relevant issues that have to do with preservation of nature and all its natural resources are also placed among the fundamental objectives of the movement. Veltmeyer and

⁶⁶ Ibid., 43.

Petras when accessing this new trend of Peasant Movements in Latin America describe them as being “influenced by a mixture of classic Marxism and in various contexts by ideas related to ecology, and, in particular, the issues of ethnicity and nationality.”⁶⁷ The authors add the role of women and gender, of indigenous people and their rights as main issues on their agenda.

In this sense, the MST had agglomerated their objectives as follow:

- a) Guarantee work for all the rural landless workers by combining a fair distribution of land and just distribution of capital.
- b) Production of good quality, cheap yet enough alimentation for all the Brazilian population, including that segment of the cities, and in the same sense guaranteeing food security to all.
- c) Guarantee the social welfare and better life conditions in an equalitarian form to all Brazilian society. Prioritizing the workers, and specifically the poorest.
- d) To permanently ensure social justice, and equality of rights in all aspects: economic, political, social, cultural and spiritual.
- e) To diffuse the practice of humanitarian and socialist values in the relations among people by eliminating the practice of social, religious and gender prejudice.
- f) To create objective conditions for the participation of woman in society guaranteeing them equalitarian rights.

⁶⁷ H. Veltmeyer and J. Petras, The Dynamic of Social Change in Latin America, 118.

- g) To preserve and to a certain extent recuperate the natural resources; water, forest and earth.
- h) To implement the agro industry, and industries in general, as the main axes to develop the most remote parts of the country.
- i) Guarantee jobs for all those willing to work in the land.

Organization and Funding

Latin American movements are correlated and rely upon other neighboring movements in their activities. Veltmeyer and Petras have also emphasized in the cooperation of these New Peasant Movements along the region. "The NPMs are generally coordinated and, to a certain point united, on the basis of regional organization such as CLOL and increasingly international forums such as Via Campesina which debate and exchange relevant experiences related to rural struggles-struggles that are increasingly shared and viewed as the same."⁶⁸

As for accessing the organizational chain of the movement, the MST's structural organization is well established along sharp lines of leadership and sectors' responsible in each of its departments and units. As the movement has expanded from few hundreds to millions of members, it has had to fulfill the needs of a professional organization. "This means developing increasingly bureaucratic means of

⁶⁸ H. Veltmeyer and J. Petras, The Dynamics of Social Change in Latin America, 119

coordination.”⁶⁹ In the interview conducted with Geraldo Fontes⁷⁰, the international relations representative of the movement, he clearly explains that the movement is divided along different sectors, and in each sector there are those in charge of the major responsibilities and decisions. However, this line of leadership is not an autocratic one; instead the leader is democratically voted and assigned to represent all members and to maintain discipline and order among them. The movement is organized along a state or regional forum and along a national forum that encloses members of the former. The most important organ of representation of the movement is the National Guidance committee. This committee is made of 21 members of almost all states of Brazil that are appointed and democratically chosen after winning the minimum of 50% votes plus one. These forums meet in a semester or yearly pace, as to discuss their problems, differences, set up agendas and take decisions. Decisions are taken in the movement after voting and discussing, nothing is just implemented as to attend the will of someone or a certain group. Everyone in the movement has its role and its space, no one is left out regardless of age, color, gender, or education, as long as the member wants to belong, he will always have his/ her place. Joao Pedro Stedile quoted the words of an important comrade of the movement saying “that he feels honored and proud of belonging to such an organization where everyone can fit; independently of the formation, of the knowledge, there are duties for everyone.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ A. Wright and W. Wolford, 313.

⁷⁰ Geraldo Fontes (Responsible for the International Relations of the movement), Personal interview, 21 Nov. 2006.

⁷¹ J. P. Stedile and B. M, Fernandes, 86

The movement, being an autonomous and well organized body, has its own means to sustain itself other than donations. When Geraldo was asked in the interview about the funding and the financial aid of the movement, he explained that, not a unique source is counted on, but there are always means. “First, there is the contribution of the people or members of the movement already settled in their lands, which is equivalent a 50%, obtained from the trade of agricultural products, where one of the aims are of contribution to the movement varying between 2 or 3% all over the country.”⁷² Other forms are of personal donations of the funds received from the government, or campaigns as he exemplified; the selling of raffles to buy the movement headquarter, where the interview was being conducted. Another source is the NGOs (Non- governmental organizations) which cover around 20% of funds “Specific projects, like for example the construction of a certain school, are presented to the government, and if the latter is not interested, the same project is presented to international NGOs.”⁷³ A further form of collecting funds, are associations with the regional, estate or national government for certain causes, like for example campaigns for STDs or AIDS ; not in form of money though, but as investment in material, amounting also an average of 20% of the total funds. Also there are around 5% that comes from associations with the society itself and another 5% from the trade of materials like caps, T-shirts, flags, mugs, pens, and gadgets in general that have the symbol of the movement.

⁷² Geraldo Fontes, Personal Interview.

⁷³ Ibid.

Forms of Struggle and resistance

Occupations

Occupation of land is the main asset and tool of social pressure that the movement relies on for maintaining their cause and utmost objective of land and agrarian reform. As Bernardo M. Fernandes explains, “The occupation is a complex socio- spatial and political process that needs to be read as a popular struggle of resistance for peasantry, for its recreation and creation.”⁷⁴ The Occupation originates from the necessities and expectations of the peasants to question, reject and act against the role of the state and those in power that do not perceive the needs of the poor. The need to unite and act is the motive behind the success of the MST in their occupations and achievements. MST leader, Joao Pedro Stedile depicts the occupation as an important and crucial step especially for poor families, giving them the opportunity to take decision and act. “The vehemence of this action means that no one can sit on the fence, you have to have a position, either in favour or against.”⁷⁵

As opposed to the way it is pictured by many, ‘Occupation’ is far from being a violent and rebellious act, but a peaceful, well organized and strategic step that looks forward for earning earth out of struggle, and not through begging. Organization and agglutination are key words in this process, as Stedile explains; people have to

⁷⁴ Bernardo M. Fernandes, *Questao Agraria, pesquisa e MST*(Sao Paulo : Cortez, 2001) 52.

⁷⁵ S. Branford and J. Rocha, 65.

organize as to avoid the trap of upheaval, and to agglutinate themselves in masses and families to form the ideal of community.

The movement has learned that the heavy weight of the 'Occupations' are the only means to face the government and force it for decisions. Stedile affirms that "if we don't occupy, we cannot prove that the law is on our side."⁷⁶ He proceeds that expropriation of land was only possible when there was occupation. "The law is just applied when there is social initiative, this is the norm of law...the law comes after the social factor, never before. The social factor of the agrarian reform is the occupation, the demand of people for land, so the law can be applied."⁷⁷

Throughout their history for the fight for land, the MST has come to the conclusion, through their various struggles, that their victory would only be accomplished with occupation. The biggest evidence of this is that today, over a 1,500 occupations have been made and historians believe that there are much more to come yet. Although success has been accomplished and more than 350 thousands of families had been settled, yet it is worth recalling that in many circumstances government and influential landowners have faced the landless with harsh and violent reactions. Massive massacres took place, many lives have been lost, members imprisoned and others had simply disappeared.

⁷⁶ J. P. Stedile and B. M, Fernandes, 115

⁷⁷ Ibid.,115

The movement, throughout its rough and long journey, is aware of the complexity of an 'Occupation', and for that, an overall procedure is taken before concluding the act. To choose the land is not an easy step; researches or legal governmental statements have to be relied upon as to identify if a latifundio (big land property) is fulfilling its social function or not. After choosing the land, the question of who is going to execute the occupation arises. Although the availability of people is immense, yet this question remains a tough one, many families feel feared and unsecured by taking such a drastic decision and end up waiting for years with no piece of land. Here comes the role of the coordination of the movement, "leaders have the responsibilities when exposing the occupation, of presenting ideas and references to surpass all doubts."⁷⁸ After deciding where and who are going to execute the 'Occupation' a committee is appointed to follow up the negotiations with the government and at the same time to guide and maintain the settlers informed about the actions being taken. These committees are also responsible for reorganizing themselves along numerous sectors like health, education among others, which will be further discussed when accessing the Encampments.

Marches and Manifestations

A further powerful form of mobilizing government and civil society in general, are the famous "Marches" and manifestations that the MST organizes all over the country. These marches and manifestations are a form of claiming and revolting against the political system. Manifestations can come in forms of "fasting and food

⁷⁸ Bernardo M. Fernandes, 56

grievances that are usually done in front of governmental institutions or public units to call the attention of media and population in general.”⁷⁹ Occupation of Public buildings is also another form of manifestation “the intention is to expose to the public that these organs did not follow their duties and oblige them to negotiate.”⁸⁰ Other general attitudes are also taken; encampments in the capitals or big cities and in front of banks to protest against capitalism and the lack of support of these banks to liberate loans and resources to the MST.

Although the Marches were not invented by the movement since they existed throughout humanity’s existence and struggles; yet they are the most influential and of considerable repercussion in society. The most famous march that the movement had engaged was the 1997 march to the Brazilian capital Brasília. The trajectory of 1,500 kilometers traversed by foot by over 1,500 people became known as the “march against neoliberalism”. “There were over a hundred thousand people waiting for us there-not just local people but trade unionists and CUT and PT members who had come from all over the country.”⁸¹ The media was mobilized, people all over the country was accompanying the movement in its trajectory that was considered as a remarkable success of the movement’s history. “The marches publicly presented the authorities with a set of proposals that constituted the outline of the Popular Project, intended to be an alternative to the neoliberal policies adopted by the international

⁷⁹ M. Morissawa and I.Lopes, 201

⁸⁰ Ibid, 202

⁸¹ Joao Pedro Stedile, interview, “Landless Battalions: The Sem Terra Movement of Brazil,” New Left Review 15, May- June 2002, 15 Feb. 2007 <<http://newleftreview.org/A2390>>

capitalism and implemented by the Brazilian state.”⁸² This was the first time that the governing president meets with members of the MST to discuss their strategies.

Although no major implications were taken by the government, the movement considers itself victorious simply by the influence it had on society, and at the same time the fulfillment of their “objective of talking to people and breaking the isolation that the government was trying to impose.”⁸³

Other marches have taken places, in May 2005 for example, as covered by the BBC News online, Sue Branford reported about an agglomeration of some 12 thousands sem-terra (landless) who marched till the capital Brasilia to protest against the government of Lula. One of the interviewed Luisana Bonfim, a member and marcher said “We want the government to carry out its agrarian reform program...President Lula said he would give land to 430,000 families during the four years of his government, but so far only 73,000 families have been given plots. At this rate, he is not going to honor his promise.”⁸⁴ However, these marches do not only happen to contest the government and its lack of position towards the agrarian reform. In many instants, it happens to criticize the government political policies in general, or to defend a certain cause. They have marched to denunciate the President Lula’s meeting with Bush, they had marched to protest the government interference in Haiti and so on.

⁸² New left review, the MST challenge to neoliberalism, 41

⁸³ J.P Stedile e B. Fernandes, 152-153

⁸⁴ Sue Branford, BBC News,2

Encampments

This last stage is considered the final stage of an occupation. The encampments are the settling phase that members of the MST engage into territorializing a specific space. It can be a farm considered viable as per norms of the constitution for agrarian reform, or it can be a settlement in the side of the road as a form of protest. These encampments are made up of plenty of tents and can allocate between 500 to 3000 people. The time of these manifestations vary according to the area, if it's to claim for a particular area, it may last till 4years, "because resistance is the word of order that the movement follow till all member are settled."⁸⁵

Besides being a form of resistance, the encampments are also a form of pressuring the categorization of families in front of the INCRA, to be placed in the list of beneficiaries of the agrarian reform when it happens in the designated area. As Fernandes reaffirms, "This is an incontestable proof that the actions of the Federal and State government originate from the actions of social movements".⁸⁶

It is very interesting to note that as tie professed, the settlements moved away from random attaches to an organized and structured occupation which arranges for housing and other requirements for the former tenants of the areas. Organization is one more time, the key word of the movement, a committee is delegated to better organize and lead this people and to assure that activities and services such as;

⁸⁵ M. Morissawa and I. Lopes, 177.

⁸⁶ B. Fernandes, Questao Agraria, Pesquisa e MST, 80.

alimentation, healthcare, hygiene, education, religion interalia, are well operated.

Although it is not something that could be easily identified, yet the movement is well concerned with social issues such as institutionalizing education, alphabetizing adults and children, and in a more advanced instance forming an educated class able to fight for their cause beyond the walls of ignorance. Churches made of tent are also established to help in the formation of a more mystic and religiously oriented community. In general, leaders try to make sure that nothing is lacking in the lives of the settlers and give them incentives and a role of participation in the community.

Being part of encampments is so important to the formation of the character of the MST members that no character of leadership, in the local, regional, or national level, can reach to his / her post without going through the process of an occupation and settling an encampment. This last phase is considered as vital for living and sharing different stories and being exposed to different realities.

As we can notice, the movement is aware of its role in society, and has a clear view of its problematic trajectory towards reaching its aims and objectives. The MST has elevated itself to become a well structured and potential movement to represent all Brazilian landless society and for them act through all the means for a fair and just agrarian reform. The path is long and has been persisting for centuries, but their faith and will are their main weapons to survive the challenging and chaotic political system that the world presents. After understanding the root cause of the land problem in the country and accessing the different types of struggles and movements

that emerged till the emergence of the MST, now it is time to deal with the agrarian reform and its prospects. The following chapter will explain why the agrarian reform is the only valid solution for the country and discuss the MST's proposal for an agrarian reform. Whether it would be possible or not to attain such a proposal is something to be discussed in the next chapter along with reliable figures, case studies and examples.

IV- The Need for an agrarian reform

Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world in land extension, one of the richest countries in terms of natural reserves, placed on the top ten industrial economies in the world and foreseen by many specialists as “the country of the future”. However, such figures do not conceal the reality of a country that also exposes itself far behind the parameters of the life conditions of any poor country of the world. Brazilian journalist Wilson Braga had cited that “we have two countries here under one flag, one constitution and one language. One part of Brazil is in the twentieth century, with high technology computers and satellite launches. And, beside that, we have another country where people are eating like lizards to survive.”⁸⁷ More than a third of Brazilians, which is nearly 60 millions, live in absolute poverty, on less than two dollars a day. There are sources that consider that “Brazil has the largest gap between rich and poor of any sizable nation on Earth,”⁸⁸ a gap that tends to deepen more and more. Growth and technology, which should be invested to adjust this reality, have only intensified rather than reduced inequality. Only the rich and well informed have access to internet, to television, and to all means of technology, while the poor are only left behind.

This reality, had raised the criminal rates all over the country, the homicide rate in Brazil is one of the highest in the world; the rate of drug trafficking had also shown a considerable increase in the last decades. The so famous urban slums or “favelas”, represent the reality of a population that had migrated from the rural areas to the big

⁸⁷ A. Wright and W. Wolford, XV.

⁸⁸ Ibid., XVI.

cities hopping to find better life conditions with the upcoming growth of the industrial economy. The realities in the rural areas were not any better; high rates of illiteracy, hunger and malnutrition have marginalized these people and had incited many groups and organizations to act by themselves. Their urge was also very much deepened by the lack of trust in the political system that had done little or nothing for these excluded population.

There is no doubt that the key for reducing inequality in the country is to primarily address the needs of the rural poor through agrarian reform, a task that had seemed impossible to reach in the face of the ingrained opposition of a small minority of powerful landowners. "According to the Gini index, Brazil has the highest concentration of land ownership in the world. One per cent of the proprietors- around 40,000 of the biggest ranchers, or *latifundiarios*- own 46 per cent of the land, some 360 million hectares, in *fazendas* of over 2,000 hectares, more than 5,000 acres each"⁸⁹. It is within this context of frustration and rejection that the MST had found a wide popular support and keenness to persist in its cause.

Working with the excluded, the landless, and the unemployed and more importantly with those that do believe in their cause, the MST has achieved what few believed possible to attain. It is of no doubt that this movement has gone far beyond what many other social movements have reached in Brazil in terms of government pressure, organization, militancy and persistence.

⁸⁹ Joao Pedro Stedile, interview, "Landless Battalions: The Sem Terra Movement of Brazil," New Left Review 15, May- June 2002, 15 Feb. 2007 <http://newleftreview.org/A2390>

The MST's Plan of agrarian reform.

Agrarian Reform is a whole process of a struggle and determined ideology.

Conquering the land by itself is not enough for the members of the MST, their aim goes beyond the acquisition of a simple piece of land, they are struggling for rights, for participation, for equality and for a decent role in society. This is clearly noticed in the dissatisfaction of the movement with the land distribution program that the government has been executing. Stedile explains the three categories of Agrarian reform and their differences and why some models are more successful than others. The Classic type, or as known, the capitalist agrarian reform took place at end of the XIX century and forth and its main objective was “to democratize the land propriety, by distributing the land to the peasants and transform them in small autonomous producers”⁹⁰. Three characteristics of this type of reform are pointed by Stedile ; it was executed in a massive form, reaching all big proprieties of the country, it had imposed a maximum size that a propriety could reach, and it had been rapidly accomplished, taking a time of one or two years. This model is according to many specialists, the most efficient model of agrarian reform, and the reason why these countries have developed more than others and have emerged as economical and industrial potencies. Brazil, as Stedile explains, would never adopt such a model, since its agrarian colonial structure was implanted to export to the colony, and not to enhance the economy of the country. The United States of America is an example,

⁹⁰ J.P Stedile and B. Fernandes, 1996, 157

with their promulgated Homestead Act⁹¹ that was the core of their agrarian reform; they had succeeded in developing agriculture in the western side of the country and integrating it in the industrialization era.

The second concept, which is the model adopted by the Brazilian government, is the process of oscillation between agrarian reform and settlement policy. This process is nothing more than a form of alleviating the problem where the government pursues land by negotiating, expropriating or buying and redistributing it to the landless, as to avoid revolts and social pressure to turn into political ones. "It is a policy of social assistance, only to get rid of the problem of the landless and not to solve the problem of land concentration of the land propriety in Brazil"⁹².

The last model, the one supported by the MST and all other organizations in favor of a just agrarian reform, revolves around the principle of a massive expropriation of land in a fast and regional way to further distribute it among families all over the country. The challenges of fighting inequality and deprivation in the camp leads to the concept of democratization of land. However, as Stedile portraits, the capitalist stage in the rural area in the country is advanced, which means that not only land but the capital has to be democratized. Democratization of capital "means to create appropriate conditions so the settled peasant has access to capital... meaning access to subsidiary credit, not only to develop agrarian product, but to install their own agro

⁹¹ A law that guaranteed a quota of maximum 41 hectares of land for the people that lived and cultivated the land, in I. Lopes and M. Morissawa.

⁹² J.P Stedile and B. Fernandes, 1996, 159-60

industry, mechanism of access to the market and the commercialization... ”⁹³

Democratization of Education is another important aspect that this reform tackles.

Stedile recapitulates these factors with the following words “our agrarian reform is a struggle against three fences. The fence of the latifundia, which is the easiest to win, it is just to occupy. The fence of Capitalism, a bit more difficult to access constructs our agro industries; and the fence of ignorance”⁹⁴

A just agrarian reform for the movement is a reform that overthrows the embedded patriarchal system of land, and imposes a new system that not only would guarantee land for the peasants, but an overall situation of commodity and service for them to develop.

An important central aspect of the movement’s agrarian reform is the concept of land and ownership. The MST is clear about their neglecting the concept of private property “in the encampments linked to the MST, no one has title of property of the land, what they have is the right to employ and work in the land, the MST cannot sell the land, because it does not belong to them, it belongs to INCRA.”⁹⁵ Geraldo Fontes also adds that this principle is highly supported by the movement, “the government has the tendency of wanting to give out the land, to wash out their hands from it, when you only use the land, you have rights to financial credits to start up.”⁹⁶

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 162

⁹⁵ Geraldo Fontes, Personal interview.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Some of the main points that the MST program of agrarian reform tackles are:

- The necessity of modification of the structure of land property;
- The subordination of the land property to social justice, and to the need of the people and of society in general.
- The guarantee that the farming and cattle production will be directed to serve the nutritional, economical and social development of the workers
- Incentives for the “family production” with fair prices, easy access to credit and agriculture.
- Implementation of a special project of development to the semi- arid region of the country.
- The application of new methods of adequate development to the Brazilian reality, by preserving and recuperating the natural resources.
- The implementation of a rural model that would guarantee better life conditions of education, culture and commodity for all.

Lands considered viable for expropriation

As previously explained, the Brazilian legislation, in its content and its jurisdiction is self sufficient to implement and carry on a just and fair agrarian reform. “It is not for the lack of laws that land has not been distributed”⁹⁷ had remarked Stedile in his book “the agrarian question in Brazil”. Brazilian constitution, like of many other formerly colonized countries, had addressed the question of land and specified that unused

⁹⁷ Joao Pedro Stedile, Questao Agraria no Brasil, 10th ed. (Sao Paulo: Editora Atual, 2005) 31.

lands can and should be expropriated by the state. A three stages process should take place. First, the role of INCRA is to examine the area and specify, according to their criteria, if the land is or not fulfilling its social function. In the next stage, the judicial procedure takes place to define the fate of the land and all its paperwork if it has a fraudulent or legal basis. Finally after setting the origin of the land, the landowner is compensated in national treasury bonds and the land should be legally distributed to the peasants.

Laws have been amended and others incorporated in the constitution to reinforce the principle of the necessity of an agrarian reform. On the other hand, as the study that follows will clarify, the mechanism to implement it is also available. What lacks is the state's willingness to act and promote a fast and effective agrarian reform. In this sense we will analyze the study of Jose Gomes da Silva, one of the major specialists of the agrarian question in Brazil, ex -president of the INCRA and ex- secretary of the agriculture in the state of Sao Paulo, that had developed a framework about the quantity of land that could be expropriated if only following the laws and the constitution. This study done twelve years ago had concluded that the amount of land that could be legally expropriated, is the exact amount needed to embrace all the members of the MST.

Category	Rural proprieties	Area (in thousands hectares)	Number of landowners (4)	Percentage(5)
Latifundios (According to land statute)(1)	95,380	284,418	63,587	3.1
Big unproductive proprieties (2)	85,781	115,054	57,188	2.8
Big proprieties with the minimum limit (3)	70,833	120,975	47,222	2.3

(1) They classify the Latifundios according to the area to which the land belongs to. This means that if it is situated in a fertile region the size to be considered is less than if it is situated in a non fertile region. In the north region, it is considered a latifundio if it is above 1500 hectares, in the center west region above 1000 hectares, and above 500 hectares in the South, South east and North east regions.

(2) Over 85 thousands proprieties were considered unproductive belonging to approximately 57 thousands owners

(3) Working with the limits of land established above, 1500 hectares to the north, 1000 hectares to the center west region and 500 hectares to the south, south east and northeastern regions, are found as unproductive 70 thousands rural proprieties with over 120 millions hectares and belonging to around 47 thousands owners

(4) An average of 1,5 rural property by owner

(5) Percentage over the total of landowners in Brazil

According to the law 8.624 that was amended in 1993, that had determined the role of government to expropriate huge properties considered unproductive, the government could reach 115 millions of hectares that would fit in this category. "It would be covered by law around 57,188 landowners, equivalent to 2.8% of the total."⁹⁸ Stedile points out that "with the availability of 115 millions of hectares of land, and if taking into consideration a medium sized module of 15 hectares per family, more than 5 million families, meaning the total number of the Landless people existent in the country, could be favored without affecting any single hectare of the productive land."⁹⁹

Cuba: a successful case study

Like mentioned before, Brazilian historical background is similar to many other states in Latin America. Cuba is a good example of a country that was exposed to same colonial exploration and went through similar political dynasties but leading to different political systems. Being a Spanish colony for almost 400 years, Cuba as well had its economy based on "plantation agriculture, mining and the export of sugar, coffee and tobacco to Europe and later to North America."¹⁰⁰ Also being the most important sector of Cuban economy, agriculture experienced radical and important transformation thorough its history and different leaderships.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 32

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Online Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuba>

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 was the turning point of Cuban history and agricultural renovations. "These transformations originated in the agrarian struggles that were supported by most sectors of Cuban society before the revolution."¹⁰¹ The first law of agrarian reform, enacted in May of the same year, had succeeded on many aspects: "it proscribed latifundia (defined as estates larger than 402 hectares) and it initially distributed some land and encouraged the development of cooperatives on larger estates."¹⁰² Significant differences were noted, according to Armando Nova's research, a professor and researcher at the Habana University, "Under Batista's regime, 73.3 percent of the land was owned by 9.4 percent of landowners. The revolutionary government nationalized over 5 million hectares (ha) and redistributed 1 million ha of cultivable land to more than 100,000 peasants..."¹⁰³ Fidel Castro, when addressing a speech to the General assembly in 1960, had defined the Cuban Agrarian Reform as being radical and necessary. "We carried out an agrarian reform adjusted to the needs of our development, to the possibilities of agricultural development. In other words, we carried out an agrarian reform that would solve the problem of peasants without land that would solve the problem of essential foodstuffs, that would solve the great unemployment problem on the land, and that would end the frightful poverty that existed in the rural areas of our country."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Jose Alvarez, "Transformation in Cuban Agriculture after 1959" EDIS University of Florida IFAS Extension, December 17, 2008: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FE481>

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Maki Tanaka, "Armando Nova 'Cooperatives: A Key Line of Agrarian Development in Cuba", Sep. 27, 2005, Dec. 16, 2008. <http://clas.berkeley.edu/Events/fall2005/09-27-05-nova/index.html>

¹⁰⁴ "The case of Cuba is the case of all underdeveloped countries" Address by Fidel Castro to the United Nations General Assembly, 26 September 1960. Militant, Vol. 61, no. 4, Book of the Week Column, Jan.27,1997, Dec. 14, 2008 <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43b/134.html>

In October 1963 the second law of Agrarian Reform was passed in the country that "expropriated the land of most farmers with more than 67 hectares, bringing 70% of the lands under government control."¹⁰⁵ Cooperatives and Government institutions became more active on the ground, "the government nationalized the ownership of all agricultural land and brought all peasants under National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP). The principal target of implementing agrarian reform law was to demolish capitalist agrarian system from Cuba."¹⁰⁶

This successful model continued on upgrading and adjusting itself to the necessities of the markets and the economical and political eras that it was living. Nova calls the 1990's era with the end of the Soviet bloc, the "third agrarian reform" in Cuban agriculture. This reform meant the empowerment of the private sector and multiplied the land owners and cooperative members. "The third agrarian reform also involved the substitution of animal traction for machines, the replacement of agrochemicals by organic inputs, the expansion of home gardens and the legalization of farmers' markets."¹⁰⁷

After reviewing Cuban case study and comparing it to what is being proposed by the MST, it becomes easier to understand why the MST's proposal is the only valid one. As the MST defends, the Agrarian Reform has to be massive and fast, as to reach all

¹⁰⁵ Jose Alvarez.

¹⁰⁶ "Agrarian Reform Law of Cuba" Economy watch, Dec. 15, 2008.
<http://www.economywatch.com/agrarian/law/cuba.html>

¹⁰⁷ Maki Tanaka, 3.

regions of the country and tackle all unproductive or illegal proprieties. Judicial and legal resources are available in Brazilian constitution to implement and carry out such a programme, however what lacks is a competent government to put in action what has been designed in words by many specialist and expertise on the subject. On the other hand, Brazilian social movements or political parties had missed the opportunity to perform a radical agrarian reform on the time of overthrowing their military regime, as it had happened throughout all Latin America. Nowadays, neither the political circumstances of the country nor the agenda of the MST itself would allow any radical land reform as was the case of Cuba for example. This lead us to conclude that it is in the hand of the government to act, and the MST to keep on pressuring it for any desirable outcomes on the subject. And based on this thought we could raise the idea of why social movements or the MST specifically still have some 'faith' on leftist regimes and their political parties as for both embracing this revolutionary path.

The next chapter will cover the Brazilian governments and what they have or haven't been doing with regards to the agrarian reform concept and tackle the riddle of why the so awaited leftist government presided by Lula, has also disappointed the MST and all the people concerned with the agrarian reform problem.

V - The “Lula” Government and the MST

Although the MST clearly shows its detachment from politics or political parties, it is important to bear in mind the importance and the influence the movement has on its members and on society in general, within their active role of political and social awareness. The MST, as categorized along the New Peasant Movements theory of Veltmeyer and Petras, is described as autonomous from political parties in terms of commitment. Accordingly, the NPMs are “... involved in direct struggle and not in the electoral process... They are careful to retain control of the pace and the direction of the principal form of struggle- massive mobilizations and direct actions.”¹⁰⁸

Populism in Latin America and its stages

Brazil shares the same historical background and political transformations of a series of Latin American countries. In order to understand the political wave which brought Lula, in addition to other left presidents, to power, it is relevant to mention the different turmoil that the region went through.

The region with its different political and historical cycles has accommodated and helped in the rise of different waves of governance. However, a persisting and marking element to the peculiarity of politics in the region is the Populism of political leaders and governments all together, whether they are rightist or leftist. Populism

¹⁰⁸ H. Veltmeyer and J. Petras, 118.

appeared first in the 1930's and 40's decades in its authoritarian aspect under the military dictatorship era to legitimize the rule of leaders and states. The second wave of populism appeared in the 1980's and 1990's and is referred to as neopopulism since "it has emerged into an environment characterized by new legitimacy of political democracy."¹⁰⁹ In this era, Populism has reappeared in a different shape, moving more towards the right and particularly leaning towards Neoliberal governance all over Latin America. The scholar and expert on Latin America, Ignacio Walker in his paper Democracy and Populism in Latin America explained this Neoliberal Populist appearance with three factors: First is the new wave of democratization after World War II, second by "the problems (exhaustion?) experienced by state-led import-substitution industrialization, which was very much at the core of the 'populist' coalition"¹¹⁰ and finally the new reality of the cold war and the impact of the Cuban revolution on the region.

The third and current populist wave emerged from the Left and not from the Right anymore. This expansion of leftist regimes all over the continent is explained by the failure of neoliberalism and neoliberal economic reforms all over Latin America. Leftist regimes are said to have emerged as a reaction to "the decomposition of traditional institutions and elites, and the new social demands of these emerging social sectors",¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ I. Walker, 16.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 13.

From another perspective, Mathew Cleary in 'Explaining the Left's Resurgence' points out different factors that finally brought the left to power at this timing. The underlying reason according to him is the "severe economic inequality is endemic throughout Latin America"¹¹² that had developed and opened space for mass mobilized structures. The timing for resurging only 20 or 25 years after redemocratization in most countries is understood along two factors combined a gradual shift in the left's approach to electoral politics, and the constraints imposed by the set nature of many Latin American transitions. "In Brazil, for example, the transition in the early 1980's required prodemocracy forces to proceed with caution. The Electoral College that was to select a new president in 1985 originally seemed to favor the PSDB, which had close ties to the military."¹¹³ The Left had abandoned its revolutionary aspects and adhered to the democratic norms of respect for democracy in a world where economic integration and neoliberalism prevail.

This third wave of leftist leaders is characterized with their continuity to their neoliberal predecessors in what they have started. Lula as it will be explained later is part of this team who pledged to continue the neoliberal path of his antecedent, and in this manner alleviating the economic elites from any threat or fear of a Left revolutionary take over. As summarized by Cleary "the same factors that prevent the left from pursuing more radical economic policies are also responsible for the ability

¹¹² M. Cleary, 37.

¹¹³ Ibid., 41.

of the left to remain in power without provoking antisystemic behavior on the part of opposing political forces."¹¹⁴

Lula's trajectory since 1988 onwards and the agrarian question in the country.

Since the end of the Brazilian military dictatorship in 1984, the country has always been led by governments of the right. The parties of the left especially the PT (Partido Dos Trabalhadores) Labor's Party and social movements in general have always found themselves unrepresented and underestimated within the Brazilian society.

The present Brazilian President elected in 2002 and re-elected in 2006, have finally got to power after running and losing three previous elections. Jose Luis Inacio da Silva, popularly known as Lula, is a high school dropout and a former shoeshine, metal worker, trade unionist and leader of the PT (Workers Party) who have acquired his victory based on the sympathy and support of the Brazilian poor majority who had won over their fear and looked out for hope and change. Referring to those voting poor majority, Lula "had exulted shortly before taking office: I cannot fail. The poor in Brazil have waited 500 years for someone like me."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 46.

¹¹⁵ Aijaz Ahmad, "Radical Promise, Neoliberal Policy: Fire in the plains, Fire in the mountains: A balance-sheet of Lula's promises and policies" *Frontline*, Vol 2- Issue 7: Apr. 2006, 15 Feb. 2007 <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2307/stories/200604210007212700.htm>.

Lula's journey dates back to year 1979, when a group of trade unionists from the industrial suburb of the city of Sao Paulo of which he was the leader, "had taken advantage of the new political freedom to set up the Worker's Party (PT), a left wing party committed to far-reaching social change."¹¹⁶ Lula and his party have always spoken about the necessity of social changes and pointing specifically to the unconditional need to perform an agrarian reform. In his first candidacy for presidency in 1989 against the representative of the right wing candidate Fernando Collor de Mello, Lula had listed the plan for an agrarian reform as one of the core concern of his electoral plan. Although The MST had always neglected the fact of any political affiliation with the party, yet they had fully supported Lula's candidacy and had raised several campaigns and helped in his electoral rally. Lula's defeat crushed their hopes and expectations. Joao Stedile's in his interview with Fernandes had described this catastrophic moment as a moment of defeat and sadness: "we were badly hurt. We were in our adolescence. We were a weak movement and we felt as if we had been orphaned. We didn't have enough maturity to understand the historical moment we were living through."¹¹⁷

Collor's Government as previously noted, represented the end of any hope for the question of land or the agrarian reform. Although he had presented himself as the "father" of the poor and the one willing to convert their reality, "his commitment was really to the landowners and to the foreign investors who were demanding that Brazil

¹¹⁶ S. Branford and J. Rocha, 23.

¹¹⁷ J. P. Stedile and J. B. Mancano, 68.

open up its protected economy.”¹¹⁸ The government was aware of the risk and challenge that such social movements would represent to his program of market reforms, and had adopted rash and violent measures against any type of manifestations carried out by the MST, it “... treated the MST as a pariah, arresting its members and bugging its telephones.”¹¹⁹ The MST in return had opted for an aggressive and committed campaign, it was at the same period when the Second National Congress of the movement adopted the two slogans: “Agrarian Reform: By Law or by Force” and “Occupy, Resist, Produce.”

In December 1992, after two years in power, Collor had resigned just before the Congress, pressured by popular demonstrations, impeached him for corruption. The presidency then, was lead by his vice president Itamar Franco. Franco, who stayed only two years in government, had surprisingly led his term in a tolerant and progressive manner. As cited by Stedile, in this short period of Franco, the MST had the chance for the first time in their history to meet and open up negotiations with the government.

The next presidential elections in 1994, were won by president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, an ex -Marxist who came to power with a huge wave of support for his anti-inflationary economic plan (Real Plan) introduced by him when he was the finance minister of Itamar Franco’s government. The economy of the country was still carrying out the burden of the atrocities of Collor’s government and although the plan

¹¹⁸ S. Brandford and J. Rocha, 54.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

had ended with the problem of inflation, it had also opened doors for unemployment and social dilemmas in both the rural and urban areas. The Cardoso government since its beginning had been clear about its priorities and its political program. It was a Neo-liberal government directed to the integration and participation of the economy in the international system. He directly pointed out that the agrarian problem was not a main concern of his political agenda, an agenda that “had embedded in its economic plan the complete subordination of the nation to the foreign capitalism.”¹²⁰ Stedile adds that this economy opened up the market for foreign products and placed the economy under the supremacy of the financial capital that marginalizes the agriculture.

However, at the end of his first term in government, Cardoso had started to change the premises of his policies towards the agrarian reform and towards the MST by itself. “What brought about the change was the growing mobilization of the MST, which was expanding rapidly as a result of the crisis in rural employment.”¹²¹ It was during Cardoso’s government in April 1997, that the MST had performed their first, most notorious and successful mobilization, the so famous “Marcha” a demonstration “when nearly 1,500 comrades covered 1,500 kilometers in a few months.”¹²² When they reached the capital Brasília, there were more than 100,000 people waiting, not just local people, but people from other political parties like the PT (Labors

¹²⁰ J.P Stedile and B. Mancano, 139.

¹²¹ S. Branford and J. Rocha, 197.

¹²² Joao Pedro Stedile, interview, “Landless Battalions: The Sem Terra Movement of Brazil,” *New Left Review* 15, May- June 2002, 15 Feb. 2007 <http://newleftreview.org/A2390>

movement) and trade unionist from all over the country. The main purpose of the march was not meeting with the president and discussing the political reform agenda, but to protest and remind the government that they could not just isolate the movement as if it does not exist. “Our main objective to achieve during the march was the contact with the people, not with the government.”¹²³ The march was successful in achieving its main purpose of mobilizing public opinion and their compassion towards the movement and its cause.

After assessing Cardoso’s approach towards the agrarian reform, it has to be concluded that his policy has changed during his term due to the increasing pressure and mobilization of the MST. Although the government had settled a considerable number of families, yet it was just walking further away from any plan or project for a viable agrarian reform in the country. This settlement policy was successful in meeting some people’s demands, but not at meeting any social and long term agenda for solving the problem from its root. Land was being acquired in the most capitalistic way possible such as the buying and selling of property, and at the same time opening ways for further debt of the government through titles that the holders could directly use as shares in the privatization of state and federal corporations. Moreover, even in the settlement policies, the government was very cautious about the land to be misappropriated, and resisting the MST’s attempt to acquire fertile land near the main consumers’ centers. “According to a report published by a parliamentary commission of enquiry, three-quarters of the 8 million hectares allocated for land reform lay in the

¹²³ J.P Stedile and B. Mancano, 154.

Amazon basin.”¹²⁴ A strategy that hinder any real progress in solving the agrarian problem of the country and adopting an “old policy of using agrarian reform as a way of alleviating social tensions in the south, southeast and northeast regions of the country by transferring impoverished families to the Amazon basin.”¹²⁵

During his period in government, Cardoso had always tried to peacefully deal with the MST and refraining from any direct actions to repress them. However, at the end of his term in year 2000, Cardoso had realized that the simple fact of ignoring the MST would not be enough to face the new phase that the movement was going through. The movement had entered a new phase in which it had expanded its struggle to mobilize and reach all sectors of society about a new popular project.

Cardoso and Raul Jungman, the responsible for the new ministry created by Cardoso—the Extraordinary Ministry for Land Policy¹²⁶ “began to see the MST as a dangerous foe bent on sabotaging their program of market-oriented agrarian reform.”¹²⁷ Severe and repressing actions were taken by the government to isolate and at the same time demoralize the MST all over the country; new political policies through INCRA were imposed, also more prominent role to the security and police in dealing with the militant of the movement on their occupation. The ongoing attacks and oppression from the authorities had also placed the national media, who used to be sympathetic and just to the movements activities, in a much more violent and criticizing position towards the MST. The countries most important and influencing TV network *Rede*

¹²⁴ S. Branford and J. Rocha, 199

¹²⁵ A published report by a parliamentary commission of inquiry, page 18 in *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ That was to take its orders directly from the presidency, not from the minister of agriculture.

¹²⁷ S. Branford and J. Rocha, 203.

Globo, the most important newspaper *Folha de Sao Paulo* and the magazine *VEJA*, had all contributed to the campaign of engaging the MST and its settlements with stories about corruption and intimidation.

Lula's victory and his dual role in government

Lula came to office facing a dual challenge. On one side he had the Brazilian capitalist bourgeoisie that have always been in power, and have always controlled all political, economical and social means to meet their utmost interests. While on the other side, there was an archaic cast of society that had been always excluded and could not relish any of the stages of Brazilian prosperity. Lula had to face the challenge of knowing how to deal and please this powerful sect of the society who in reality controls and owns everything. At the same time, he wanted to be careful not to disdain the expectations, and the trust and the hope of those millions of voters who had placed on him all their hopes. This problematic situation had first to be solved in the cabinet, where the president had to form a team who could apparently represent both sides. As appointed out in the media, Lula's political party was a socialist one; however, his government was not. "Rather, it was said to be a government of national unity that owes its power in part to the support of an important sector of Brazil's most influential capitalists, who support Lula because they agree that inequality is Brazil's greatest problem."¹²⁸ This dilemma had also touched the ministry of agriculture and agrarian reform making any further consensus even harder to reach. The man

¹²⁸ A. Wright and W. Wolford, 338.

appointed to the post of cabinet minister to oversee agrarian reform was a member of the Labor's Party and at same time had very good relations with the MST, this in favor of agrarian reform. On the other hand, in charge of the ministry of agriculture was Roberto Rodriguez. "Rodriguez is associated with international agribusiness and speaks vigorously on behalf of large-scale, highly capital intensive, export-oriented agricultural policies."¹²⁹

For accessing Lula's first term of government, we can borrow David Kane's examination and at same time criticism in his article: "Brazil: scandals Hinder Lula's administration". Kane defines Lula's first two and a half years in government as a combination of progressive and conservative policies. Internationally, as maintaining a more independent posture in relation to free trade agreements like the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and at the same time working towards increasing South- South relationships through stronger binds with Asian, African and other Latin American countries. Internally, Kane proceeds that Lula's government "has passed a series of structural (neoliberal) reforms that the PT historically had fought against, such as the partial privatization of social security and bankruptcy reform, and is working for other unpopular reforms of education, worker's rights and unions."¹³⁰

Lula's end of first term in government was also accompanied by plenty of scandals including important names of his political party. Scandals such as extortion of money

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ David Kane, Brazil :Scandals Hinder Lula's Administration, Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem Terra, July 15, 2005, May 18, 2007 <http://www.mstbrazil.org/?q=Lulascandal>,

from a clandestine lottery for political campaigns of members of the party, or a video on national television showing an executive of the postal system receiving money from a private company in exchange of contracts, had certainly affected the popularity of the party, and of the President himself. "...the percentage of people rating the government as good or great has fallen from 41 to 35 percent."¹³¹

Lula's strategic program aimed at reaching and pleasing both contradictory sides of society, ended up falling in the trap of not pleasing anyone, and especially the leftist parties and social movements. The latter ended up accusing the president and his government of dissociating itself more and more from its own roots. Although his victory in 2002 over the candidate of the PMDB (Party of the Democratic Movement of Brazil) Jose Serra meant a victory for the millions of disgraced people, including the MST "We feel proud and victorious because we elected Lula. Now we have the chance to implement a real agrarian reform.... We see latifundia as our enemy and Lula's government will play a fundamental role in democratizing land ownership in Brazil..."¹³² However, his second candidacy in 2006 did not find the same support and trust.

Changes have not come overnight, after losing his three previous elections, Lula himself have learned that the only way to acquire the so much aspired presidency is through some sort of changes. "On the one hand, as Lula began to look increasingly presidential, the ambience and political outlook of the top leadership of the PT began

¹³¹ Ibid., 2.

¹³² J.P Stedile, Brazil Landless Movement: "Our aim is to Topple Three Walls...", *Envio Digital*, Jan. 2003, 15 Feb. 2007, <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/2061>

shifting away from mass movements such as the CUT and the MST and more toward European and social democracy, notably the French socialists who had by large accepted the main premises of neoliberalism under Mitterrand.”¹³³ Aijaz continues that the structure of the movement by itself have changed towards getting more streamlined “from being a conglomerations of movements, to being more of an electoral machine.”¹³⁴ Lula, to a certain extent, seemed to remake himself and largely cut loose from PT structures considering that his popularity was way bigger than that of the party. “He created an institute of Citizenship, a think-tank which did not even claim to be socialist, and which gathered economists and experts in other fields for seminars and discussions that were to lead to the formulation of the programme for his electoral campaign of 2002.”¹³⁵ Additionally, to face the media and western campaign against him, which had certainly lead to the worries of the Brazilian middle class and of the bourgeoisie, Lula had run for the option of opening negotiations with the IMF and with U.S officials. During his campaign, he also had issued the famous “Letter to the Brazilian People” where he guaranteed that, if elected, he would carry on all previous governments commitments, would not step in front of movements of international capital, and that he would not renounce or try to negotiate the debt to the IMF. All these signs led to a more lenient attitude by the media and international campaigns towards him, resulting in his presidential victory.

Moreover, it is important to add that the Brazilian situation, or the left over of the previous government, was a critical one. Some political and economical analysts had

¹³³ A. Ahmad, 7.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 8.

defined the situation as a financial crisis trap that the president was led into in addition to the substantial international duties of the Brazilian state, which his powers were limited to resolve. Lula, to face the internal and external pressure, has resorted to some drastic policies which were not welcomed by the left or by the right. Not only had he continued Cardoso's policies but he went further in raising interest rates even more, raising the level of primary fiscal surplus, attacking worker's pension funds, imposing new taxes and so on- affecting in this manner all levels of society.

Lula had a different plan that according to some analysts could be considered a good one, that of paying all the country's debts and at the same time getting rid of major powers influence in Brazil, and getting freed of international interest rates and speculations in the economy.

The MST's dissatisfaction with Lula's government

When analyzing Lula's first term in government, social movements in general were discontent with the President's course of actions proved in their lack of support in the first round of his re-election for his second term in presidency in October of 2006.

They believed that their agendas were basically disregarded as the president was engaged in economical and social stabilization policies and disregarding any formula outside this pattern. The MST deeply felt the government's harsh policies and lack of consideration towards them. Darci Frigo of the Land Rights Center had stated on

behalf of the MST that “The demands for a profound agrarian reform program advocated by the MST,..., were ignored. Some limited spending was directed to social and educational programs for the landless, but the large landed estates of the country were barely touched as the government encouraged agro-exports.”¹³⁶ The agro-export sector controlled by few minorities of plantation growing and agribusiness “experienced spectacular growth thanks to lucrative subsidies and tax incentives.”¹³⁷ “Agricultural export had a ‘boom year’, growing by over 30% according to the Commerce minister, Luis Furlan.”¹³⁸

In all his political campaigns, the movement had always given its support for Lula and also to other political candidates of his party. However, they were always cautious about any kind of connection or labeling of the movement with the PT or any other political party. “MST leaders repeatedly stated that the movement would aggressively continue to fight for agrarian reform no matter who was in the executive office.”¹³⁹ Furthermore, movement leaders and members enthusiastically supported and voted for policies and candidates of the worker’s party. Joao Pedro Stedile, speaking on the electoral campaign of Lula, had demonstrated their support to the ideology behind it, but at the same time had shown their worries about Lula’s capacity to confront the real politic of the country, and place agrarian reform as a priority. In an interview conducted to the New Left Review in May 2002, Stedile had

¹³⁶ Roger Burbach, Lula’s Presidential Vicotry in Brazil Opens up Challenge from Bellow, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, Oct. 2006, May 18, 2007, <http://www.mstbrazil.org/?q=lulawinsandnow>

¹³⁷ J.Petras and H.Veltmeyer, 91.

¹³⁸ Financial Times , July 2, 2003 in J. Petras and H. Veltmeyer, 94

¹³⁹ A. Wright and W. Wolford, 336.

gone far beyond detaching themselves as an independent social movement not affiliated to any political party and criticized the role of the “left” in Brazil. “Firstly, the left has no clear project for Brazil- or it falls into the simplification of socialism versus capitalism... Secondly, the institutionalization of the parties and currents had distanced them from the mass movements... and forgotten that the only force than can bring social change is the organized mass of the people.”¹⁴⁰ The third criticism that he raises has to do with the lack of union and of organizing people “Activists no longer have the patience to conduct meetings with depoliticized people.”¹⁴¹ The fourth point tackles the lack of political orientation and education by itself; “Activists need to read the classics, so they can master the tools necessary for a correct interpretation of reality. The left here has simply abandoned the classics and even, from a theoretical perspective, the study of Brazilian reality itself...”¹⁴²

Lula had won the MST’s support by making plenty of serious promises. He had pledged to give land to 400,000 families, and allowing 500,000 squatters to acquire legal titles to the land on which they live. However, according to the Brazilian National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), only 235,000 families had acquired land. “Under the previous government, agrarian reform was going at a snail’s pace, and it has continued at a snail’s pace” quoting the words of MST leader Marina dos Santos. “We are very disappointed, we expected so much

¹⁴⁰ J. Pedro Stedile, *Landless Battalions*, *New Left Review*, interview, May-June 2002, 15 Feb.2007, <http://www.newleftreview.org/A2390>

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

more from him.”¹⁴³ To challenge these numbers, land holdings, on the other hand, keep on growing by absorbing smaller properties. “There are no indicators of a waning of rural poverty and social inequality. Ten transnational companies—Monsanto, Bunge (agribusiness and food), Cargill, ADM, BASF (chemicals), Bayer, Syngenta, Norvartis, Nestlé, and Danone—control virtually all agrarian production, pesticides, transgenic seeds, and foreign commodities trading.”¹⁴⁴

In May 2005, another expressive march by the members and sympathizers of the MST went one more time to the streets to show their discontent and their rejection towards Lula’s government. As covered by Sue Branford to the BBC News, “...they were more than 12,000 sem-terra who have spent two weeks walking to the Federal capital, Brasilia, from Goiania, capital of the neighboring state.”¹⁴⁵

The MST is not only asking for appropriation of land to place its people, they want more, they want to pave a way for ending the land exploitation, the big proprietries and ownership. In his article to the official site of the MST, Bernardo Mancano Fernandes had made clear the objectives of the movement specially when assessing the performance of the Lula government. He had posted the number of families that had been placed and under which condition of land. In 2003, of the 35,623 families placed by Lula, Fernandes portrays “8,521 (24%) in lands conquered or bought by the government and 21,102 (76%) in blocks of encampments already existent. In 2004,

¹⁴³ Lula No Long Ball Hitter When it Comes to Land Reform, Council on Hemispheric Affairs, April 2006, 15 Feb. 2007, <http://www.coha.org/2006/04/07/lula-no-longer-ball-hitter-when-it-comes-to-land-reform>

¹⁴⁴ Joao, Pedro Stedile, “The Neoliberal Agrarian Model in Brazil”, Monthly Review Vol.58, Number 8, Feb. 2007, 25 Jan. 2008.

¹⁴⁵ Sue Branford, “Brazil Landless squeeze government”, BBC News, May 16, 2005, March, 17, 2006 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3440773.stm>

the Lula government placed 81,160 families, being 25,975 (32%) families in land conquered or bought and 55,185 (68%) in blocks of encampments already existent. In 2005, the Lula government placed 127,506 families, being 26,591 (21%) families in land conquered or bought and 31,373 (24%) in blocks of encampments already existent, 49,203 (39%) in encampments built in public lands and 19,979 (16%) in encampments already existent in public lands.”¹⁴⁶

Fernandes clarifies what the intention of analyzing such numbers are. He adds that although the Lula government had gone far beyond the accomplishments of the previous governments in terms of numbers, (a ratio of 81,430 families per year) still, it is not enough to look at the number of the families placed, but about how many private properties, viably considered suitable for agrarian reform were in fact misappropriated. “...in this sense the Lula government is being a huge retrocession.”¹⁴⁷ In three years, only 25% of the families were placed in lands owned by the government. Thus Fernandes defined this kind of government as enhancing in a fraudulent type of agrarian reform, a reform that has as a main objective placing families in the place of previous excluded families. Such process creates a problem in itself and does not solve it. He ends his article by calling for awareness and action from all sides. “And the rural movements should be conscious about making an agrarian reform that is fed with big proprieties and not with encampments.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ B. M Fernandes, Da “clonagem” a “autofagia”: o dilemma da reforma agraria no Brasil, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra, March 2006, 15 April, 2007, < www.mst.gov.br>

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

The failure of Lula to bring about agrarian reform due to its incompatibility to its economical and social plan can be better understood throughout the five following points that highlight the contradictions between the landless and the regime.

The first contradiction is between the policy of concentrating and centralizing production in the hands of the agro-export elite vis-a-vis the landless demand for land redistribution and expansion of the domestic market; The second point is between concentrating financial and commercial credit, transport and technical assistance to agribusiness and their denial to land reform beneficiaries; The third contradiction is between privileging and legitimizing agro-business expansion and criminalizing social action and land occupation by the landless rural workers; The fourth point is between the transferring of the regime's wealth to foreign and domestic bankers and drastically reducing social services and public investments for small-scale producers, rural proletarians and Indian and Black communities; and last point is the subordination of Brazil to the imperialist division of labor and the effort of landless workers, cooperatives, and small farmers to deepen and extend the linkages to the domestic market.¹⁴⁹

Another criticism that is raised to this new capitalist agrarian model is due to their production techniques that destroy the environment, its biodiversity, and compromise natural resources through the excessive and uncontainable use of pesticides, with a heavy cost to nature and society in future generations. Moreover, this new model had substituted human labor by machine, the latter being more efficient and economical.

¹⁴⁹ J. Petras and H. Veltmeyer, 131.

“In 2005, almost three hundred thousand workers in the countryside lost their jobs and migrated to cities.”¹⁵⁰

When analyzing Lula’s second term presidency re-election, we can find it quite understandable why the MST did not endorse Lula’s re-election in his first term. In an important work for the *Monthly Review* journal, Rosa M. Marques and Paulo Nakatani had overviewed the Brazilian elections and had interviewed Joao Pedro Stedile, the leader of the MST by covering the movement’s attitude and lack of trust in the president. Stedile had clarified that the support for Lula in the second term came out of the lack of option or even refutation for the competing candidate of the extreme right Geraldo Alckmin. “Electing Alckmin would mean a return of U.S. hegemony in Latin America. The continent is in transition, and in virtually every election the peoples voted for anti-neoliberal candidates”.¹⁵¹ He explains that this transition had led to three types of distinctive governments in Latin America: a left-wing group—Venezuela, Bolivia and Cuba—a moderate group in transition from neo-liberal policies and confronting U.S. policies—Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, Peru and Ecuador— and a group of faithful allies of the United States—Chile, Paraguay and Colombia. Therefore, “an Alckmin victory would mean a pro-U.S. rupture, with Brazil going to the group of servile allies.”¹⁵²

Stedile again for an interview with Atilio Boron for the *Socialist Register* brought to discussion the question raised previously by the Historian Eric Hobsbawm, about the

¹⁵⁰ John B. Foster, “No Radical Change in the Model”, *Monthly Review*, Vol. 58, Num. 8, Feb. 2007, 14 Jan. 2008.

¹⁵¹ Rosa M. Marques and Paulo Nakatani, “The State and Economy in Brazil an introduction”, *Monthly Review*, Vol. 58, Num. 78, Feb. 2007, 14 Jan. 2008.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

dilemma of a candidate like Lula winning elections in a period of downturn of mass movements, by further claiming that the Left only wins when Social movements are on rise. Stedile explains this victory based on several factors; political, ideological, and even economical factors. Regionally, he recalls the 2002 Argentinean revolt mobilizing people against neoliberalism and ousting the president. Brazilian bourgeoisie felt threatened and feared that “if Serra wins the elections and deepens neoliberal policies the outcome could be the same as Argentina...”¹⁵³ The second factor, refers to the Brazilian bourgeoisie, that by that time had “realized that the principal goal of neoliberalism, the privatization of the strategic, large state-owned firms, had already been achieved,”¹⁵⁴ meaning that there would be no need to continue with the harsh phase of neoliberalism, and believing by that, that Lula’s policies would be less severe. The last and most important factor in the explanation relies on the reality of the PT that has moved towards a more central political ideology by abandoning the popular and socialist project. “This ideological conversion removed the last fears that the PT might represent something threatening to the dominant classes.”¹⁵⁵

As it is clearly noted, the PT, which was the last hope of the MST for any significant and radical change, has clearly chosen to engage in the political scenario and play along the rules of the political system, leaving behind any ideological threat that could challenge its victory and continuity. The MST has tried to tie itself to other political parties from the extreme left, but the latest elections have proven that so far,

¹⁵³ Atilio Boron, interview with Joao Pedro Stedile, “The Class Struggles in Brazil: The Perspective of the MST”, The Socialist Register, May, 2007.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

this is not what the Brazilian population is looking for. The following chapter will draw some final conclusions and try to locate the MST along the complex Brazilian political scenario, but before doing that, some theoretical consideration will be helpful as to finally access the movement along the NSM and its paradigms.

Conclusion

After covering the MST throughout all its phases before a problematic and endemic political system, it is important to reassess the movement in a broader theoretical context and test our theory's validity. The NSM theory, relied upon to conduct this study, had proven to have matched our work in hands in many levels; however, in some other aspects it had shown inconsistency and some weakness.

Claus Offe's paradigm of the NSM theory, have succeeded in placing the movement in the context of contemporary society and the problematic revolving around this new age. However, it is worth recalling that this "newness", does not mean that this movement (as it has been covered in the second chapter of this study), is new in a historical perspective, on the contrary, it persists on a previous cause, with certain adjustments to present realities. The MST is distinct from previous Brazilian peasant movements in its values and orientations that could be easily seen throughout the movement's interest in information, technology and development, new concerns that have given the movement a new face. The importance they also give to culture and education is seen throughout their support for formation of cadres that could represent and stand the movement in a positive manner.

The strength of Offe's paradigm in our study is relevant to the movement's lack of trust in the state and the disillusion with democracy. The MST clearly abides by this notion of a movement that has emerged to fight the deprivation of the neoliberal state

that works in favor of the market and the international economical system. Following this line of thought, the NSM theory is also successful for explaining the MST and its political attitude in society, recalling that the movement is very careful with its political autonomy and subjectivity. However, this does not mean that the movement detaches itself completely from the political arena, it maintains itself, as we have seen, politically active in fulfilling its civic role of voting and raising political awareness, but never directly involved in the political arena.

The theory also is compatible for understanding how the movement is organized and the importance it places on its leaders and their formation. This movement has a very meticulous organization, it organizes itself as we have seen along regional and national lines, it has commission and leaders to discuss and share all problems and solutions from all the region of the country. These leaders, on the other hand, are not posted as hierarchal figures, but as feasible representative that are eligible for representing and speaking for the movement's members in a democratic way.

Although the NSM theory is very well used by many scholars for explaining Latin America Social Movements, it also gathers lots of criticism by those who believe that European and North American social movements' theory cannot be applicable to Latin America. True, is that Latin American social movements have all passed to a similar and peculiar path in their formation, history and results, which is a very far reality from those in Europe or North America.

The NSM theory, propagated to serve the new wave of European social movements with their claim for Human rights and recreating civil society, labeling their cause as a non-class based cause. However, Latin American Social movements, considering the MST along other peasant movements, represent a real class struggle of those oppressed and undermined against those rich and powerful. While the theory could be a good approach for addressing newly urban movements who claim for their Human Rights, it is important to note that these grass root movements, are still demanding basic rights that have been granted as universal in the developed countries, but remain as a daily struggle for movements such as the MST.

In sum, although the theory can help us allocate the MST in the contemporary social and political world, it fails to specifically address peasant mobilizations and their unique and resonant trajectory in the wave of the XXI century.

The MST could be placed in the middle, carrying a grass root cause but running its struggle in a contemporary way, and striving to survive all the challenges of the new world and globalization.

The Brazilian problem of Agrarian reform is not and will not be solved easily, struggles for rights over land, as we have noted, have been taking place since the country's ever existence. The MST, however has been successful on maintaining the agrarian cause alive, due to its strategy and persistence for a just and equal society. Results have shown us that if it was not for the movement's determination on maintaining their cause alive, the issue of land would still have still been lying on the

shelf. It has been clear that after the end of Military dictatorship, all democratic elected governments that came to power have raised the question of agrarian reform in their political agenda, but no major changes and actions took place till present date. Facing all the confrontations and repressions, the MST has still been persisting on its cause for over 28 years, engaged on different attitudes and carrying different slogans to make their struggle vivid and compatible with the actual challenges of the World.

Their utmost hope was on the coming of the governments of the left to power, and with them to place the agrarian reform as a vital and urgent matter on the agenda. However, the reality was different, the PT which had succeeded after twenty years of struggling to come to power had dropped many of its ideology and shifted to a more flexible or neoliberal political agenda. It becomes difficult to know who and how to blame, the left only came to power because it had learned with its own experience that the country would not welcome any radical regime. This leads us to raise a unique possibility of the engagement of the MST and social movements in general directly in the political arena, a possibility that so far they have highly rejected. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that if they do so, they would attain any progress; the PSOL is a live example of the extreme left that was frustrated with the PT and its neoliberal policies, and engaged in an independent Political Party, but turned out to have little sympathy among Brazilian voters in the last 2006 elections. Hopefully in the coming years, this reality will revert and such political parties will gain their terrain in Brazilian politics and accomplish what previous governments and political parties have failed to do.

The movement had gone far beyond national public recognition, and had attracted interest of other movements and sympathizers from all over the world through moral and economical support. "Several European governments have included the MST in foreign assistance, grants and projects, and the MST has been honored by the Swedish parliament and various international organizations".¹⁵⁶ The movement had also been taken as an example of a successful case study by many other movements willing to learn from the movement's trajectory and experience. Social researchers also played an important and recognizable role with their wide and valuable researches about the movement.

The MST along its twenty years of experience had learned that the cause of land by itself is not enough, they had projected themselves in a broader cause, a cause that embraces all Brazilian population that is discriminated and placed below the parameters of dignity and justice. Major issues were automatically placed in the agenda of the movement aiming at reaching equality and justice for all population. Although they are not directly involved in politics, yet they are aware of their role in mobilization and direct action against the embedded capitalist neoliberal system that the country is trapped in. In a national Sphere, the movement had also made some considerable moves in their coalitions, they had moved from heavy supporters of the Labor's Party (PT) to a new coalition with the recently formed political party (PSOL) a Socialist Party formed with previous members of the PT that were dissatisfied with the political line of the party. Also important are the national coalition with other

¹⁵⁶ Wright, A. and Wolford, A. To inherit the Earth, page 331.

social movements. A further important role that the movement has been playing is the responsibility of unification of the numerous social movements and socialist unions in the country. The task, as Stedile himself explains in his interview with Atilio Boron, is not easy, ideological and tactical differences are at stake; however he explains “We are then facing this responsibility, before any other international commitment, to use our prestige to help the process of convergence on the Brazilian social left. Without this unity we cannot escape the crisis. Our goal is to promote the growth of mass movements.”¹⁵⁷

In the International scene, the movement is also successfully involved with world wide alliances, with which they share their national plan and international perspective for a better world. The question of land is not necessarily the main indicator, but issues of environment, gender empowerment, and politics among others are some of the indicators for such coalitions. Currently they are involved in two important initiatives; one of them is the organization of what could be called the World Assembly of Social Movements to replace the World Social Forum. The need for such assembly is due to the Forum’s flaws and the movement’s disillusionment on particular issues, “because of the WSF’s own nature the assemblies there did not represent the real forces that resist neoliberalism.”¹⁵⁸ A further important step is the movement’s alliance with Venezuela in the process of advancing the ALBA (the Venezuelan-sponsored Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) as an alternative to the ALCA (the U.S.-sponsored Free Trade Area of the Americas). “For us ALBA is

¹⁵⁷ Atilio Boron, 22.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 23.

not only a name but the possibility of creating concrete mechanisms for the popular integration of the continent.”¹⁵⁹

This lead us to conclude that the MST is not any ordinary social movement, but a movement that with all its objectivity, recalls mysticism and still revives and honors important revolutionary names as Che Guevara, Rosa Luxemburgo, Sandino, Emiliano Zapata, Nelson Mandella among many others along their examples of life and commitment. The movement is aware of the difficulties that the present world offers and is also aware of the need to continue its battle and persist on its cause. It would be difficult to predict what the future has in store for the movement given the pace of the national and international challenges, but whatever the next chapter of Brazilian history will bring, there is no doubt that the members of the MST will have a significant role in it.

A final remark is about the next political chapter in Latin America that can not be dismissed when premeditating the future of the MST. Populism has been the most pervasive political ideology in the region; waving from the extreme Right during the military era, to neoliberalism in the 80's and 90's and finally the Left in the past decade. The Left by its turn did not succeed carrying on and promulgating its core ideology, which leads us to question who, when and towards which line the new actors will lead the region? And finally what would be the role of social movements in this new stage?

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

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Interview

I conducted a well extended interview with Mr. Geraldo Fontes responsible for the foreign relation of the MST. The interview was realized on the 21st of November 2006 in the headquarters of the movement in the city of Sao Paulo-Brazil.