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## Learning as territoriality: the political ecology of education in the Brazilian landless workers' movement

David Meek

In this contribution, I explore the importance of agroecological education in the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (MST). I analyze how certain MST educational programs are based in a critical place-based pedagogy. This type of pedagogy can serve as a form of *territoriality*, influencing individuals' interactions with the land. Drawing upon a political ecology of education perspective, I conclude that MST educators can serve as Gramscian 'organic intellectuals', by using a critical pedagogy of place as a form of territoriality to: (1) create a conception of place that is not discrete, but instead relational, and (2) advocate counter-hegemonic land usage.

**Keywords:** Landless Workers' Movement; critical pedagogy of place; political ecology of education; territoriality; Gramsci; organic intellectual

### Introduction

Why do Brazilian agrarian social movements institutionalize education? The institutionalization of education seems paradoxical, because institutionalization often results in the state's co-optation and subsequent neutralization of a progressive agenda. Yet 'Movement institutionalization does not always entail the risk of deradicalization, depoliticization, or demobilization of collective action' (Suh 2011, 444). Social movements institutionalize their vision of education because it is part of a long-term strategy of state transformation (Poulantzas 1978; Jessop 1990; Boden 2011).

Antonio Gramsci refers to this long-term struggle as the 'war of position', and sees activist educators as playing a fundamental organizing role as 'organic intellectuals' (Coben 1995; Mayo 2008; Yogev and Michaeli 2011). Although Gramsci originally applied the organic intellectual concept to the industrial proletariat (Gramsci 1978, 8), I build upon Feerman (1990) and Del Roio (2011) by exploring its relevance to peasant movements. Following the introduction, I justify this application of Gramsci. I draw upon Gramsci's organic intellectual concept to explore the role of educator-students in Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (*O Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, or MST).<sup>1</sup> I analyze how these educator-students learn about agroecology, which is the integration of ecological principles into agricultural systems (Gliessman 2006), and the opportunities and constraints they face in disseminating this agroecological knowledge. I shed light on

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<sup>1</sup>I use the phrase 'educator-students' because the individuals I follow in this research are *both* educators, working as teachers in a primary school within an MST settlement, *and* students in a graduate certificate program.

how the MST is using institutionalized education to strategically reconfigure state-society relations in the Brazilian countryside by exploring the training of these educator-students as Gramscian organic intellectuals.

The MST is Brazil's largest agrarian social movement, and its activists pursue agrarian reform by occupying land deemed 'unproductive' (Wright and Wolford 2003). This tactic evolved in response to the Brazilian constitution, which states that the government can expropriate land if it is not 'socially productive' (Wolford 2006).<sup>2</sup> Both agroecology and transformative education are central to the MST's ideology and struggle (Branford and Rocha 2002; Rosset and Martinez-Torres 2013).

The MST's engagement with agroecology is explicitly political, consisting of a critique of capital-intensive agribusiness and its support of a new model of cooperative production (de Molina 2013). Owing to Green Revolution-era agricultural modernization in Brazil, the country's dominant agricultural model is large-scale, and based in high inputs of petrochemical fertilizers and pesticides, as well as expensive machinery (Callou 2007; Troian and Eichler 2012). The MST critiques this model as socially and environmentally unjust, and advocates small-scale family farming that can help achieve food sovereignty (Patel 2009; Altieri and Toledo 2011; van der Ploeg 2012). The MST has institutionalized agroecological education by collaborating with other social movements and state entities in a broad-based educational movement known as *Educação do Campo*.

The *Educação do Campo* movement seeks to develop pedagogies and opportunities that are attentive to rural realities (Munarim 2008). This umbrella movement has helped create a new emphasis within Brazilian educational policy on locally relevant rural education as opposed to homogenous national courses that do not attend to local diversity in geography, culture and history (Breitenbach 2011). One way the *Educação do Campo* movement has attended to rural realities is through what Gruenewald (2003) terms critical place-based education. Critical place-based education is a synthesis of critical pedagogy's attention to transforming systems of oppression, and place-based education's focus on learning's historical and geographic context. Critical pedagogy helps students learn 'to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality' (Freire 1973, 17). Place-based education draws on 'the power of place as a context for diverse experiences ... using diverse communities as "texts" for curriculum development ...' (Gruenewald 2008, 143). In certain contexts, the MST has institutionalized critical place-based education by creating agroecological programs funded by the National Program of Agrarian Reform Education (PRONERA) (Araujo 2004). PRONERA, which was launched in 1998, offers funding for institutional partnerships between agrarian social movements and educational organizations (Molina 2003).

I posit two interrelated arguments in this paper. First, I argue that the MST institutionalizes critical place-based agroecological education through PRONERA-sponsored certificate programs, which helps transform educator-students into Gramscian organic intellectuals who are capable of influencing agricultural production by advancing counter-hegemonic agricultural practices. Second, I hold that these educator-students face difficulties in institutionalizing the agroecological learning they have gained through the certificate program because of the daily politics of settlement life. As a result of these difficulties, these educators are engaged within the school in a Gramscian struggle of territorial dispute.

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<sup>2</sup>A voluminous scholarship exists on the MST, its origination and its complicated relation to the Brazilian state. See Branford and Rocha (2002), Wright and Wolford (2003) and Wolford (2010) for key perspectives.

In the next section, I explicate Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual, and what modifications are needed to utilize it in an agrarian reform context. I then draw upon a political ecology of education framework to disentangle the complicated relationships that exist between territory, territoriality, hegemony and counter-hegemony in the MST. I introduce the research site through an ethnographic vignette. In the first of two ethnographic sections, I analyze critical place-based agroecological education in a graduate certificate course offered through a MST-federal partnership. I then explore, in the second ethnographic section, the opportunities and challenges educator-students in this program face in disseminating their critical place-based learning.

I gathered these data during 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork the MST's 17 de Abril settlement located in southeastern Pará state, Brazil. One focal point of the research was a two-year graduate certificate program entitled 'The Agrarian Question, Agroecology, and *Educação do Campo*', which was established for social movement activists of the 17 de Abril and other agrarian reform settlements. I followed the experiences of two educator-students, whom I call Diana and Lucinede, who participated in the program.<sup>3</sup> I gathered data by participating in the program and accompanying these educator-students on their field-based research. I conducted participant observation at the 17 de Abril settlement's school during events that were intended to disseminate the results of this course to the community. I contextualized these data by conducting a survey of 47 percent of all household heads in the community ( $n = 330$ ), which addressed political participation, landscape change and agroecology. Five trained research assistants administered this survey by first dividing the settlement into five areas of comparable population, and then conducting a convenience sample by going house-to-house. I present descriptive statistics derived from these data to buttress the perspectives of Diana and Lucinede.

### Gramsci and the question of organic peasant intellectuals

Central to Gramsci's thought is the belief that subaltern subjects have the capacity to both understand and change the world. To do so, there needs to be an 'intellectual and moral reform' involving the critiquing of hegemonic ideas, and the advancement of popular ideologies. Popular 'common sense' can only gain the ability to become hegemonic through a long-term process of movement building that Gramsci termed the 'war of position' (Carroll and Ratner 1994; Meek 2011). Integral agents in this war of position are activist educators, whom Gramsci termed 'organic intellectuals' (Mayo 2008).

Gramsci articulates the concept of the organic intellectual in opposition to the traditional intellectual. Traditional intellectuals were once organic to a rising class, but became complacent, and detached from life's social concerns. In the *Prison notebooks*, Gramsci typifies traditional intellectuals as the 'man of letters, philosopher, artist' who see themselves as classless, and that their knowledge is apolitical (Gramsci 1978, 9). Traditional intellectuals won't advance the struggle of the proletariat, because they are not ideologically committed to this class. Organic intellectuals differ because they arise from within, and are passionately connected to, the subaltern class. These educators play a pivotal role in the 'war of position', by engaging in counter-hegemonic activity.

Gramsci believes that 'every social group, coming into existence ... creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals' (Gramsci 1978, 5). For

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<sup>3</sup>All names used in this paper are pseudonyms in order to protect individuals' identities.

Gramsci, the origination of intellectuals results from class needs. Intellectuals organic to subaltern movements arise from class-based needs, because ‘in the modern world, technical education, closely bound to industrial labor, even at the most primitive and unqualified level, must form the basis of the new type of intellectual’ (Gramsci 1978, 9). By understanding how industry functions technically and administratively, subaltern groups can overthrow the bourgeoisie (Jones 2006, 85). Yet these organic intellectuals must do more than simply possess technical knowledge; they must also turn this specialist knowledge into political knowledge. Organic intellectuals use this political knowledge to move beyond the ‘eloquence’ of traditional intellectuals, and become defined by their ‘active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, permanent persuader and not just a simple orator’ (Gramsci 1978, 10). However, Gramsci’s particular vision of the organic intellectual requires modification before being applied to the MST.

Gramsci held what are seemingly oppositional accounts of the formation of intellectuals. On one hand, he writes, ‘every social group has its own stratum of intellectuals’ (Gramsci 1978, 60). On the other, he holds that ‘the mass of the peasantry, although it performs an essential function in the world of production, does not elaborate its own “organic” intellectuals’ (Gramsci 1978, 6). This disjunction can be explained, because, following Marx, Gramsci believed the peasantry cannot become a class ‘for itself’ (Shafir 1980, 224).

Although Gramsci himself arose from peasant society, he saw peasant culture as archaic and fragmentary.<sup>4</sup> Gramsci is very critical of the political potential of subaltern movements. He saw Italy’s southern peasants as accepting hegemonic values and trying to emulate the characteristics of ruling classes (Gramsci 1994, 327), yet he also believed that these peasants can inject non-hegemonic values into the dominant worldview (Gramsci 1978, 420; Cirese 1982, 226). In sum, Gramsci saw Italy’s peasants as a class that maintained itself in subordination through internal weaknesses and its acceptance of the social, political and moral leadership of the ruling classes. Yet it could also become a revolutionary class through alliances with workers, and the development of a class consciousness (Arnold 1984, 158–59).

In arguing for a non-orthodox application of Gramsci’s organic intellectual concept, it is important to acknowledge his changing views on the peasantry. Following the success of fascism in 1922, Gramsci realized that (1) any revolution must take into account the peasantry, (2) without understanding their world view there would be no chance of their mobilization, and (3) only intellectuals who were committed to the class could help solidify its worldview (Davidson 1984, 145). The justifications of peasant movements themselves, who have long applied Gramsci’s concepts to function in disparate historical and geopolitical contexts, are particularly instructive.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Perhaps as a result of his own lack of sustained focus on the peasantry, or the difficulty of extracting a coherent narrative from his *Peasant notebooks*, Gramscian scholars tend to focus on his writings about the industrial working class in comparison with the peasantry (Arnold 1984); but see Davidson’s (1977) *Antonio Gramsci: towards an intellectual biography* for a critical analysis of this neglect, and Davis’s (1979) *Gramsci and Italy’s passive revolution* for a consideration of how the peasant problem is interconnected with his larger corpus of ideas.

<sup>5</sup>Gramsci’s concepts have been applied to peasant groups in diverse international contexts. Feierman (1990) translates Gramsci’s concept of the organic intellectual to rural Tanzania, exploring the formation of peasant intellectuals. Karriem (2009) draws on a Gramscian approach to understand the interplay between space, ecology and politics in the Brazilian MST.

In the late 1970s, Brazilian movements began drawing upon Gramsci to inform their political-pedagogical activities (Semeraro et al. 2011). Paulo Freire, for example, an influential Brazilian critical pedagogue, cites Gramsci as having a direct influence on his thinking about the role of peasant intellectuals (Freire et al. 1986, 68). In situating the historical and political translation necessary to make Gramsci relevant to Brazilian movements, Marcos Del Roio (2011) first describes how Gramsci himself needed to translate Lenin into Italy's national context and Machiavelli to that time period, to understand the development of capitalism and the State, and strategies for socialist revolution. Del Roio considers one of the principal problems of translating Gramsci into a Brazilian context the form of popular social movements. Yet he concludes that if one questions the nature of these movements from the position of the actors themselves, then we see how these movements understand themselves as

a moment in the construction of the people, of the unification of subaltern classes, of the realization of a moral and intellectual reform, of a new hegemony that will result in the construction of a new State, and the translation of Gramsci will coalesce in praxis. (Del Roio 2011, 81; my translation)

This revolutionary process, Del Roio goes on, is slow, and requires the type of moral and intellectual reform that can only come about through the accumulation of organic intellectuals that are organizing on behalf of syndicates, parties and movements. The MST, Del Roio argues, is a paradigmatic example of peasant organic intellectuals. He qualifies this by describing how the MST's Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandes has built alliances between the rural areas and the city, restructuring Gramsci's vision of the nature of the alliance between workers and peasants (2011, 82). In the context of the MST, I believe organic intellectuals are characterized by technical training they've received through the movement, and their active involvement in the everyday politics of the community as knowledge producers, disseminators and mediators.

### **Education as a tactic for influencing relations to the land**

I employ a political ecology of education framework to explore how MST educator-students function as Gramscian organic intellectuals, and struggle to advance counter-hegemonic agroecological production. A *political ecology of education* framework analyzes how reciprocal relations between political-economic forces and pedagogical processes mediate resource access, control and landscape change (Meek 2010). The linkages between territory, territoriality, hegemony and counter-hegemony are key to understanding the potential for MST educator-students to affect agricultural production.

Territory consists of a combination of material and immaterial aspects (Fernandes 2009). Material territories are natural landforms and infrastructure (Rosset and Martinez-Torres 2013). Immaterial territories, by contrast, are the ideologies connected with landscapes, including ideas about what constitutes appropriate land use. Immaterial and material territories are intrinsically interconnected through territoriality, which is a process of exerting control over territory (Sack 1986; Storey 2012).

Educators can employ education as a form of territoriality. One way educators exert control over territory is by promoting the dominant ideologies and associated forms of land use. An alternate way educators can influence territory is by critiquing the dominant ideas about land use, and advocating counter-hegemonic forms. MST educators can function as organic intellectuals due to their ability to raise awareness about contradictions



inherent in dominant economic, cultural and material systems, and advance counter-hegemonic forms of agricultural knowledge and practices.<sup>6</sup>

### **‘The struggle is over and now there’s just victory’**

The MST’s 17 de Abril settlement was created in 1996, following the Brazilian paramilitaries’ massacre of 19 MST members outside the city of Eldorado dos Carajás on 17 April 1996. The settlement consists of 690 families, who each have a small plot of land in a peri-urban village, and a larger plot of land (~25–50 hectares) in the surrounding rural area. The original settlers were largely from the Northeastern state of Maranhão. These individuals came from disparate backgrounds, having worked as miners, laborers on others’ farms and urban merchants. All of these respondents described joining the movement out of desire for ‘a piece of land to work, and a place to live’. Since that point, due to failed credit projects, poor health and the general difficulty of living off the land, many settlers have left the community for the neighboring urban centers of Paraupbas, Curionópolis and Eldorado dos Carajás. The majority of respondents (64 percent) have lived in the settlement since its origination. Newcomers (36 percent of respondents) have flocked to the settlement because it is ‘good, and really cheap land’. Many of these new inhabitants were landowners in the south, and have replicated their ranching activities in this settlement. Given the emigration of many original MST members, and arrival of non-MST affiliated individuals the community has an incredibly heterogeneous feel, as described in the following ethnographic vignette:

I groan as the settlement’s radio begins crackling at 5:30 a.m. Samio, in charge of the radio, can’t be starting this early I think. However, it’s the unmistakable first notes of the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement’s anthem that causes to me to sit straight up in bed. Although I’ve lived here for 17 months, it’s the first time I’ve ever heard the MST anthem played on the community radio of the 17 de Abril settlement.

I’m surprised as the song ends and begins again. I reach the central square, watching what would appear to be another normal morning unfold, if not for the fact that the anthem finishes and then begins yet again. After the fourth repetition, I hear a voice break the radical monotony, but it’s not Samio’s. Rather, it’s Arnaldo. Arnaldo is the settlement’s president, and extols the importance of the settlement’s anniversary in the historical context of regional agrarian reform. Three other MST activists follow Arnaldo and each give speeches on the importance of the movement. Following these speeches Samio turns on a popular Forró song, whose refrain is ‘the struggle’s over and now there’s just victory’.

As if on cue, a vehicle lurches into the central square. It is a flatbed truck carrying sets of giant speakers bolted together. A man with a cowboy hat stands on a stage that rests atop the speakers. He does a sound check, and proceeds in what is clearly a professional rodeo announcer’s voice: ‘Wellllllllllllllllllcome Amazonian horsemen from all neighboring cities. Wellllllllllllllllllcome to Amazonia’s biggest rural horse parade!’ As his call bellows out, from all six intersecting streets men and women on horses begin to trickle out into the central square.

Douglas is orchestrating the horse parade. He is a large-scale dairy producer and in this role has become one of the settlement’s most powerful individuals. While directing the riders he tells me, ‘My dream is for this event to be on the scale of the big cattle expositions. Complete with lasso events, and a real rodeo’. Douglas hands out flags to several horse riders: a state of Pará flag, a Brazilian flag, and one from the MST. Aside from this morning’s radio announcements, it would be the only sign of the MST on this settlement’s 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. Sometimes absences are more telling than presences.

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<sup>6</sup>As I discuss below, educators do not always fulfill this role as intended.



Conspicuously *absent*, to me, are the signs of the movement on this day, such as the MST flags, banners, t-shirts and hats. Also absent are the members of the MST's state secretariat, or activists from other encampments or settlements. The colorful horse parade, a manifestation of regionally dominant cattle culture, occupies this negative space, and draws attention to the forces transforming the settlement.

This anniversary used to be a harvest festival, marking the importance of various subsistence crops. However, a number of factors ranging from credit incentives, to urban migration, to the failure of agricultural projects and cooperatives have resulted in the large-scale transition away from agriculture and towards milk production. As a result, what used to be a harvest festival is now a rodeo. Yet despite the dominance of cattle culture at this event there are still some indications of the settlement's agrarian roots. José Batista is one vestige.

Although I had never met him, I knew of José Batista from attending a recent presentation about agroecology at the settlement's school. MST educator-students, who had recently finished a graduate certificate program in agroecology, were presenting results to their students from their field-based research in the community. As part of this research, they had analyzed environmentally destructive forms of production, such as intensive cattle production within the settlement. But they had also researched emerging alternative forms of production, such as agroforestry, that were environmentally sustainable. With an image of José Batista projected on the school's wall, one teacher described to an auditorium of students how through this research she found that the settlement was not solely comprised of cattle ranching but, rather, was a diverse universe of production. José Batista exemplified this rich universe.

On the settlement's anniversary, José Batista stands in front of a cart decorated with hanging fresh mangoes, papayas, squash and various other agricultural products. On the cart's edge sits a homemade water wheel, which is fed by a tank in the back of the cart. 'People hardly remember these', José Batista admonishes, 'but they should. I'm here to remind them, to represent the settlement, to represent the small family farmers and the various products they produce'. José's reminder is of the traditional agroecological experimentation that characterizes the community's agrarian history.

I use this ethnographic vignette to introduce the contest between hegemony and counter-hegemony in the 17 de Abril settlement. In what was once an agrarian reform settlement of politically committed activists, it is now an anomalous event to hear the MST anthem on the community radio. Political participation on the settlement's anniversary consists of the perfunctory carrying of an MST flag; as the song's refrain reminds us, 'the struggle's over and now there's just victory'. Agriculture is also a constraint: subsistence production has been replaced by export-oriented dairy production. The harvest festival, which was timed to coincide with the settlement's founding, has been replaced by a rodeo, paying homage to the importance of regionally dominant cattle culture. This political and agricultural context is antithetical to the MST's agroecological vision, and calls into question whether 'the struggle's over and now there's just victory'.

While the original struggle for land might be over, the struggle over the meaning of land continues. The settlement's inhabitants are largely divided concerning how they see the transition from subsistence agriculture to cattle ranching. Two responses typify this division. The first is that 'without cattle ranching I wouldn't be able to live here'. Those holding this perspective have abandoned subsistence agriculture for one reason or another (most frequently due to lack of forest to convert to swidden agriculture, difficulties with non-mechanized production or lack of transportation for agricultural goods) and see ranching as the best available option. The opposing perspective is typified by sentiment that 'the transition from subsistence agriculture signals the death of the MST'. Those holding this view lament the degree to which the settlement has moved away from the movement's ideals of self-sufficient smallholder agriculture. This perspective is encapsulated by the oft-heard critique among respondents that 'we won this land in order to farm it, not to rely upon store-bought foods'. These two perspectives signal the competition

between common sense and popular common sense in the 17 de Abril settlement. It is a contest between those ideologically aligned with the MST who originally expected, and continue to believe, that the land should be used for subsistence agriculture, and those who have adopted the hegemonic system of cattle ranching, and are trying to emulate the characteristics of ruling classes (Gramsci 1994, 327). As one MST activist described this ideological struggle, 'these days everyone wants to be a *fazendeiro* (rancher)'.

Despite, or perhaps because of, these constraints, critical education has incredible potential to transform the settlement's political and agricultural milieu. The settlement's teachers use José Batista as an example of an unseen universe of agroecological production to help their students challenge the hegemonic system of ranching. These critical education practices have the potential to help maintain students' ideological commitment to the movement, engagement with its agroecological practices and role in a long-term movement towards social change.

### **Institutionalizing critical pedagogy of place: experiencing place as relational**

#### *Problematizing as creating relational place*

The certificate program in 'The Agrarian Question, Agroecology, and *Educação do Campo*' exemplifies the institutionalization of critical place-based agroecological education. The course format consisted of alternating 3-week segments in the home settlement and distant school community. During school time, students participated in field research trips, consisting of visits to sites representing opposing forms of production. My informants described these opposing forms of production as hegemonic and counter-hegemonic. They told me that these trips provided clear examples of the abstract concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony. While in their home community, they conducted critical field research and gained an appreciation for how these hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices were manifest at a smaller scale.

Professors in the certificate program described the objective of the program's first section as problematization. Problematization took three forms: conflict mapping, 'dislocating' exercises (field trips) and field research. Professors used conflict mapping to graphically depict contradictory forces, such as the infrastructure of exploitative industries and the spaces of social movement resistance. A professor indicated that conflict mapping was chosen as a form of problematizing in the course for several reasons. First, southern and southeastern Pará is a region historically defined by territorial land conflict; mapping helped students visually understand the political geographical nature of these conflicts (Simmons 2004). Second, conflict mapping advanced the course's 'political objective' to map 'strategies'. As a professor described it,

We were trying to map the capitalist strategies that confront the students' own territoriality; we decided to focus not on industrial capital in an abstract sense ... or the personification of the enemy, i.e. the large land owner, but rather on these strategic processes.

Student activists from dispersed settlements mapped these strategic processes by placing their communities on the map and discussing what geographic features spatially, politically, economically and ideologically link their communities together. For example, a railroad line operated by Vale, a transnational mining corporation, runs from Paraupébas to Marabá, and then into the neighboring state of Maranhão. The students discovered that each community had been affected by Vale's strategy of extractive capitalism, whether through environmental pollution, land grabs or exploitative labor. Students also mapped

their resistance activities, such as where they had occupied the railroad in 2009, and agroecological practices such as agroforestry. Students visualized how community-level and industrial sites of extractive capital are interconnected. These mapping exercises helped to solidify the abstract concept that scale is socially constructed, meaning it is not ontologically fixed as local *or* regional, but rather ‘a contingent outcome of the tensions that exist between structural forces and the practices of human agents’ (Marston 2000, 220). Critical mapping can be understood as training these educator-students as Gramscian organic intellectuals, providing the tools to critically analyze the contradictions of hegemonic land use, and the spaces for popular resistance.

In addition to conflict mapping, the first section’s focus on problematization consisted of ‘dislocating’ exercises. Dislocation pedagogy is ‘the removal of students from what has become familiar by disrupting their geography ... and their assumptions about ... the authority of academic knowledge’ (Godlewska 2013, 385). In this program, dislocation consisted of several 2–3-day field research trips to aluminum smelters, cattle ranches and mines, as well as farmers’ markets, agricultural cooperatives and land occupation encampments. During one of these dislocation exercises, Diana, who is a long-term educator from the 17 de Abril settlement, critically recognized a contradiction between an industrial mineral extraction operation and its claims of environmental conservation:

In Serra dos Carajás we went to the areas where they deposit the mine tailings. There (in the forest) we realized the contradiction that they say that this is an area of environmental preservation, but what type of environmental preservation is this, where they destroy the rainforest to discard the tailings that they don’t want? What type of preservation is this? Was it set up this way to preserve, or was it to distance people from what they were doing, so they could be free to do what they want? These were the types of questions that we asked, *why* are they preserving?

Scholarship highlights how contradictory moments, like Diana’s recognition of the contradiction between mining and claims of environmental conservation, are when learning happens (Mezirow 1990).

Diana subsequently elaborated that her learning during this trip was not simply about *those* mines, but about larger questions of how scale constitutes place:

The experience involved the questioning of, ‘What space are we living in? What is happening here?’ Because we live here, and lots of people say, ‘Oh this is happening over there in Amazonia.’ But hell, Amazonia is here, Amazonia is right here. They say, ‘Oh that is happening way over there in the mines of Serra dos Carajás,’ but you know what? Serra dos Carajás is right here.

Diana’s scalar reflection typifies moving ‘away from thinking of scale as an area or a circumscribed space – we should think of scale as a network, or a strategy linking local struggles to regional, national, or global events’ (Jones 2006, 26). This conception of place as a product of scalar interactions is fundamentally relational.

A relational perspective of place opposes the conception of places as coherent and distinct locations (Massey 1999, 14). Diana’s narrative exemplifies Massey’s (1999) description of place as ‘the sphere of juxtaposition, or co-existence, of distinct narratives, as the product of power-filled social relations ... This is place as open, porous, hybrid’ (21–22). By asking, ‘What space are we living in?’ Diana called into question accounts of environmental change that see place as discrete and environmental devastation as distant. Rather, by seeing place as ‘open, porous, hybrid’ and constituted through interconnected

scales, Diana visualized how the strategies of extractive capitalism connect places in a 'sphere of juxtaposition' (Massey 1999, 22). Describing her understanding of how contesting scales constituted a relational place, Diana emphasized how *that* 'Amazonia [the one of extractive capital] is right here ... Serra dos Carajás is right here'. Through dislocating pedagogy, students gained further training as organic intellectuals by developing a relational understanding of place as grounded in struggle at multiple scales.

### ***Intervention through problematizing***

While the certificate program's first section dealt exclusively with problematization, the second section was structured around intervention. As one student explained,

One of the grounding principles, for the professors and for us, in the course was that this cohort can't be simply another group of researchers who go to farmers' lands, take away an understanding of the problems, but never return. Rather, the proposal was that we conduct the research and then do projects that can help the farmers.

The program's grounding principle of applied research trained these educator-students as organic intellectuals who could advance counter-hegemonic forms of production. Bernardo, another participant in the certificate course, conducted research on one of the most prominent local strategies of extractive capitalism: sand extraction. He sought to apply his research finding in the community, using critical place-based research as a form of territoriality.

Bernardo stood on the undercut bank of the *Rio Vermelho* with a community-managed agroforestry grove to his back. Motioning with his hand over the muddy river on which floated makeshift barges coughing black smoke into the air, he reflected upon his research, and its transformative potential for the settlement:

The river is dying here. When you extract the sand you're going to take out all of the land from over there, and so all of the soil will continue sloughing off from the bank, filling in the river, and the river will dry up. While discussing this process in the course, we've been talking about how rural farmers become involved in these processes. Many rural farmers are having difficulties meeting their subsistence needs through agriculture, and see the best way to make a living as the easiest, which in these areas is the extraction of sand. But, they don't recognize that they're negatively affecting the environment. So, this research has enormous potential within the community. The community could control the sand extraction if they had the knowledge, and this is what we tried to do in the research, talking with farmers, but it's difficult, because they see it as the easiest way to make money.

Bernardo exemplifies how critical place-based education serves as a form of territoriality, by advocating for alternative forms of land use. Bernardo's usage of agroecological education as a form of territorial communication underscores Sack's perspective that 'human interaction, movement, and contact are ... matters of transmitting energy and information in order to affect, influence, and control the ideas and actions of other and their access to resources' (1986, 26).

As part of the certificate program, the students conducted a final project that sought to unify the course objectives by both problematizing and creating solutions. Diana and Lucinède, the educator-students in the course who came from the 17 de Abril settlement, focused on related topics – milk production and pasture – that underscored the historical transformation of the region's economy and ecology. Although community members largely engaged in subsistence agriculture following their original settlement, in the last 15 years they have almost entirely transitioned to dairy production. The majority of

survey respondents indicated that they transitioned to cattle ranching due to economic necessity, because 'it's more income' (57 percent). Lucinede, an educator-student, adds context to these data with an exasperated sigh:

The tendency in our settlement is ranching! In a little while, we won't be producing anything; we're simply going to be raising cattle for milk. I've realized that there are many families that have abandoned the practices of working the land for agriculture, and have become dependent upon working with cattle.

I found the settlement's inhabitants were divided as to whether or not this agricultural transition was positive: 38 percent of respondents saw the settlement's transition away from subsistence agriculture as a bad change, 40 percent viewed it as a good thing and 22 percent saw it as both. Those seeing it as a good thing shared the view that it was 'less work and more money', whereas those who saw it as a lamentable change expressed a similar view that 'we shouldn't have to buy foods with pesticides, but instead be able to plant healthy food to eat'. Lucinede's frustration with the transition to cattle ranching motivated her research project:

I began to observe this [the predominance of ranching] 2 years ago, and I talked about it with my friend, and it annoyed me. When I began the course, I wrote several assignments about this, talking about this irritation I had, and at the end of the course's first section, our professors proposed some assignments for our time in the communities, and the assignment was for us to work to identify the form of production in the settlement and through researching it, work to understand both hegemony and counter-hegemony.

When Lucinede's professors encouraged her cohort to focus on conflicting commodities, she chose milk production, because of its cultural, economic and political value (Hoelle 2011). Once she settled on milk production, her professors urged her to research an alternative product, asking her, 'What is it that you have in your settlement?' In response, Lucinede

discovered so many things, so many lovely things, so many interesting things. I discovered that there is a farmer who has milk cattle, but he also has a mandala agricultural planting, he works with agroforestry, he has *cacau* trees. There's another farmer who works doing beekeeping, but he also produces *cupuaçu* fruit. There's another farmer who is working with agroforestry and is working to reforest his land with native Amazonian forest species. And so I discovered within the settlement a universe that I had never seen, which was so broad, so vast and so marvelous, filled with diverse experiences of production.

Although Lucinede had lived in the community for 17 years, she had largely internalized the narrative that one finds circulating both within the settlement and the surrounding cities, which is that in the settlement 'it's only extensive cattle ranching'. Lucinede's narrative highlights how researching the relations between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forms of production led to a critical place-based rediscovery. This realization pushed Lucinede towards action:

When I discovered this I thought, 'I need to do something to show these people the potential that exists within the settlement, the potential for the diversification of production', and I realized that someone has to do something, and I thought that I can do this.

I argue that Lucinede, by working to communicate these realizations, becomes positioned as a Gramscian 'organic intellectual' in several ways. First, she is dedicated to working in

the community and not leaving it after she gets her degree. Second, as an educator in the settlement's school, she can share the counter-hegemonic examples of land use she uncovered, engaging in the long-term work of transforming territory from monoculture to agroecological polyculture.

Lucinede and Diana began to take action by discussing the creation of an agroecological 'brigade', which would study agroecology in the settlement. This brigade would ideally work in the school, but also engage with the farmers in the community. However, as I show in the next section, Lucinede and Diana faced significant obstacles in the endeavor.

### **Transforming the school?**

The school where Lucinede and Diana work is defined by the ebb and flow of political participation among both educators and the larger community. The micropolitics of educators' political participation serves as both an impediment to and opportunity for agroecological change within the settlement. I first explore how educators themselves perceive their political participation as both an opportunity and obstacle for curricular change. I then examine how Lucinede and Diana, the educator-students from the certificate program, communicate their critical place-based research to influence their students' perceptions of land use.

The school's namesake points to its origination in struggle: Oziel Alves Perreira was a 17-year-old MST leader who, as local lore tells it, screamed 'Long live the MST' before being fatally shot during the 1996 Eldorado dos Carajás massacre. Following the creation of the settlement, the community was extensively involved in the building and staffing of a rudimentary wooden school. As infrastructure within the settlement began improving, the community demanded a 'quality' school. Students, parents, teachers and administrators actively participated in the politics of the new school's creation. Between 2007 and 2009, the community held a variety of protests to pressure the government for the resources to construct the new school. Several times in 2006 and 2007, students, parents, teachers and administrators occupied highway PA-275 in the southeastern Amazon, transforming it into a makeshift two-lane classroom. Government officials eventually arrived and began a discussion, asking the MST activists what were their priorities in terms of creating a new school. Although building materials were promised at these protests, the months dragged on and there were no signs that the government would make good on its promises. When the school material failed to arrive, these MST activists and those from other encampments and settlements occupied the train tracks of the Vale Corporation for over a month. This action led to more substantial and formal dialogue with the state and municipal governments, which ultimately resulted in the construction of the school.

In the five years since the occupation of the railroad, both the school and the politics of its educators have undergone a transformation. When I first conducted pilot research in 2009, the school consisted of classrooms separated by flimsy wood walls, and a cafeteria under a thatched-roof. At that point, construction on the new school complex was just beginning. When I returned in 2010, the old school was leveled, and the new school had been completed. At that time, I was struck by the visual absence of the movement in the new school in comparison with the old one. In 2012, when I returned for a year of fieldwork, the school had once again metamorphosed, taking on the appearance of a more radical space. MST posters now adorned the administrative wing. Two large spray-paint stencils of Che Guevara adorned the exterior walls. Slogans from revolutionary intellectuals like Rosa Luxemborg, and critical pedagogues such as Paulo Freire, graced the wall, formed

from cut-out letters created in a children's art class project. When asked about this transformation in the school between 2010 and 2012, Edison, an MST activist who works at the school, pointed to the change in the coordinating council: 'When the coordinating council of the school changes, it wants to put on a face that represents itself'. The coordinating council of this municipal school is made up of six teachers who are elected by all of the teachers, and who function as the administration. Edison continued,

This year is the first year that the coordination of the school has been completely composed of activists. As such, we've decided to give the school a makeover, to give it the face of what we represent. It happens all the time, if you have a coordination that is Evangelical, you'd expect to have an Evangelical 'face' at the school.

Edison's perspective points to the complicated daily politics within the larger settlement. The political participation of educators mirrors that of the larger settlement, in the sense that neither is a homogenous space of movement activism. The fact that all inhabitants of an MST settlement are not MST activists might be surprising, given the community's political victories. However, Wolford (2003) reports similar findings from multi-sited research on the MST: 'Settlers in both places struggle over their understanding of what community means to them – they struggle inwardly and they struggle with each other. Sometimes the everyday experience of "community" is not very communal at all' (501). Edison underscores this discord in his community:

It's really quite complicated, this relation between the school and the movement. The school tries to work by following the organizational principles of the movement. But the problem is that not everyone who works in the school belongs to the movement. It's one thing to live in an MST settlement; it's another to belong to the organization. These two things are quite different, and it's difficult to reconcile these two aspects.

Part of this inconsistent participation is related to the influx of non-MST inhabitants, as many of the settlement's original inhabitants have left, due to failed agricultural efforts, lack of resources or other problems. Another part of 'the problem', as Edison called it, stems from the inhabitants' complacency, as they no longer see the need for political engagement. Whereas 19 percent of inhabitants described their participation in the MST as 'high' at the time of the settlement's creation, at present only eight percent see themselves as being actively involved in the MST. As one MST activist opined, 'Everyone's got their television, their house, their motorcycle. They have enough food, and can go and hang out with their cell-phone in the central square. What need do they have for the movement?' Other activists within the community continue to see the MST as a fundamental organizing force of the community, arguing, 'The struggle is continual. When one struggle ends, another begins'. These differing perspectives support Wolford's (2010) point about how people flow into and out of the movement, participating in a protest one year, and disassociating from the movement soon after. This ebb and flow of participation was manifest in the production of knowledge within the school. As Edison explained:

There are a number of teachers that disagree with the MST's principles, and because they disagree with these principles it becomes difficult to direct this process [of integrating MST principles into the school]. For example, a teacher arrives, and he's from São Paulo, but he grew up in Goiana, and he grew up with a completely different reality than ours. And he arrives and wants to work with the principles that he brought from there. I'm not saying that the principles that he brought are wrong, and those that we have are right. We have an ideology, and so we want to preserve our ideology, and work with the grassroots, in the manner in which we think is correct. But it's really quite complicated.



Edison's description of these internal politics draws attention to the importance of geography, because, in his analysis, where a teacher is from structures whether or not they will defend the MST and its pedagogical principles of advancing alternative forms of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

The geographic question inherent in educators' political participation is not simply about who is or is not from the settlement. Rather, *place*, and its attendant opportunities and constraints, is relational. Whereas all of the school's teachers give lessons in the same space, their understanding of that place, its transformation and their role in it is structured by their life trajectory of experiences. As Edison remarked, 'They may have lived in the settlement for several years, but so what?' The following example highlights Edison's point.

Luana is a biology teacher who works in several schools, spending three months in each of five communities on a rotational basis. At one class I observed, she showed pictures of the larval stages of bee development, and a student remarked, 'How in the world can we see it that close?' Luana informed the student that they would use magnifying glasses, which they should all have. 'Magnifying glass?' the student remarked. 'Where are we going to get money for a magnifying glass?' Luana jokingly responded with a tasteless play-on-words: '*Sem Terra*, I swear, it should be *Sem Nada* [those that have nothing]'. Luana's comment was an insult to the students and the movement as a whole and illustrates how far removed Luana is from the realities of her students in the settlement. Although she occupies the same educational space, her relational sense of place has an entirely different referent than those like Diana and Lucinede, who have literally grown up, and developed as activist educators, within the movement's ideological spaces.

The relation between school micropolitics and those of the larger political sphere became pronounced in the weeks after the October 2012 municipal election. Municipal elections strongly shape settlement politics, because the winning candidate typically appoints his supporters to leadership positions in various institutions, such as the municipal school in the settlement. While elections strongly shape the school's political composition, MST activists disagreed about the ultimate impact of electoral politics on the school. The next vignettes explore these MST activists' differing perspectives, and yield insights about how the politics of place mediate curricular change.

The week after the election, Joata and Francisco, two of the settlement's most active MST leaders, met with Genilda, a state-level MST leader, to discuss the potential impact of the local elections on the school. Upon greeting them, Genilda, the state MST leader, asked what would happen to the school's director. Joata said resignedly, 'We haven't decided yet who it will be'. 'She's definitely going to be out, that much we know', interjected Francisco, the other representative from the settlement. Genilda sighed in frustration, and added,

This business with the elections has to end. Every time we have an election we have a change in administration in leadership within the school. Look at Palmares [a nearby MST settlement];

<sup>7</sup>Although Edison describes these internal politics as geographical, not all agree. Salette Campigotto, who is known as the first educator of the MST, indicated in a personal communication to MST education scholar Rebecca Tarlau that whether a teacher is from the MST community, or not, is not important. According to Campigotto, some teachers born in MST settlements will refuse to use the movement's pedagogy, and some teachers from outside the community will become the biggest activists. Therefore, the MST should try to engage with all teachers equally. Following Campigotto, one's 'place' (or where they come from) does not necessarily translate to how they defend or do not defend counter-hegemony in a particular territory.

they have direct elections in the settlement for the schools' coordinating collective. Perhaps that could work in the 17 de Abril ...

As she trailed off, Francisco and Joata both sighed and seemed uncertain. Genilda continued, looking Francisco, the older and more influential of the two activists, directly in the eye: 'We *need* to retain our presence in the school. Who is being considered for the position?' Francisco responded, spitting as he said, 'Daniel, most likely. He has no interest in the MST. No interest whatsoever'.

As these comments make clear, these MST leaders saw having an MST-oriented school principal as crucial. As the MST-supportive party lost the election, the school's director will be replaced. From their perspective, this was a very important and unfortunate consequence, because, as Edison previously remarked, the director's personal politics affect the 'face' of the school and its curricular programming. Losing the current director would thus result in a transformation in the coupled ideological and material terrains of the school and, consequently, the larger settlement.

Yet not all MST activists placed such importance on municipal politics. Lucinede, one of the certificate program participants and a long-term teacher in the school, reflected,

Sure, you can put a representative of the movement in the school, but if you don't have a consensus among teachers that education is a fundamental part of our transformation, than that opportunity is lost, because we won't be able to get it done [the integration of MST politics in the curricula].

Lucinede's understanding of the importance of electoral politics contrasts markedly with that shared by Genilda, Joata and Francisco. Lucinede emphasized that having a school director 'who walks with the movement', as she often described it, is important. Yet she exemplified a Gramscian perspective on the importance of advancing popular consent, arguing that if there is not a larger consensus among educators about the political role of education, then it can be difficult to create mobilization in spite of the director's MST sympathies.

Instead, Lucinede explained, the politics of the teachers themselves would ultimately determine whether or not the MST's pedagogy could be implemented:

We have a series of problems in the school. Even within a settlement of the movement we have significant difficulty implementing the pedagogy of the movement, but it's not because the municipal government doesn't allow it. Having worked as the director of the school, I never had a directive from the municipal government or the secretary of education saying, 'You can't work with this. You can't work with that'. So, if the school doesn't function as it should, then the problem is us – the settlement – in implementing this work [the pedagogy of the movement]. The problem is not the municipal government.

I've suggested at various times in various meetings that what we have to change is the mentality of the educators who are here within the settlement. Teachers used to be trained by the movement, and understand the importance of debate within the school. These days, frequently, you invite the teachers to come to a discussion and they don't come.

As Lucinede sees it, the crux of the problem is the educators' lack of consensus regarding the place of the MST in the school.

Lucinede's perspective draws attention to how educators' participation is *political* in two senses. First, the act of educating is a form of political participation because – depending upon one's intent – it either transmits or omits particular ideals supported by the movement. Those who function as 'organic intellectuals', such as Diana and Lucinede, participate daily in the movement by communicating its ideology to other teachers and

students. By contrast, those who either actively denigrate or simply do not acknowledge the importance of the movement practice their own ideological resistance, and simply drag their feet. Their daily resistance to the MST's efforts to advance a counter-hegemony within the school took the form of not showing up at teachers' meetings where political projects were being discussed, and not encouraging their students to participate in movement events. Second, MST educators' teaching is political because it sees the school as a mechanism for achieving social and environmental transformation. MST teachers are thus organic intellectuals who have the power to advance a counter-hegemonic project. Each of these manifestations of educating *as* political participation is intimately linked to the act of territoriality, because the terrain of ideas and land is interwoven.

Lucinede went on to describe how being an educator committed to the movement is at variance with the interests of the majority of educators in the school.

Working with the movement is something that demands a significant focus: more availability on behalf of the people, in terms of being available to come to the school to discuss things, to become involved in activities. What we [MST educators] have found is that people don't want to be more available; they don't want to be present at the school more than is required in their little contract. For example, if my contract says you need to be there for 6 hours, I'm only going to be there for 6 hours. And so people are really caught up in the question of salary. And it's a salary that says I need to work for a total of 100 hours, and so at the end of that hundred hours I'm finished. The rest that needs to be done, such as extraneous projects, oh, just leave it to the side. But in the pedagogy of the movement it's more than this. The person needs to really be able to make time available to plan and organize, to propose activities, to involve the community in these discussions, and these discussions go forward veryyyyyy slowly within the community. You have to find methodologies that bring the community to the school, and we've not been able to achieve this because this requires time, it requires resources.

Particularly important, from Lucinede's perspective, is educators' personal political commitment to the MST's mission. This intrinsic motivation is necessary for transcending everyday concerns about the number of hours worked to achieve the larger objective of social transformation. If there is going to be a lasting agroecological 'face' at the school, consisting of anything from posters and slogans, to substantive curricular content and applied student research projects, it needs to arise from the educators' own political commitments.

I have presented two different perspectives regarding the links between the settlement's formal educational curriculum and the larger political environment: one represented by Edison, Genilda, Joata and Francisco, which views the dominant political party, and subsequently the school administration, as the key driver of school politics; and one represented by Lucinede, who asserts that regardless of the larger political leanings of the school leadership, educators' individual commitments to the movement are crucial. This exploration highlights how the politics of place – and in particular, a lack of consensus in the community and in the school regarding the importance of MST electoral and internal politics – can be a constraint for integrating the pedagogy of the movement within the school; the next section explores the flipside of how these politics provide opportunities for institutionalizing agroecological education.

### *Territory as opportunity*

Various MST activities take place in the school throughout the year, and the driving forces behind them are usually the organic educators dedicated to the MST and its ideals of transforming the social and ecological relations of production. For example, in April, there is an

annual 10-day ‘pedagogical encampment’ where MST activists study agroecology and agrarian theory; during June an agroecological student garden is annually planted; and every August the MST Youth Journey (*Jornada de Juventude*) takes place.

The Youth Journey is a week when normal classes in the school are canceled, and in their place MST activist youth and teachers lead lectures and workshops. One afternoon during the 2012 Youth Journey, which was devoted to the topic of agroecology, Diana and Lucinede led a session about the individual research projects they conducted during their certificate program. Lucinede told the students, ‘Sometimes you’ll hear people talk about certain things as if they were something that only took place really far away; but sometimes, those things are actually occurring quite close to you, it’s just you’re not able to realize it’. Lucinede’s description is strikingly similar to Diana’s previous comment about discovering a ‘marvelous’ and ‘unseen universe’ of agroecology in her own community. The students began to learn about these invisible landscapes as Lucinede continued, ‘Through this research we were able to learn many things, to discover many things here in the settlement. We observed a variety of agroecological initiatives going on, which are barely known by the population of the settlement’. Lucinede had lived in the settlement for 17 years without knowing of these agroecological areas. Her narrative ensured that the students learned about this unseen geography through a critical lens. Lucinede continued,

I’m going to tell you all two stories from our research. One is an inhabitant in our settlement, and another is from another MST settlement, which we visited as part of our course. When we were visiting that other settlement, Mede took us on a tour of his lot. And he told us that the first thing he did was try to use the lot to raise cattle, but the lot was very small and didn’t work to raise cattle, which is often the case here.

None of her students had been to this other settlement, but Lucinede painted a relational vision of place by using a description of *that* place to educate students, critically, about *this* place. She indicated that MST settlers in both settlements face similar constraints with the land and its small lot sizes, which are inadequate for cattle ranching. Lucinede also used her experience to instruct the students about how both settlements’ inhabitants had similar agroecological opportunities available to them. Lucinede went on to describe, in exquisite detail, the ecological richness of Mede’s land and how he was able to sustain his family through the agroecological products he and his wife sold from it, ranging from fruit pulps to natural cosmetics to orchids. Challenging the students, she asked rhetorically, ‘Now, where is all this taken from?’ ‘From their lot’, a student interjected. ‘From their lot is correct’, Lucinede responded, ‘from Nature, exactly correct, so it’s a different form of producing. They are able to survive without destroying the rest of Nature that still exists there’.

Lucinede’s presentation then shifted from illustrating a relational geography, to explaining her critical place-based learning about hegemonic and counter-hegemonic production in the 17 de Abril settlement. ‘Another place where we did research was here in our settlement. And sometimes you see someone’s land plot that has a lot of forest, really high forest, and you say, “Man, he’s lazy”, right?’ She stopped and emphasized her next statement, meting her words out slowly to describe a hapless imagined individual: ‘We ... see ... them ... as ... *lazy*, now don’t we?’ Without missing a beat, the auditorium responded in unison, ‘We do’. ‘Right,’ Lucinede continued, ‘we see them as lazy because they’ve been on the land for 15 years, and you can see from the beginning to the end, it’s just forest, *just* forest’. Lucinede drew upon the students’ own experiences, setting them up for a problem-posing moment by asking what seeing ‘*just*’ forest on someone’s lot indicated about that person. ‘But I don’t think this is laziness’, Lucinede offered. ‘You know what it is? It’s

a choice to engage in a new form of production. Do you think economically he just survives on cattle and pasture?’ ‘No’, the students all replied again. Lucinede probed further, ‘Do you think that he just knocks down the forest to burn so that he can then plant crops?’ ‘No!’ shouted the students. ‘There are other forms of production’, Lucinede said in a voice that was reserved, yet forceful, and filled in the other half of the contradiction she had created: having one’s land comprised completely of forest is not laziness, as the community tends to believe; rather, it can be tactical. Lucinede continued,

What is lacking amongst us is knowledge of how to do this, and so for that reason we did this research, and through this research we learned that this individual has *açai*, mahogany, cedar, *cupaçu*, *cacau*, *goiaba*, he has a huge list of tree species, including *castanha do Pará*. He has planted more than 5000 trees on his land.

Lucinede’s research was, as she described it, a process of discovering the counter-hegemonic forms of production that constituted place.

Lucinede’s talk took on an increasingly normative nature as she described the threats that this forest farmer faced:

He needs to have a lot of courage, because many people say it’s deplorable, they’ll say that he hasn’t *even* been able to generate any income from this. And what happens to all of the effort and resources he invests in this, traveling hours away to acquire native transplants, and then someone comes with a nice sharp machete and makes a trail to hunt the animals that are living in the forest, or to cut down the trees, right?

The students unanimously agreed, ‘They will be cut down.’ With statements like these, Lucinede’s narrative directly confronts the competing ideologies and forms of land usage in this MST settlement. Drawing on this sole example from her research, she described to the students the conflict, within their own settlement, between the proponents of hegemonic forms of cattle production who see agroecology not merely as lazy, but as something that needs to be stopped, and counter-hegemonic forms of production based in agroecological diversity. Lucinede concluded her presentation by telling the students,

These examples can be a way of encouraging our parents to work in a type of production that is not simply ranching. This new form of agroecological production is in equilibrium with nature, because one thing depends on the other. This type of work is gratifying because it creates in the person a perspective of a future that is more healthy, and that is much better than having someone take a land plot and mechanize the entire thing and plant pasture across it. And so these two experiences bring for us a new hope for life.

Lucinede’s conclusion epitomized how education can serve as a form of territoriality, encouraging particular uses of and relations to land through production.

## Conclusion

I have explored in this contribution the opportunities and constraints facing the MST’s institutionalization of critical place-based agroecological education. I found that both these opportunities and constraints were geographic in nature.

The certificate program in *The Agrarian Question, Agroecology, and Educação do Campo*, exemplifies the successful institutionalization of critical place-based agroecological education. This program was created by a partnership between the MST and the Federal University of Pará, funded by PRONERA. This institutionalization of critical place-based

agroecological education was an *opportunity* for the MST, because it enabled the training of its educator-students as Gramscian organic intellectuals. This Gramscian training was structured into the certificate program, which was designed around the problematizing of hegemonic forms of production, and applying research findings about those system's contradictions and emerging counter-hegemonic forms of production. In this case, institutionalizing a critical place-based agroecological education helped the MST advance its struggle within the framework of the state. It thus became a way to begin transforming the state from within (Poulantzas 1978; Jessop 1990; Boden 2011).

The critical place-based education helped educator-students develop a relational conception of place. Diana's description of the ties between Serra das Carajás and her settlement, Bernardo's analysis of sand extraction and Lucinede's description of extensive cattle ranching all illustrate an understanding of place as relational, comprised 'of distinct narratives, as the product of power-filled social relations' (Massey 1999: 21), yet also interconnected. This cohort learned through dislocating field trips and community research how scales are interconnected, and socially constructed through hegemonic forms of production, such as sand extraction and cattle ranching.

The certificate program also emboldened the educator-students to apply their research findings about alternative methods and systems of production. Bernardo visualized his research as having an 'enormous potential' to communicate the negative effects of sand extraction to his community, filling a knowledge gap and facilitating the control of small-scale mining. Through her research, Lucinede also realized that 'someone has to something' and that 'I can do this'. Together with Diana, they decided to form an agroecological brigade, and bring this debate about hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forms of land use into both the school and larger community. Bernardo, Lucinede and Diana's efforts to use knowledge as a tool to transform material production within their communities highlight how agroecological education can be employed territorially, affecting the relation to and control over land. Although institutionalization provided opportunities for these educator-students to develop as Gramscian organic intellectuals, there were also constraints.

Whereas the educator-students had the training to advance counter-hegemonic knowledge and practices, the geographic politics of the school were a constraint. As Edison cautioned, 'It's really quite complicated, this relation between the school and the movement'. Edison's warning signaled that educators in social movement schools are not necessarily counter-hegemonic agents simply because of their location within an agrarian reform settlement. The example of Luana, the temporary teacher who joked that her students were better characterized as '*Sem Nada*', illustrated how all educators are the products of their particular spatial histories, which are relational and hybrid. The contrast between Luana, the temporary teacher, and Diana and Lucinede, the organic intellectuals, illuminates how educators' spatial histories of political participation mediate whether or not they will support MST counter-hegemonic objectives through their teaching.

Various theoretical perspectives could shed light on these issues. Critical educational scholarship takes as a foundational principle the idea that all education is political (Giroux and McLaren 1994; Apple 1995). Similarly, the political economy of education draws attention to how public policies shape curricula (Carnoy 1985). Political ecologists draw attention to how struggles over power shape ecology (Neumann 2005). Yet none of these perspectives illuminates the interconnections between politics, economy, education and ecology. The political ecology of education lens provided insight into how mapping strategies of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forms of production, which one professor described as the 'political objective' of the certificate program, influenced the students'

independent and collective understandings and attempts at transforming place. This lens also shed light on how the MST is institutionalizing its projects within the state as part of a long-term war of position. This analysis of *why* movements institutionalize education clarifies the omnipresence of spaces of resistance within the larger project of neoliberalism.

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