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Educação do Campo [Education for and by the countryside] as a political project in the context of the struggle for land in Brazil

Lia Pinheiro Barbosa

Latin American and Brazilian rural social movements believe that significant social transformation requires the collective construction of a political project of an historical character. Education is conceived as an historical-cultural and political project to transform the peasantry into an historical subject through emancipatory educational-pedagogical praxis. The Landless Workers Movement (MST), the most emblematic peasant movement in Brazil, has played the leading role in this debate, which also includes many other peasant organizations. The MST has identified education as the key element in forging an historical-political actor out of the landless peasantry. This is articulated through the struggle for education for rural peoples, and along a theoretical-epistemic axis that revolves around the emergent concept of *Educação do Campo* ('Education for and by the Countryside'). I ask how the MST conceptualizes education, and what the role is of education in strengthening peasant resistance and sharpening the dispute between political projects for the countryside. I focus on the epistemic dimensions of the concepts of education and pedagogy in the trajectory of the MST in Brazil, and I examine *Educação do Campo* as an educational-political project and in terms of policy conquests in the political dispute between the rival political projects for the Brazilian countryside of peasants and capital.

Keywords: Educação do Campo; MST; social movements; rural education; Brazil; PRONERA; epistemology

Introduction

Brazilian political history is a mosaic of experiences of resistance and political struggle whose protagonists are diverse organizations and social movements. The political demands made by these movements respond to the historical asymmetry and inequality that are the products of a very exclusionary socio-cultural structure and economic development model.

The land problem is an integral part of this asymmetrical inequity. During the mid-twentieth century, characterized by large rural estates (*latifúndios*) and by forced-pace industrialization, political pressure from below regarding the agrarian question and the need to undertake land reform steadily increased. An intense political debate quickened as rural outmigration exploded toward the Amazon region and Brazil's large urban centers, particularly Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. These historical processes, in the absence of a 'peoples' political project for the countryside, created fertile ground for the emergence of broad-based peasant organizations and social movements (Welch 2009), such as the *Ligas Camponesas* (Peasant Leagues) and, more recently, the Landless

Workers Movement (MST). Throughout their history of struggle, these historical–political actors or subjects have opposed a development model that, in its essence, is based on relations of domination of both an ideological–cultural and political–economic nature.

During the past 30 years, political debate centered on agrarian problems has increased throughout the world, particularly in Latin America. This debate has an historical particularity in terms of the political response by peasant social movements: they understand that a true social transformation requires the collective construction of an emancipatory political project with an historical character, built on lessons learned through resistance and struggle. One of the key elements in this proposition is *education*, conceived as an historical–cultural and political project aimed at building the critical awareness needed to forge an historical actor, with an educational–pedagogical praxis aimed at human emancipation. From the mosaic of resistances and political struggles in Latin America, a variety of educational projects have emerged, which have over time been inserted into the realm of political dispute, with their own concepts of education, pedagogy and pedagogical practice.

Brazil has several strong and politically active peasant social movements. One of the most prominent and emblematic of these is the MST. During three decades of struggle for land and for a Popular Agrarian Reform (*Reforma Agraria Popular*), the MST has emphasized the central role of education in transforming the landless peasantry into a powerful historical–political actor (MST 2005a). This is part of a wider debate based on the recognition of the implicitly and/or explicitly political nature of education in the political formation of the working class, in this case in rural areas. The MST has opened a profound discussion concerning the political role of education in collectively constructing a *different* development project for the countryside. This discussion has grown gradually to the point where we can consider it to be a true historical–political project, initially put forth by the MST but now articulated by the larger peasant social movement in Brazil.

This project operates along two axes: the political axis having to do with the struggle for the right to, and democratization of, education for peasants; and a theoretical–epistemic axis that revolves around the emergent concept of *Educação do Campo*. The phrase *Educação do Campo* (EdC) has a critical double meaning in Portuguese, as both ‘education for the countryside’ and ‘education by the countryside’. The former responds to the historical denial of educational opportunities for rural people, claiming the right to education, to attend school where one lives, to learn to read and write, and to individually and collectively make informed choices among possible trajectories for collective and community life. The latter means an education designed by rural people and their movements themselves, an education rooted in *place*, that is based on the culture, knowledge, wisdom and needs of rural people.

EdC embodies the struggle for a *different* education, i.e., the epistemic basis that undergirds the educational–pedagogic proposal put forth by rural social movements.¹ This is not just about assuring that there are schools *in the countryside* – i.e., restricted to a certain geographical space, in this case the rural area. It is a theoretical–empirical and political

¹What I call the ‘epistemic basis’ is related to the dimension of knowledge, or of ‘knowing’, about the reality of things. It refers to knowledge that is situated in a given time and space; that emanates from an historical–political subject with the capacity to interpret their own reality and have an impact on it. In this sense, an epistemic ‘take’ presupposes a pre-theoretic positioning with respect to a given reality – that is, the establishment of a dialogic and dialectical relationship between reality and knowledge, in which it is possible to put forth multiple interpretations of the historical moment, to, later, posit its theorization, as well as strategies for social and political intervention (Zemelman 2004; Barbosa and Sollano 2014).

conceptualization of *education* and of *pedagogy* that goes beyond geographic location, taking on a character of socio-cultural belonging to the countryside: *an education by and for the countryside, by and for its historic actors, and by and for the peasant people*; also an education for the *collective transformation* of reality in the countryside (Barbosa 2013b, 2015).

In this contribution I delve into this idea, based on the experience of struggle for land in Brazil and on the MST's educational-political practice.² To this end, I explore the ways the concepts of *education* and *pedagogy* are being built, and their influence, in the first two sections of this essay. The first way is *internally*, at the level of the political organization and formation of a social movement, in and from which new concepts of education, pedagogy and knowledge emerge, based on the concrete experience of the struggle for land and agrarian reform. The second is *externally*, in the arena of political contention, which addresses the meaning of the MST's educational proposal itself, and specifically how EdC is a proposal that calls into question the actions of transnational capital and agribusiness in rural territories. The MST and other peasant movements and organizations demand EdC as an educational-political project for the peasant peoples and as public policy for rural areas (Kolling, Cerioli, and Caldart 2002).

In the next section, I review the political evolution of the MST's education project in the sphere of policy, in order to highlight its national scope and unprecedented popular participation in the public arena through the creation of a National Program for Education in the Agrarian Reform (PRONERA) and a legal framework that speaks to the gradual democratization of peasant access to education.

Further, I highlight an aspect of contemporary political experience in Latin America, where we see the rise of new epistemic-political meanings of education that serve as a counterpoint to conventional modernity.³ I will also demonstrate how opposing political projects are waging a bitter struggle for the Brazilian countryside, and how the education plan crafted by rural social movements calls into question the actions of transnational capital and agribusiness in rural territories. Although the MST's educational-political project has had notable achievements in strengthening political awareness and conquering rights for Brazil's rural population, nonetheless it faces considerable challenges and tension in the dispute for hegemony with and within the state.

²In methodological terms, this essay is the product of both an extensive revision of documents (by and about the MST) and of fieldwork. Some of the fieldwork was carried out as part of the research for my doctoral dissertation (Barbosa 2013b) in the Postgraduate Program in Latin American Studies of the National Autonomous University of México (UNAM) and for my papers in Portuguese and Spanish, many of which are cited in this essay. It also the product of participant-observer research and analysis spanning a full decade of participation in political activities of the MST, and in those organized by its Education Sector. Over the past decade I have been a professor in the Pedagogy of the Land undergraduate program for militants of La Via Campesina-Brazil, carried out under an agreement between the Federal University of Ceará (UFC) and the MST, I have been involved in the coordination of various educational programs funded by PRONERA (explained in this essay), and I am an active member of the Collective of Agrarian Reform Educators of the Education Sector of MST-Ceará.

³What I refer to as the 'project of modernity' refers to the process of conforming the nation-state in our continent, which itself has consolidated capitalism as its economic and political-ideological project. The modernization project has sharpened differences based on the social relations of production and class antagonism. In the process of building the nation-state in Latin America, the coercive apparatus allowed the state to consolidate a monopoly over violence as a form of social control. Thus, there is a multiple structure of domination: economic (dependent capitalism of the periphery), symbolic-ideological (combining elements of Spanish and Portuguese cultural domination with the naturalization of capitalism and class difference) and coercive (Barbosa 2014).

Education emerges from the struggle for Agrarian reform

The contemporary struggle of the MST continues the long history of peasant resistance in Brazil and Latin America, dating from the colonial period in which large-scale land grabbing and expropriation were applied, leading to the consolidation of large latifúndios in the countryside (Morissawa 2001; Fernandes and Stédile 2004). The rise of the MST is grounded in the historic precedent of Latin American peasant insurgency and, particularly, in its Brazilian variant,⁴ which seeks to bring forth a new balance of power in the arena of political confrontation. The MST was born in the midst of the coalescence of historical–political forces that collectively built the democratic, grassroots political project that defeated the military dictatorship. Reflecting on that moment, João Pedro Stédile, a member of the MST’s National Coordinating Committee, says that the MST was

the result of three basic factors that came together. The first was the economic crisis at the end of the 1970s that put an end to Brazil’s cycle of industrialization that began with Kubistschek⁵ in 1956 [...]. The second factor was the work carried out by friars. During the 1960s, the Catholic Church lent considerable support to the military dictatorship, but given the growing unrest stemming from Liberation Theology, changes occurred in its orientation, the CPTs⁶ were created and a progressive group of bishops emerged [...]. The third factor was a growing climate of struggle against the military dictatorship in the late 1970s that transformed even local labor disputes into political battles against the government. (Fernandes and Stédile 2004, 201)

Although the first land recoveries date from 1979, the MST made its first public appearance on the Brazilian political scene in 1984, in the context of the First National Meeting of Landless Workers, which held a wide-ranging discussion on Brazil’s agrarian problems (Fernandes 2000; Harnecker and Bassegio 2003). Denunciations at the meeting focused on latifúndios, land concentration, and domestic and international economic and agricultural policies as the principal factors behind increasing misery, impoverishment, migration and conflicts in Brazil’s rural sector. To overcome this political–economic stagnation, the participants found it urgently necessary to place agrarian reform on Brazil’s political agenda as part of a grassroots effort. This agrarian reform was not to be limited to the breaking up of latifúndios and the redistribution of land. It was to encompass a wider social, cultural and political–economic transformation, premised on national sovereignty and grassroots power. For the MST, agrarian reform meant ‘building a society without exploitation, where labor has ascendancy over capital [...] and private property is subordinated to social justice, to the needs of the people, and to objectives chosen by the larger society’ (Morissawa 2001, 153).

One of the MST’s principal political tactics in attacking latifúndios and land concentration has been to carry out occupations of land, i.e., the actual, concrete site of peasant struggle, an action that became the symbol of the resistance of the *landless* as an historical–political actor.⁷ Turning a land occupation into a political action is a unique way of

⁴For example, the Peasant Leagues, linked to the Brazilian Communist Party, who engaged in agrarian struggles in Brazil’s Northeast region beginning in the mid-1940s, are one of the previous experiences that have inspired the MST (Welch 2009).

⁵Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira was President of Brazil from 1956 to 1961.

⁶Initials of the Pastoral Land Commission in Portuguese.

⁷The MST identifies itself as a *Landless Movement* (in capitals) to strengthen its political identity and its identifying ethos linked to the countryside, i.e., the life-sustaining territory and site of its cultural and material (re)production.

confronting the state and large landholdings by bringing conscious, direct action to force negotiations in favor of expropriating unutilized land (Barbosa 2012). MST *encampments*⁸ represent the first *locus* and symbol of landless resistance (Turatti 2005; Barbosa 2012). Land reform settlements (the second symbol of resistance), once achieved through the negotiations that follow occupations, make the MST's political project of agrarian reform a concrete reality, and signify a split from capitalist agrarian structure, by breaking from the relationships of production, power and culture inherent in the Brazilian *latifúndio* tradition and strengthened by neoliberal agricultural policies (Barbosa 2013b).

Throughout its political evolution, the MST has expanded and modified its definition of agrarian reform by incorporating historical-cultural and political-economic elements, based on the critical reflection of the changing reality of land-related problems in Brazil and Latin America. Recently, the MST has adjusted its vision and demands for agrarian reform in Brazil because of the rise of financial capital that has funded the expansion of agribusiness and its consolidation as a political project and principal enemy of the landless and the peasantry, and the concomitant decline of the old enemy of landless peasants, the *latifúndio* (Rosset 2013). The old argument that a few landholders – the 'unproductive *latifúndio*' – have so much land they can't even use it, is less valid than before. This means that the call for agrarian reform must now be based on a new logic, and must appeal to benefits to all of society, not just landless peasants, of agroecological peasant agriculture that generates food sovereignty, versus agribusiness that poisons people and the land while producing more exports than food (Rosset 2013).

Held in 2014, the MST's Sixth National Congress was an important political occasion, giving greater attention to this debate and highlighting the MST's new formulation of a call for what would henceforth be called 'Popular Agrarian Reform' (*Reforma Agrária Popular*).⁹ In the words of Alexandre Conceição, another member of the MST's National Coordinating Committee:¹⁰

The so-called 'Popular Agrarian Reform' seeks to address the demands of our times. The basis for the 'Popular Agrarian Reform' is: land distribution that will put an end to large landholdings; food production without poisonous chemicals for domestic consumption; and an agroecological program with local [cooperative] agro-industry so that income can be generated and young people can find work in the countryside.

Popular Agrarian Reform has thus incorporated agroecology and food sovereignty as central principles (Rosset 2013), and is defined as a political-ideological project in opposition to agribusiness, the symbol of the recent gains made by transnational financial capital in the Brazilian countryside. Thus, the MST's most recent Agrarian Program (MST 2014)

⁸Created when lands are first occupied, as the first step in the struggle to establish legal land reform settlements. When occupying lands, families build encampments where they live under black plastic tarpaulins or palm fronds, where they remain in resistance while negotiations with the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) proceed. The Institute is the public entity tasked under Brazilian law with reassigning unproductive lands and carrying out agrarian reform. It rarely acts without pressure from below in the form of land occupations.

⁹The MST has held six national congresses: 1st Congress (1984) – 'There is No Democracy without Agrarian Reform'; 2nd Congress (1990) – 'Occupy, Resist, and Produce'; 3rd Congress (1995) – 'Agrarian Reform: Everyone's Struggle'; 4th Congress (2000) – 'Agrarian Reform: For a Brazil Free of *Latifúndios*'; 5th Congress (2007) – 'Agrarian Reform: For Social Justice and Peoples' Sovereignty'; 6th Congress (2014) – 'Struggle: Build Popular Agrarian Reform'.

¹⁰See Américo (2014).

hopes to achieve real structural changes in the use of natural resources, in how production is organized by focusing on agroecological production techniques, and in social relationships in the countryside. Yet for this project to become a political reality, it must take into account the socio-cultural specificities of peasant actors, i.e., it must be in harmony with the knowledge, experiences and subjectivities that emerge from daily life in the countryside as linked to peasant identity. The MST slogan, ‘Struggle as you live and live as you struggle’, synthesizes, in political and epistemic terms, the *landless identity* that that MST is working to create as a key step in transforming the landless peasantry into a powerful historical–political subject of its own history (Barbosa 2011).

The MST considers the first fundamental aspect of a political strategy to be scaling up the struggle for agrarian reform to all regions of Brazil, while building a political agenda that provides feedback and strengthens the MST’s internal political action through dialogue and the building of a common front with other movements and organizations, both domestically and abroad.

Second, the MST understands that building a Popular Agrarian Reform project requires not just breaking with the *latifúndio* of concentrated land holdings, but also needs a clean break with ‘the *latifúndio* of knowledge inherent in illiteracy and elite control of education, by also carrying out an agrarian reform of knowledge and culture’ (MST 2005a, 31). This statement gives political meaning to education, linking it to socio-cultural transformation by creating historical–political actors and subjectivities that resignify the symbols and meanings of the struggle for land and agrarian reform.

Education is thus an important aspect of the MST’s agrarian reform project: an education designed to consolidate class consciousness – i.e., as a class in itself and for itself¹¹ – and a political practice aimed at liberation, centered mainly in breaking away from the political–economic and cultural pattern that undergirds relationships of domination in the Brazilian countryside, creating a new idea of the countryside based on a different rationality, i.e., that of peasant peoples (Barbosa 2013b). In the next section, we examine the political notion of education based on the MST’s political practice.

A different education to break with the latifúndio of knowledge

What is the MST’s concept of education? What is the role of education in strengthening peasant resistance and in the debate over political projects for the Brazilian countryside? The MST says that education ‘is not synonymous with school. The word has a wider meaning, because it refers to the complex process of human formation, where social interaction is the principal environment of learning’ (MST 2005a, 233).

This process of human formation takes shape in the construction of a *landless* political identity, an essential condition in giving political meaning to land occupations and to the resistance in encampments, and in furthering a political praxis in the struggle to implement agrarian reform. Inspired by Marxist critical thinking, the MST goes a step further in conceiving education as the key element for interpreting prevailing cultural and productive relations of domination in Brazil’s cities and countryside (MST 2005a; Barbosa 2013b).

For Marx (1963), in the capitalist mode of production, the types of consciousness are directly related to the material conditions of life. In the industrial world, education is one of the most important ways of perpetuating the exploitation of one class by another.

¹¹See the discussions by da Silva (2014) and Sevilla Guzman (2006) on the peasantry and Marx’s characterization of class consciousness in a class ‘in itself and for itself’.

Thus, in the capitalist education model, school is where the dominant ideology is disseminated and assimilated in order to instill the worker with a bourgeois worldview.

Education has been a mechanism of alienation of the masses in two spheres: in the economic sphere, by expropriating the knowledge of production from the worker and implanting, in the subjective plane, the fetish of commodities as a social necessity; in the ideological sphere, it has done so by imposing a social space that fosters the ongoing reproduction of the capitalist system. In other words, the entire set of ideas and beliefs disseminated through the capitalist educational system is a distorted representation of reality and inherently generates a *false*, or *inverted*, consciousness, based on a social imaginary that does not express the true essence of the social and economic relations that are intrinsic to the capitalist model.

In its search to build a landless peasant historical consciousness, the MST has revisited some of the elements of the theoretical debate on critical thinking, as well as the political history of other organizations and movements, in order to conceive of itself as an historical subject in the permanent dispute between political projects for Brazil. In the dialectic that cuts through this debate, education is (re)appropriated in order to deepen the critical understanding of how it can play a role in human liberation and emancipation (Barbosa 2013b, 2014).

I want to emphasize that it is through the careful reading of its past and present realities that the MST has been able to identify the following issue: if education (and its concrete expression in a type of pedagogy and a specific space for the act of educating, i.e., the school) is the point of departure for cultural subordination and political domination, then the notion of a *different education* and a *different pedagogy* is the first step in beginning a process of liberation and emancipation (Barbosa 2013b). This is an educational process inspired by the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1982), in which the ultimate objective of education should be to foster a critical consciousness of *being* and of *being with* and *being in* the world – in other words, an education forged through liberating action. According to Freire (1982, 65),

Man is a being who exists in and with the world. Since the basic condition for conscientization is that its agent must be a subject (that is, a conscious being), conscientization, like education, is specifically and exclusively a human process. It is as conscious beings that humans are not only in the world, but with the world, together with other humans. Only humans, as 'open' beings, are able to achieve the complex operation of simultaneously transforming the world by their action and grasping and expressing the world's reality in their creative language. Humans fulfill the necessary condition of being with the world because they are able to gain objective distance from it. Without this objectification, whereby a person also objectifies themselves, humans would be limited to being in the world, lacking both self-knowledge and knowledge of the world.

In the Latin American context, this consciousness of being with and in the world has had a direct relationship with the development of critical thinking concerning the developmentalist, modernizing ideology that was marked by dictatorship until the 1980s. Paulo Freire was a key thinker concerning the political importance of education and the need for, and pedagogical methods for, consciousness-raising education as a key step toward social transformation and working class emancipation. His emblematic *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Freire 1987) found a powerful echo among Latin American movements. The MST was one of the movements that was most inspired by the educational–political praxis of the Freirian legacy. Other key thinkers whose work has influenced the educational practice and pedagogy of the MST include the early Soviet educational theorists Anton

Makarenko (Luedemann 2002) and Moisey Pistrak (2003, 2009), as well as Antonio Gramsci (1982).

For many social movements, this critical awareness of education has implied an understanding of the foundations of the model of modernity in Latin America, particularly by identifying the educational–pedagogical dimension of how power is built, as well as the subjective conditions for the expansion of capitalism and how it has defeated and subjugated lives and cultures. For precisely this reason, the MST understands the importance of appropriating education as both a tactic and a strategy of resistance, conceiving it as socio-historical praxis, as influenced by historical actors that make up a dialectic movement of political and cultural forces that work in diverse spheres of the struggle for hegemony (Barbosa 2013b).

In the political framework of Brazilian agrarian matters, the MST places education at the center of the debate, understanding that the struggle for land is also an historical struggle over education. To conceive of an agrarian reform project implies taking sides in the struggle for hegemony between opposing projects and in the battle of ideas. Thus, the MST posits a durable link between *resistance*, *education* and *politics*, as the central pathway toward breaking the metaphorical enclosures of *latifúndio* and *knowledge*. This implies developing a concept and praxis of education in which:

the act of education should provide elements for understanding the make-up and political–ideological and cultural array of socio-political forces that are linked to particular social relations; it ought to be a historical project of knowledge that forges critical awareness of the political sphere and aims at a horizon of social transformation as the expression and construction of society itself (Barbosa 2013b, 253).

In this vein, the MST places education among its first and principal steps in the struggle, and pushes a debate based on three pillars: (1) the enforcement of the constitutional right of access of all to education; (2) the responsibility of the state in enforcing this constitutional right; and (3) the collective construction of a new *education* and *pedagogy* in harmony with the daily needs of peasant peoples in an effort to strengthen their cultural and political identity with and in the countryside (Barbosa 2013b).

Thus the MST sees education as a new factor in the struggle for agrarian reform, particularly as a *locus* of forging a critical historical–political actor, and *school*, *land* and *dignity* become banners of struggle (Barbosa and Soares 2012). Education and pedagogy are interwoven in the context of the land occupations, whose daily demands were the threads that linked the MST’s earliest experiences in education (Caldart 2004; MST 2005a).

Due to widespread illiteracy in rural areas and the low level of formal schooling of the participants in the encampments created by the earliest occupations, the first tasks of education were basic literacy and primary schools. The MST considered that being able to read and write was fundamental to *landless* political training (MST 2005a). Bringing literacy to actors in the birthplace of *landless* resistance, i.e., the encampment, was the materialization of *education for liberation*, as Paulo Freire taught (Freire 1987).

The Itinerant Schools were the MST’s first educational–pedagogic experience (Harnecker and Bassegio 2003; MST 2005a, 2008a). They were mobile due to the dynamic of the struggle for land: occupying unproductive land requires the physical presence of MST families, children and adolescents in that space of resistance. Thus, the Itinerant Schools undertake a double political role: to guarantee that families with children remain at the encampment, and that children and adolescents will enroll in a school based on

new notions of education and school, with educational–political formation for resistance and the struggle for land (Barbosa 2013b).

For the MST, the Itinerant School was the ‘first school of life in the movement, following the rhythm of the encampment’ (MST 2008a, 7). The school

is based on organization, since the encampment itself is a giant school. Whoever spends time there will never be the same again, since the direct action that takes place there, in and of itself has a formative and educational nature. (MST 2008b, 58)

The Itinerant School was a *new possibility of schooling* (MST 2008a), ‘a new pedagogical and political presence wherever the encampment is located’ (MST 2008b, 7), ‘born from necessity and from the struggle of the encamped, especially the children’ (MST 2005a, 188).

The first experiences with Itinerant Schools began in the early 1980s in the encampments of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, and gradually spread to other southern states including Paraná and Santa Catarina. While the schools were founded as part of the resistance in the camps, the MST fought for their official recognition. They used Basic Education Law no. 5.692/71 (LDBEN) to legitimize the schools. The first state to accept the legal argument and recognize the schools was Rio Grande do Sul in 1996, followed shortly by Paraná, Santa Catarina and Piauí (MST 2005a, 2008a; Camini 2009).

The Itinerant Schools encouraged internal reflection in the MST regarding the emancipatory nature of education. It was increasingly clear that the MST had to define *what it understood by education, what pedagogy needed to be developed, and what role both played in the struggle for land and agrarian reform*. In 1985, the Education Sector and the [Political] Formation Sector were created by the MST, as internal spaces dedicated to thinking out the educational–political project of the movement. They were charged with the responsibility of organizing the ongoing process of *landless* education and political training.

More specifically, the Education Sector began as a space to coordinate the work of the earliest Itinerant Schools (that were not yet recognized by the State), and over time came to have responsibility for all of the MST’s educational–pedagogical processes, from pre- and primary school through higher education. It is the space for debating curricular contents, teaching philosophy and methods, school schedules and programs, teacher training and, above all, defining the nature of the educational–political project comprising EdC. The Formation Sector is responsible for processes of political training or ‘formation’ for the militants, or cadre, of the MST, and of other social movements from Brazil and other countries, particular the organizations that are members of *La Via Campesina*. This sector coordinates political formation courses in each state in Brazil, and the MST’s political training schools, like the Florestan Fernandes National School (ENFF). While education and formation are distinct processes in the MST, they share many of the same pedagogical methods and philosophies, and are part of the same political project, through which they are in constant dialog with each other.

The conformation of the Education and Formation Sectors is an expression of a concept and a characteristic that is integral to the educational–political project of the MST, that they call ‘organicity’. In the simplest terms, this is a word used by Latin American social movements to refer to the degree of internal organization. The MST calls it ‘a word we created to indicate the relationship that one part of our organization should have with the rest. Yet it should not be a theoretical relationship, but rather physical, practical, and possess a certain ethos’ (MST 2001, 30–31).

The principle of organicity comes to life through the MST's internal organization. An example is the basic unit of organization known as the *Núcleo de Base* or NB ('grassroots cluster'), which is either 10 people (in the case of students in a class, or members of a collective, for example), or 10 families (in the case of a settlement or encampment). The NBs consisting of families are grouped into Brigades, which consist of a certain number of families who take charge of distributing the work among the different collectives as they are formed. The NBs, Sectors, Collective Coordination and Brigade Coordination belong to the Brigade (MST 2005b). The NBs are a true expression of the organicity of the MST, whose responsibilities include making the collective an educational space, i.e., where socially interactive work in the collective generates the exchange of experiences and political debate, as well as the political formation of the *landless* militant. Among their responsibilities are organizing and coordinating meetings, and encouraging dialogue among the collectives of the MST in order to carry out collective decisions. A principal concern is guaranteeing equal gender participation and cultural diversity in political and educational formation (MST 2005b).

At both encampments and settlements, the MST gradually consolidated an educational-political project with an educational outlook and a pedagogic practice closely linked to the struggle for agrarian reform. In addition to the Itinerant Schools, schools of educational and political formation were founded, such as the aforementioned ENFF, the Josué de Castro Education Institute (IEJC), the Milton Santos School and the Frei Humberto Training Center. At these schools, the educational process is an opportunity to strengthen one's identity, culture and political awareness as a *landless* militant. At MST schools, the building of knowledge is intrinsically related with the political dimension of the MST's Popular Agrarian Reform Project (MST 2005a, 2008a, 2014).

Organicity is found throughout the MST's political-educational project, in its political narrative, and in teaching documents and materials used to train the MST's political cadres in education and politics. Students in all schools, courses and political formation spaces are organized in NBs, in which, for example, they self-organize, discuss readings and elect representatives to the collective coordination of the school or course (together with teachers, administrators and other staff). In a document studied at the formation courses for grassroots militants, the MST outlines the political importance of the organicity concept in political organization (MST 2009, 22):

Organicity transforms a mass movement by reducing its spontaneity and guaranteeing its ongoing nature or permanence in time. Organicity has the power to set the masses into motion at any time, as well as to keep them organized via their NBs.

One of the principal political legacies of the MST's reflection on the agrarian question (from a perspective of both class-struggle and of Latin American resistance movements) is the idea that *different* (or *Other*) education and pedagogy can only come from profound analysis of the current historical period or conjuncture. This involves a critique of the historical role that education has played and the importance of its political dimension in building an agrarian reform project from a grassroots perspective. In the MST's long struggle, it has built an education based on epistemological framework arising from the political struggle (Barbosa 2013b).

Although *school* was the MST's earliest concern of how to make its educational-political project a reality, the concept of pedagogy gradually became its central thrust. Thus, the concept of the *pedagogy of the MST*, as explained by Roseli Caldart of the MST's National Education Sector (Caldart 2004, 329):

the MST itself is pedagogical matrix made up from the real life experience of political formation practices through which the landless are prepared; not by creating a new pedagogy, but by picking and choosing among the different pedagogies created throughout the history of human education. In other words, the Pedagogy of the MST constructed its own pedagogy, by mobilizing and incorporating into its dynamic (organicity) different pedagogical frameworks developed by others.

In the book *Pedagogy of the MST*, the MST is the quintessential *pedagogical actor* and the principal educator of the landless (Caldart 2004). Caldart shows how the educational–political process goes far beyond the school setting, as it strengthens all the sites and activities of the struggle for land. So education occurs during marches, land occupations, congresses – i.e., in all activities on the MST’s political agenda. A phrase commonly used in the MST is: ‘all spaces are formative’. That signifies that learning does not take place just in the classroom, but also on the picket line, in cultural activities, in cleaning the school and washing dishes in the communal kitchen, etc. (Barbosa 2012a, 2013b). This means both that in all these activities we are forged and learn important things as human beings, as activists, as cadre, as militants, and that each of these activities can and should be designed with pedagogical intentionality, to maximize their formative utility (Barbosa 2013b).

In my view, the *pedagogy of the MST* is transformed into a *geo-pedagogy of knowledge* (Barbosa 2013b): by this I mean the relation between pedagogy and socio-cultural elements situated in *territory* and *culture*, and their articulation in the political plan of resistance. In this sense, the consolidation of a geo-pedagogy of knowledge takes place in the daily process of struggle. This is the moment of construction of the pedagogical aspects of the theoretical production of the MST, which sustains its political praxis, and, in a dialectical relationship, builds the *landless* identity in an organic relationship with resistance situated in land and territory (Barbosa 2013a, 2013b).

After defining its own notion of *education* and *pedagogy* and developing a process to prepare landless activists in the daily confrontation with large-scale land holdings created by the enclosure of land, known as *latifúndio*, the MST went a step further in its multifaceted confrontation with large landholdings. The MST began to define educational contents and methods that essentially defend current structures of property and power and teach conformity, as the metaphorical fences that enclose a *latifúndio of knowledge* (Barbosa 2013b). These are institutionally anchored within national educational policy and institutions. Thus the MST places education squarely in the perspective of the struggle between different political projects, and goes further by introducing an epistemic–political element into the analysis, i.e., the rural–urban or countryside–city dichotomy, and by consolidating a new educational paradigm for the Brazilian countryside (Barbosa 2013b, 2013c, 2014). The MST does so by problematizing the double nature of Brazilian sociocultural formation – molded both by Portuguese colonial political, ideological and economic domination, and by class differentiation under capitalism – and placing it squarely within the context of the dispute between political projects for the countryside (Barbosa 2015).

According to the MST, the *logic of the city* historically prevailed in official education, to the detriment of the countryside, and that educational policy actively contributed to the rural–urban dichotomy. The idea of *rural education* as conceived by the Brazilian state is *segregationist* at its heart, and is empty of any real alternative project in benefit of the rural population (Barbosa 2015).

The logic of *rural education* penetrated the social imaginary, and on-the-ground Brazilian educational policy in rural areas was characterized by its precarious nature, due to the lack of resources provided by public policies and the lack of qualified professionals who

could address theoretical, methodological and pedagogical issues in rural education. Limited access to schools, where the few that actually exist typically have insufficient grade levels, has led to low-quality education for peasants. The state's notion of *rural education* was imbued with a rationality that sustained the rural–urban dichotomy, seeing the countryside solely as an appendage and labor reserve of the city (Barbosa 2014).

In Brazil, this dichotomy expressed itself in the development model implemented in the 1950s, characterized by growing urbanization and an emphasis on cities as manufacturing and cultural centers. In this context, *rural education* was reinforced as a way of perpetuating the exploitation of the countryside's productive capabilities. In this type of education, the city is held up as the epitome of modernity and progress, while the countryside is addressed only as the site of agricultural production and supply of cheap labor (Barbosa 2015).

From my perspective, we need to unpack this analysis to understand other facets of the MST's educational–political project. It is my belief that this project brings together four central concepts (Barbosa 2014, 2015):

- (1) The formal schooling dimension;
- (2) The political–educational principle of *organicity*;
- (3) The production of theory based on political praxis;
- (4) The epistemic–political dimension of the educational project.

There is a dialectical relation among these four core concepts, where education as political formation both informs and is informed by the political praxis of the movement. Thus, in order to challenge the model of agribusiness in the Brazilian countryside – a project built by the agrarian bourgeoisie in alliance with the governments of both Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Luís Inácio Lula da Silva – the MST responds with EdC as an educational–political project aimed at achieving Popular Agrarian Reform.

EdC in the dispute between opposing projects for the Brazilian countryside

Although the MST began its initial educational experiences with the curriculum of the Itinerant Schools, it gradually understood that peasant peoples have a right to education at all levels, from primary to university studies. This revelation comes from a critique of the role that the countryside and the peasant have had within Brazil's modernization model, as well as the role of education, i.e., *rural education*, in the model (Barbosa 2014).

To counter the internal logic of *rural education*, the MST posits EdC as an educational–political–cultural project that inaugurates a different way of confronting the state in the battle over educational projects, 'by stressing the struggle over public policy that will guarantee for people of the countryside the right to education and, particularly, to schools' (Caldart et al. 2012, 259).

The MST calls for a debate on the long-standing denial to country people of the right to educate themselves, attend school, learn to read and write, choose a livelihood for themselves and build a collective future. This debate has visibilized the historical reality of rural Brazil, putting forth an alternative project of education *in* and *of* the countryside (Kolling, Cerioli, and Caldart 2002). EdC emerges from an historic debate that questions, on symbolic, ideological and political levels, the dichotomous framework of the urban–rural relation. In the words of Caldart (2008), this is part of an 'invented contradiction' between city and countryside, which is consolidated and perpetuated in official education and curricula that only address urban people. To overcome this contradiction, it is essential

to consolidate a concept of education and a pedagogical practice that recognizes and strengthens, with intentionality, the identity and ethos of the countryside.

The MST and *La Vía Campesina*–Brazil¹² are in the vanguard of this political debate in the sense of deepening the political dimensions of both training of cadre and of education and access to schools and university education for rural people. Both recognize the importance of strengthening a political project of education that goes beyond the pedagogical dimension of schooling, and builds education linked to the socio-cultural particularities and identities of peasant peoples. They conceive of education based on dialogue among different knowledges and ways of knowing (*diálogo de saberes*),¹³ which, tempered by the struggle, strengthens the ethos of peasant identity in the countryside, as a fundamental aspect in the emancipatory political formation of human beings. The MST is the central historical–political subject that called for the debate concerning the collective construction of a new education as both a principle and as an historical–political project for the countryside, the so-called EdC (Barbosa 2013a, 2014, 2015).

For three decades the MST has broadened the debate by questioning the class nature of the Brazilian state and its rural policies, particularly those linked to the right to an education, from which spring the guarantee and legitimacy of other rights and, among these, the right to Agrarian Reform. The MST and *La Vía Campesina* widened the political terms of the debate by calling on other historical actors to help create a political and socio-cultural project for the Brazilian countryside. Noteworthy organizations that were convened include the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), the National Union of Family Agriculture Schools (UNEFAB), member organizations of *La Vía Campesina*, the National Conference of Bishops (CNBB) and, much later, the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG).¹⁴

These disparate actors are united in a common demand: the right of country people to an education. The struggle begins by denouncing the historical absence in Brazil of a political education project for the countryside, as witnessed by the *Statement of the National Education Council* (Parecer CNE-CEB No. 36/2001):

in spite of Brazil being an eminently agricultural country, rural education was not even mentioned in the 1824 and 1891 constitutions, demonstrating leaders' general lack of interest in education and the specific weaknesses of an agrarian economy based on *latifúndio* and slave labor.

¹²The following organizations and social movements make up *La Vía Campesina*–Brazil: the MST, the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), the Rural Youth Pastoral (PJR), the Small Farmers Movement (MPA), the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB), the Movement of Peasant Women (MMC), artisanal fisherfolk, and representatives of indigenous peoples, such as the Missionary Indigenous Council (CIMI).

¹³Defined by Martínez-Torres and Rosset (2014:982) as: 'A collective construction of emergent meaning based on dialog between people with different historically specific experiences, cosmologies, and ways of knowing, particularly when faced with new collective challenges in a changing world. Such dialog is based on exchange among differences and on collective reflection, often leading to emergent re-contextualization and resignification of knowledges and meanings related to histories, traditions, territorialities, experiences, processes and actions. The new collective understandings, meanings and knowledges may form the basis for collective actions of resistance and construction of new processes'.

¹⁴See Tarlau (2015) for one version of the 'late arrival' of CONTAG to the EdC scene. She also provides an analysis (somewhat 'CONTAG-centric') of how both the MST and CONTAG, historic and current antagonists who sometimes work together pragmatically, have been important in terms of interaction with the state (not the subject of the present paper).

EdC arose as a counterpoint to rural education within a political debate characterized by historical class antagonisms that were anchored in the socio-cultural and political structure, and by profound contradictions in rural–urban relations (Barbosa 2015). The class conflict that runs through the struggle for land and for the right to education needs an historical–political actor, tempered by the resistance movement, i.e., the rural working class. It is this class which, with its voice, life experiences and resistance, would build an educational project for the Brazilian countryside and a relationship with a political project that strengthened its rural *ethos* and identity, a *sine qua non* condition for peasant youth to remain in the countryside.

It was in this context that the MST and its allies would mobilize to create a movement known as ‘For an Education for the Countryside’, to demand that federal, state and municipal governments prepare and implement coherent public policies of an educational project for the Brazilian countryside.

Three important events laid the foundation: the First National Conference of Educators for Agrarian Reform in 1997 (ENERA), and the two National Conferences for an Education for the Countryside, held in 1998 and 2004. The ENERA was an MST initiative, in association with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Education, Science, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) and the University of Brasília (UnB). Its objective was to call for a wide-ranging debate regarding the political dimension of education and its importance in building and consolidating an agrarian reform from a rural working-class perspective.

The ENERA inaugurated an enabling political space that encouraged building national recognition for a rural educational project. The next step involved deepening the terms of the debate by outlining in the epistemic and political spheres the type of education that was required, and defining the actors needed to consolidate the educational project (Barbosa 2013a, 2013b, 2015).¹⁵

With this overarching understanding, the First National Conference of Basic Education for the Countryside was held, the first time a political discussion focused on rural matters and the first time an education that emanates from *the rural* was inscribed in the country’s political agenda. The introductory text (Arroyo, Caldart, and Molina 2004, 22) of this First Conference held that:

All those who participated in promoting this event share the conviction that it is possible and necessary to think about implementing a development project for Brazil that includes millions of people who currently live in the countryside and recognize that education, in addition to being a right, is part of a strategy of inclusion.

One of the main contributions of the First Conference was the political scope of the agenda that emerged from the demand for education, as shown by the previous document (Arroyo, Caldart, and Molina 2004, 22):

¹⁵After submitting this paper for publication, the II ENERA was held, in September of 2015 (which I attended as part of the MST delegation from Ceará). The objective was precisely to push the debate of EdC as a political project. A central topic was the need to build a strategic alliance between the specific struggle for EdC and the wider struggle for the defense of public education in both the city and the countryside. Other key points were the political role of EdC in the struggle for land and for agrarian reform, the need to give a central role to agroecology in EdC curricula, the denunciations of the widespread closures of rural schools, and the demand for better infrastructure for schools located in MST encampments and agrarian reform settlements.

Although the emphasis is on education, the debate is widened to include topics such as the options available for a development project for our country. We note that this seems to us, in fact, to be the great challenge posed by the current historical moment: create and implement an education project linked to development strategies, which should include, in our opinion, human development for all Brazilians.

The First National Conference for an Education for the Countryside brings together three epistemic–political dimensions for *education* in line with the rural social movements (based on Barbosa 2015):

- (1) *Education as a political project for the countryside*: The education proposed by the First Conference is of a political nature and emerges from the long struggle of the rural working class. So, the first central concept of debate revolves around questioning the conceptual and political nature of *rural education*, while the second topic involves the epistemic-political meaning attributed to EdC.

A proposal for an Education for the Countryside as an educational–political project should distinguish its pedagogic particularities, as well as its role in structuring a cultural and political subjectivity within a framework of class struggle, i.e., an indispensable condition for preparing the people of the countryside (Barbosa 2014, 2015). In the words of the First National Conference, this means defining education (Arroyo, Caldart, and Molina 2004, 23):

in the broad sense of a process of human political formation, that builds cultural and political references that allow people and social agents to intervene in their current reality. [...] The main discussion in this Conference seems to us to be how to guarantee that all people of the countryside have access to a quality education that is relevant to the interests of those who live in the countryside. At stake is ‘which school?’, the educational project to be developed therein, and the necessary link that that education must have with a specific development strategy for the countryside.

- (2) *The countryside as a territory for an educational–political project*: Here we find the epistemic meaning of EdC, i.e., the meaning attributed to the term ‘for’ the countryside (Barbosa 2014, 2015). Thus, a second central concept that emerged from the First National Congress is the contrast between the categories *countryside* and *rural area* – a useful differentiation in defining an educational–political project.

To understand further, we revisit Fernandes’s analysis (2008), which defined territory as a fundamental geographic category for encompassing all social relations and power structures. This category encompasses a sense of multi-dimensionality and multi-territoriality. As Fernandes (2008, 55) explains:

territory is a totality, but it is not one. To conceive of territory as one, is to understand it as a space for governance, but that it is a particular type of territory, while ignoring other forms. [...] We stress that all territorial units form totalities, since they contain in themselves all dimensions of development: political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental. Since all territories are social creations, we can have various forms that are in perpetual conflict. To think of territory as one, is a way of ignoring its conflicts.

Fernandes (2008) argues that in fact multiple territories share the same physical space, that every territoriality stakes out the frontiers of a certain political project and actors, whose plan is influenced by a paradigm that has been ideologically and politically constructed. To demonstrate, he posits the example of analyzing

agrarian reform with two opposing paradigms: one linked to peasant territory and another linked to capital and agribusiness's view of territory. Evidently, the matter of land and agrarian reform for a particular physical space will be broached in different ways, in line with the political intentionality of one or the other paradigm. In the words of Fernandes (2008, 44): 'for the paradigm of the agrarian question, the solution will come from confronting capital [...] while for the paradigm of agrarian capitalism, the solution lies in integrating with capital'.

Addressing the agrarian question from one or the other paradigm will go beyond the types of responses found in public policy and will define which of the historical-political actors will champion a particular project for the countryside. Specifically regarding educational policy, the territorial paradigm in question will be decisive in the perspective attributed to education, i.e., in the nature of its content, in its didactic-pedagogic orientation, in its educational actors and, above all, in the political intentionality contained therein. So, by understanding education as a dimension of territorial development, we expect to find that its political intentionality has a different nature in each of the paradigms under study.

Based on this analytical perspective, *countryside* is a territory in dispute between different political projects, and therefore *countryside* is a central category in the education project supported by the rural social movements and synthesized by the EdC concept, in contrast to the perspective inherent in rural education. This is laid out in the First National Conference document (Arroyo, Caldart, and Molina 2004, 25, 27):

We decided to use the expression *countryside*, and reject *rural area*, in order to include a reflection on the meaning of *peasant work*, and on the social and cultural struggles of groups that currently are working to guarantee that this livelihood survives [...] we want to clarify our understanding that discussion on education in the rural area cannot just be about itself [rural education], but rather must be inserted in a discussion of the wider problematic in the countryside now [...]. We are defending agrarian reform and agricultural policy for peasant agriculture. Our proposal is to conceive a primary school education for the countryside linked to the interests and the socio-cultural and economic development of the people who live and work in the countryside, respecting their historical and cultural differences.

From the analytical viewpoint of the First National Conference, removing *in the countryside* and replacing it with *for and by the countryside* represented a paradigm shift, overcoming the solely geographic dimension, i.e., one that is limited to having schools in the rural area. EdC is thus a dimension of an 'historical project of knowledge', an educational-political project for the countryside. By this I am referring to the notion that the conception of an educational act that strengthens peasant identity, as situated in territory, runs throughout the defense of EdC. Thus, it is critical that the content of this education recover both an historical perspective and a prospective perspective, in the sense of strengthening the social fabric of the peasant community, and giving it the tools to think out new ways to remain in the countryside and to improve the subjective and material conditions of existence, based on peasant ambitions and perspective.

- (3) *For basic education for the countryside*: The third central concept discussed at the First National Conference involves political denunciation of the historical deficiency of the National Education Plan to fully implement basic education in rural areas. Thus, demands call for public policy to guarantee *basic education by and for the countryside* in the framework of a *political project of development* for the countryside, infused with pedagogic principles, concepts and methods that ensure the building and strengthening of a countryside identity (Arroyo, Caldart, and Molina 2004).

Based on these three epistemic–political concerns, the preparatory text for the First National Conference underscores two challenges regarding the epistemic and political nature of EdC: (1) the long-standing need to re-conceptualize the categories of *education* and *countryside*, in order to give them epistemic meaning related to the socio-cultural idiosyncrasies of the peoples of the countryside, linked to the rural social movements' political agenda; and (2) inserting this debate in a constitutional framework that argues that the right to education can and must be juridically enforced. Thus, education should be guaranteed within public policies, insofar as it is a right established in the constitution.

By defining the epistemic–political terms of *education* and *countryside*, social movements increased political pressure for the legal implementation of the right to education in the countryside, leading to preparation of a legal framework that spurred enactment of a National Policy of Education for the Countryside, in accordance with the particularities of its people (Arroyo, Caldart, and Molina 2004, 22; Barbosa 2014, 2015).

The evolution of EdC at the level of policy

At the National Conference, the *Baselines for Preparing a Proposal for Basic EdC*¹⁶ were drawn up in which EdC was proposed as a political topic in line with the struggles of the rural social movements, which contained two key elements: (1) that it should be thought of as a political project for national development, and (2) that it should be consolidated as a people's, socio-cultural and economic development project for the countryside.

The Second National Conference for Basic Education for the Countryside of 2004 went deeper into the epistemic–political basis of building an education project for the Brazilian countryside. The importance of *school* in consolidating a National Policy of Education for the Countryside was stressed, without losing sight of the fact that it, in itself, it is not what is principally behind transformation. School is conceived as a concept that transcends its physical walls and allows a pedagogical and formative practice that goes beyond its physical space, and is articulated dialectically with its social environment, represented by the agrarian reform settlements and by other rural communities.

The First and Second National Conferences brought together representatives who demanded that the Brazilian state validate access to education, as called for by the Brazilian constitution, and defend public policies that legalize the implementation of EdC in an effort to encourage rural residents to remain in the countryside.

The debate that took place at the ENERA and at the two National Conferences, and the immense political pressure brought to bear on the state by social movements, led to the conquest and eventual implementation of three milestone legislative measures:

- (1) Creation of the National Program of Education for the Agrarian Reform (PRONERA) by Decree No. 10–98 of 16 April 1998;
- (2) Approval of the Operational Guidelines for Basic Education in Rural Schools, by means of Resolution CNE-CEB No. 1, dated 3 April 2002;
- (3) Creation of a Permanent Working Group on Rural Education, mandated by Decree No. 1.374, dated 3 July 2003. The Permanent Group has an inter-institutional basis, with participation of rural social movements.

¹⁶Original title of the document, translated into English.

PRONERA¹⁷ is a funded public policy for EdC in areas of agrarian reform, specifically for Education of Young People and Adults – EJA. Its main objective is strengthening education in agrarian reform areas by proposing, developing, funding and coordinating educational projects, whose curriculum and methodology are to address the specific needs of the Brazilian countryside (BRASIL 1999). This is handled by joint management among public entities and civil-society organizations, i.e., rural social or union movements, public or civil, nonprofit, secondary and higher education teaching entities, the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) and the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA).

PRONERA is undoubtedly one of the MST's and social movements' main achievements in terms of creating an opening in the public policy sphere, and gaining funding, for educational programs linked to EdC that respond to the specific needs and demands of the countryside. It was not a concession by the government; rather, it was a victory achieved through struggle, which required tactics of confrontation by these historical-political actors in the ideological arena, in the street and in the halls of government, overcoming the repression of protest.

As I have shown, the MST began its education project with the Itinerant Schools under the *black tarpaulin* of the land occupation encampments by bringing literacy to children, young people and adults, all victims of an education policy that did not guarantee them anything, in spite of the supposed universalization of educational opportunities. In PRONERA, Brazilian peasant social movements achieved a political victory, opening the door to a range of projects, from basic preschool education at the start, all the way through university higher education today.

Not just rural children were excluded from the formal education system, but youth and adults as well. Thus the MST also fought for educational opportunities at higher levels as well.¹⁸ Among the EJA programs across Brazil, the Josué de Castro Educational Institute (IEJA) experience from 1998 to 2002 was outstanding.¹⁹ Another program funded by PRONERA consisted of the first and second Education Projects for Agrarian Reform Workers in the state of Ceará in the northeast, with 4600 youth and adult beneficiaries from MST settlements.²⁰ It is also important to highlight the MST experiences with teacher training: for example, the first group of the *Formação do Magisterio da Terra* ('Teacher Training for the Land') held in Braga, Rio Grande do Sul in 1996, or the version of the *Magisterio da Terra* held in Ceará between 2006 and 2008, where we trained teachers for MST encampments and settlements (Barbosa and Soares 2009, 2012).

Under the slogan 'Education: Our Right, and the State's Obligation', the MST was able to finance a range of education projects. PRONERA resources initially covered EJA needs in MST settlements and encampments. But, as time went on, the MST together with other

¹⁷Elsewhere I have analyzed at length the democratization of access to education by rural peoples through PRONERA: Barbosa (2012, 2013c, 2015).

¹⁸The earliest examples are documented in the Caderno de Educação no. 3, de 1994, produced by the Education Sector of the MST.

¹⁹According to data I had access to during a visit to the IEJC, during that time period they created two secondary school and four high school programs, one of which is documented in Cadernos do ITERRA no. 12 (2007).

²⁰This project was carried out between 2006 and 2008 with PRONERA resources, under an agreement between the MST-Ceará, the *Universidade Estadual do Ceará* and INCRA. I participated in the project as Educational Coordinator. We have documented this experience in terms of its scope, limits and challenges faced under the dispute between political projects (Barbosa and Gadelha 2009; Barbosa and Soares 2012).

rural movements came to see that the right to education had to be seen in its political dimension, that education must be used to consolidate an alternative project for the Brazilian countryside (Barbosa 2013b). That meant they wanted higher education as well, and working together with several public universities they were able to get PRONERA to finance undergraduate programs for peasants.^{21,22}

Today, PRONERA programs have reached some 500,000 young people and adults, in particular militants of the MST and other rural social movements, including those of indigenous people, peasants and rural trade unions.²³ I have previously concluded that the incorporation of higher education into the EdC project marks a particularly significant conquest in the process of democratization of access to education for rural peoples (Barbosa 2013a, 2015). It should be mentioned that PRONERA is no longer the only source of funding for EdC. It is where agrarian reform beneficiaries (i.e., the MST) can submit educational projects for funding. But part of the success of the rural movements is that EdC is now a policy, with laws, regulations and budgets from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), and various state and municipal governments.

With PRONERA and the *Baselines for Preparing a Proposal for Basic EdC*, rural social movements gradually made strides – with struggles and protests every step of the way – in extending PRONERA and gaining the formulation and implementation of a legal framework with complementary guidelines, regulations and principles for developing public policy for *EdC*. In addition to PRONERA and the Operational Guidelines for Basic Education in Schools for the Countryside, the following entities and measures were added to the legal framework:

- (1) General Coordination of Education for the Countryside, linked to the Secretary of Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity of the Ministry of Education, created in 2004;
- (2) Decree CNE-CEB No. 23–2007, from Resolution CNE-CEB No. 02–2008, that defines EdC as a specific method for the people of the countryside in their differing contexts and prioritizes adapting curricula to peasant reality;
- (3) Decree No. 7.352, approved in 2010, regarding Policy for Education for the Countryside, highlights the responsibility of the three levels of public administration in scaling up and evaluating basic and higher level education for the peasant population. Also, Resolution No. 04–2010 instituted the National Curricula Guidelines for Basic Education, as defined by EdC, a modality of Basic Education;
- (4) The National Program for Education for the Countryside – PRONACAMPO, launched in 2012.

²¹The *Universidade de Brasília* (UnB) was one of the first to offer undergraduate programs funded by PRONERA. Gradually other universities were added, like the *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais* (UFMG), the *Universidade Federal da Bahia* (UFBA) and the *Universidade Federal do Sergipe* (UFSE). Today, there are more than 60 Brazilian public universities that offer undergraduate and graduate programs under PRONERA in the following areas: ‘Pedagogy of the Land’, rural education, agriculture, social work, law, geography, history, veterinary medicine, and diverse graduate and specialization courses.

²²In my case, in 2005 I taught sociology in the bachelor’s program on Pedagogy for the Land at the *Universidade Federal do Ceará* (UFC).

²³In the second ENERA, which took place in 2015, the Second National Study on Education and Agrarian Reform (PNERA) was presented. It contains a database of all PRONERA projects from 1998 through 2011, and is available at IPEA (2015).

The legal measures that make up the national policy of EdC allowed the gradual implementation of EdC in areas of agrarian reform – for example, in building new primary, middle, adult education and high schools in rural settlements. Importantly, one of the strategic policy objectives of the MST coordination with universities is to ensure the undergraduate and graduate teacher training of educators, training with a ‘social movement perspective’, so that they can take on management and teaching responsibilities in rural schools.²⁴ These are concrete examples of a social movement ‘owning’ an education policy, where community assemblies of settlement families, in coordination with the MST’s Education Sector, teachers and students at the schools, and technical experts from the secretaries of education, decide on matters such as the locations of schools and their pedagogical practices.

Yet PRONERA and PRONACAMPO are beset by tensions and challenges. In essence, these programs are spaces inside state policy that are contested by social movements and the allies of agribusiness and the rural rightwing linked to landowners. Examples include:

- (1) Typically there are bureaucratic delays of up to 11 months in disbursing funds for PRONERA projects, making it difficult to hold classes as scheduled, buy school supplies and pay teachers. Given these setbacks, the MST has used the *de facto* occupation as an immediate response for political pressure. PRONERA is a bureaucratic program, where delays can appear at many chokepoints. Often, a signature from the rector of the university is required for funds to be released, or official bodies hold up processing of key documents. The bureaucratic obstacles are in reality mechanisms used by an unwilling state to delay, demoralize and dismantle projects demanded by social movements. In 2008, at the Second National Meeting on Research on EdC, many of us present denounced these bureaucratic delays as an intentional instrument of disruption of projects financed by PRONERA. University researchers and professors, representatives of the Education Sector of the MST, and other participants in projects funded by PRONERA all protested, and this tension was an element of much debate during the meeting.

When confronted with these impasses, the MST typically resorts to *occupation as a political act* to bring immediate pressure to bear on reluctant bureaucrats and university administrators. Thus, there have been many occupations of university administration buildings and government offices (such as INCRA), to demand the immediate disbursement of financial resources, leading to tension, especially when confrontations with police take place (Barbosa and Carvalho 2009);

- (2) There have been mass rural-school closings by many state governments openly or discreetly opposed to the EdC policy. A total of 24,000 schools were closed over eight years,²⁵ and the MST has typically responded with public acts, direct action

²⁴An example of the programs consolidated under the National Policy for EdC are those in Ceará state. Since 2011, there have been four new rural high schools with the EdC program, curricula designed by the MST in negotiation with the state Board of Education, and MST militants who have gone through the teacher training programs among their administrators and teachers.

²⁵According to data from the School Census carried out by the Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies and Research, Ministry of Education and Culture (INEP-MEC), in 2009 there was a significant drop in the number of municipal- and state-level public schools in the rural area throughout Brazil’s five regions: 39 percent fewer in the Center-East and South, 22.5 percent fewer in the Northeast, 20 percent fewer in the Southeast and 14.4 percent fewer in the North. According to the same census, 37,000 rural schools were closed during the last 15 years.

and hearings, and in 2011 the MST held a 'School Closings are a Crime' national campaign, aimed at calling national attention to school closings. In addition to denunciation, the MST petitioned the executive, legislative and judicial branches for actions to restrain municipal and state governments around the country from arbitrarily closing schools.

From my perspective, this problem is a reflection of the weakness of the National Policy for EdC, especially in its legal dimension. One of the main contradictions in the field of public policy throughout Brazilian history has been non-compliance with the law, starting with the Constitution. From that perspective, although the MST, in coordination with other movements, has achieved a National Policy for EdC, states and municipalities are not actually obligated to implement the policy. For social movements, especially the MST, this means they start from zero over and over again in each state – that is, revisiting the entire EdC debate time and again with state and municipal Boards of Education, with the aim of pressuring public authorities to comply with the provisions of the National Policy. This has been a great challenge for the MST, as municipal governments are often 'intentionally' unaware of the national policy, or local and state governments simply are not forced to comply, allowing serious problems such as the closure of municipal schools in the countryside, often as political reprisals.

Nevertheless, the MST has made significant achievements with state governments, with the construction of rural secondary and high schools in states like Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná and Ceará, to name a few. But primary schools are under municipal jurisdiction, and that means ever more local battles that need to be fought. Beyond denouncing the arbitrary closings of rural schools, the MST calls on the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government to exercise their authority and roll back the closures;

- (3) Foot-dragging in the state- and municipal-level regulation of PRONERA by municipal secretaries of education, the entities charged with guaranteeing Primary Childhood Education. Although the state-level secretaries of education have gone further in implementing national policy, the greater challenge is convincing municipal secretaries of education to implement the policy, thus revealing the aforementioned legal ambiguity in Brazilian legislation. The national law actually fails to specify the obligatory nature of enforcing the policy at all levels of government, opening the door to intentional delays in implementation. In the meantime, work at the municipal level continues in a piecemeal manner, with some municipalities advancing while others drag their feet.

To illustrate this process, let me mention an ongoing process that I am part of, in the state of Ceará, in the municipality of Crateús, in the north central region of the state. The Education Sector of the MST, in coordination with the Collective of Educators of the Agrarian Reform, conducted meetings with the Municipal Secretary of Education with the aim of presenting the National Plan for EdC and demanding that it be implemented at the municipal level. One result was the carrying out, in March of 2015, of a joint seminar to discuss the conceptual and legal guidelines of the national policy and define a Municipal Education Plan of for the next 10 years, i.e., from 2016 to 2026. Typical of such debates and confrontations, the position of local officials is that it is sufficient to implement EdC at one school, while closing others altogether. As of the time of writing this essay, this has yet to be resolved, and offers a living example of the ongoing process of dispute all over Brazil;

- (4) Overcoming a very strong tendency in Brazilian education policy to over-emphasize the formal ‘school’ perspective. It is a continual struggle for the MST and other social movements to extend the concept of EdC beyond the official classroom model. This means disputing the curricular model and objectives, and the division of time between community, classroom and other spaces for learning, at every school and every university. And, in particular in secondary and high school settings, it means a major struggle against the models of student evaluation and grading imposed by the Secretaries of Education, which are based on homogenizing criteria promoted in Brazil by the World Bank;
- (5) Another challenge is to have a differentiated hiring process for teachers for rural schools. While PRONERA and the National Policy of EdC are major conquests that among other things give social movement militants access to university-level teacher training programs, preparing them to administer and teach at the new rural schools, they still have to pass through the standard teacher credentialization and hiring process in the Secretaries of Education, where the deck is stacked against prospective teachers with rural backgrounds. This process requires not only a university degree, but also both written and practical classroom exams. In no way do they get any points for being from the same rural area where the school is located, nor for having any specialized knowledge of or link to EdC. Despite this, the MST has sometimes managed to negotiate the hiring of teachers from the same settlements where the schools are located, which is always better for the schools and the teachers, but these teachers are typically taken on with second-class yearly contracts with no possibility of tenure. The Education Sector of the MST is currently negotiating for special hiring policies geared toward teachers with an EdC profile, that would more clearly meet the needs of the rural schools. But the lack of special hiring has so far led to a series of problems, such as: (1) teachers rotate constantly and usually are only around for 1 to 2 years, (2) new teachers have to be indoctrinated into EdC methods every single year, and (3) most of the teachers are rotated in from urban settings with no special skills, knowledge or interest in the rural setting.²⁶

The MST continually subverts the concepts of education, of pedagogy and of school/university, with new definitions forged in struggles for the right to education and the *diálogo de saberes* inherent to these struggles. Despite these obstacles and challenges, the far-sighted nature of the MST’s educational–political project and, particularly, its conquest through struggle for EdC, has constituted a significant victory in the fight over political projects in Brazil. Furthermore, the MST experience is in dialogue with and inspires other peasant resistance struggles in Latin America and the world, especially through *La Via Campesina*. Many members of peasant movements from the around the world have taken advantage of these exchanges with MST schools, which are inspiring peasant educational projects in many countries (see, e.g., Michi 2010).

Final considerations

As we have seen in this essay, the last 30 years have seen outcomes that respond, from below, to the patterns of domination imposed on the region since the Spanish–Portuguese

²⁶These issues have been the subject of much internal debate, in which I have been an active participant, in Ceará throughout 2014 and 2015.

colonization and to the imposition of the capitalist modernity project with its implications for land and territory appropriation by capital.

Every context of struggle evolves its own internal debate and political proposals. I have tried to lay out the process by which a Brazilian social movement, the MST, arose and put forth a political project of agrarian reform that, within the context of education and pedagogy, found a political dimension for preparing the historical–political *landless* actor. We have seen how EdC is a response by the MST, along with other Brazilian rural social movements, aimed at widening the debate over the agrarian question and the denial of rights to peasants, specifically the right to education and to remain in the countryside. This nationally organized alliance of rural social movements created an emancipatory project for the Brazilian countryside that has redefined the concepts of *education* and *countryside* in the epistemic–political sphere, based on the experiences of peasant actors.

The implementation of PRONERA is a genuine victory for the rural social movements, a paradigm shift of the concept of education, and a shift of public policy for socio-cultural and economic development of the countryside.

Furthermore, given its nature as a political project in the arena of hegemonic disputes, it was put forth as an essential part of the struggle for land and for agrarian reform. The synthesis of my contribution in this paper is to highlight that the MST is among the rural social movements that have gone furthest in defining a political project that creates a new *collective will*, in the sense of Gramsci (1975), expressed by building an historical–political actor who can construct an alternative political project aimed at emancipating the subaltern masses, i.e., the peasants of Brazil, and overcoming the hegemony of capital in the countryside. The achievement of PRONERA stimulated reflection and debate on EdC as part of an alternative development model for peasant territory in conjunction with a Popular Agrarian Reform project (Barbosa 2013b).

Part of the importance of implementing a program of this nature resides in creating specific public policies in line with the right of education enshrined in the Brazilian constitution. Note that the right to education is a guarantee of equality and universality, which recognizes the diversity of the actors in this achievement (Barbosa 2013b, 2015). From this perspective, I argue that there is an implicit dialectic in the right to EdC, insofar as it acknowledges the existence of a cultural and socio-historical basis of rural–urban differences. This recognition leads to the implementation of specific public policies to break the historical logic that excluded rural actors, by guaranteeing inclusion through egalitarian parameters in access to education (Barbosa 2013a, 2015).

In this struggle for hegemony, this is the first time in Brazilian political history that peasant movements have successfully intervened in governmental affairs and managed to enact public policy informed by their perspective. This demonstrates the ability of peasant actors to enter politics and advocate for a concept of education – from an epistemic perspective – that is in essence a political project. EdC is undeniably one of the MST's greatest contributions, achieved jointly with other peasant movements, in the arena of struggle with the state.

As political culture, EdC is a conceptual field of resistance, denunciation and proposals of an alternative educational–political project of opposition. EdC is conceived not just as a new concept, but also as a grassroots political project for the countryside in Brazil.

From a Latin American perspective, EdC raises several questions regarding the essence of modernity at an epistemic level, its political–economic conception of the world and its process of struggle for hegemony. It is a concrete experience of counteracting the logic of territorially voracious capital. For this reason, EdC is a genuine, modern response that is in ongoing dialogue with past experiences of Brazilian and Latin American resistance.

This is a political project that reaffirms that political praxis is constructed in real, concrete daily life, in a context permeated with the inherent contradictions of the class struggle.

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