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Learning to Fight: The MST's Escola Nacional and its Pedagogy of Resistance

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**LEARNING TO FIGHT:
THE MST'S *ESCOLA NACIONAL* AND ITS PEDAGOGY OF RESISTANCE**

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ABSTRACT

O Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, or Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST), has accomplished extensive land occupations and other socioeconomic and political gains by interjecting a class struggle in its agrarian reform platform. Thus, connected to its physical fight and demand for land, the MST from its inception has engaged in the political formation of *sem terra*—a process that “refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire 35). For the MST, this political formation is critical in the construction of an alternative socialist “nation that is free, wealthy, and just, a nation of citizens with no one left out” (Flavia 24).

In the last 22 years, Brazil’s shifting sociopolitical domestic and international policies, as well as the MSTs own varying needs, have influenced the different ways in which it has approached the issue of political formation. In the past, it has done so through the creation of different courses and partnerships, and even the creation of two national schools. The construction of the Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandes represents the MSTs need for *capacitação de quadros*—the development of technical and scientific skills among MST leaders. In this essay, I analyze the Escola Nacional’s multidimensional pedagogy based on work, study, organization, and human relations in training *sem terra* to better deal with the needs of their diverse realities. In so doing, I examine its pedagogy specifically in relation to its construction methodology, its organizational structures, the courses it offers, and its physical mechanisms. Moreover, I argue that culture represents a fifth dimension to the Escola Nacional’s multidimensional pedagogy, and provide a critique of the way the Escola Nacional and the MST as a whole have dealt with the issue of mental health. Finally, I include examples of the kinds of contributions the Escola Nacional’s students make upon return to their communities.

MST GENERAL HISTORY

Brazil's colonial legacy continues to shape the country's race, class, and power relations; the issue of agrarian reform exemplifies this colonial heritage. After the Portuguese crown distributed large plots of land to an elite minority, this minority maintained a monopoly over land ownership long after Brazil's independence in 1822. Today, Brazil has the highest concentration of land ownership in the world; just one percent of the nation's entire population owns 50% of its land (Dawkins 3). While some attempts have been made at agrarian reform in Brazil¹, they have met much resistance from the landed elite that remains in power. For example, when the government of João Goulart attempted to curtail the landed elite's power, this resulted in a military coup d'état and a 21 year-old dictatorship. The authoritarian regime itself then made attempts at agrarian reform, introducing the 1964 Land Law that stated: "Private property can be confiscated when its not cultivated or where there are conflicts between the owner and workers or environmental damage" (Martins 37)². Still, few upheld these and other land laws. The neglect of these laws, along with the general opposition to the dictatorship's repression in the late 70s and early 80s, served as the backdrop to the rise of numerous organized social movements fighting for agrarian reform.

O Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, or Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST), has achieved continuity for more than two decades despite shifting sociopolitical domestic and international landscapes. To date, the MST has garnered support in 23 of the 27 Brazilian states, and the close to two million people that have been involved with the MST have often come from different socioeconomic, regional, and cultural backgrounds. As

¹ Examples of attempts made before the MST include the *Ligas Camponesas* (in the mid 1960s), and the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (CPT) that organized small farmers in the 1970s and collaborated with the MST in the mid 80s

² Later Articles 184-191 of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution would defend land expropriations if lands did not serve a 'social function' (i.e. the employment of slave labor, environmental harm, unproductive lands).

of 2003, the MST had “forced the Brazilian government to redistribute 20 million acres of land to 350,000 families” (Wolford xiii).

The MST has accomplished its extensive land occupations and other socioeconomic and political gains by interjecting a class struggle in its agrarian reform platform. Thus, connected with its physical fight and demand for land, the MST from its inception has engaged in the political formation of its *militantes* and *dirigentes*³, a process that “refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire 35). For the MST, this political formation is critical in the construction of an alternative socialist “nation that is free, wealthy, and just, a nation of citizens with no one left out” (Flavia 24).

BRIEF HISTORY OF POLITICAL FORMATION WITHIN THE MST⁴

In the last 22 years, Brazil’s shifting sociopolitical domestic and international policies, as well as the MSTs own varying needs, have influenced the different ways in which it has approached the political formation of its *base*⁵, *militantes* and *dirigentes*. At first, political formation within the Movement consisted of *formação de lideranças*⁶, characterized by organizing *sem terra* in their respective encampments and settlements, developing a class consciousness, and collectively discussing specific issues such as recruitment. In 1985, the MST began to participate in week-long political formation courses administered by trade union schools in Catholic Churches. Simultaneously, the National Coordination of the MST offered political formation courses during its meetings, and in 1987 decided to offer a national

³ MST activists and leaders

⁴ The majority of this information, if not directly in quotes, is paraphrased and translated from the MST document: “A FORMAÇÃO NO/DO MST: trajetória, iniciativas e desafios de um processo coletivo.”

⁵ Includes all *sem terra*.

⁶ Leadership Building

*Monitores*⁷ two year-long course: “the principal objective was to form *dirigentes* to organize the Movement in the states, within our vision of an autonomous and independent Movement, with new characteristics and struggles”(A Formação)⁸. The MST then wanted to address the needs unique to the Movement, and consequently stopped participating in courses administered by trade union schools. Furthermore, due to the MSTs expansion to the Northeast of Brazil, the MST created different *Setores*⁹ in 1988, including a Formation Sector in charge of overseeing the political formation of the MST at its different levels (i.e. with the *base, militantes*, and *dirigentes*).

In the early 1990s, the growing MST nationwide expansion created a need to encourage collective forms of production, and the MST made attempts at mass political formation, through *Laboratórios Organizacionais de Centro/Campo*¹⁰. While these laboratories worked in organizing at a larger scale, they failed to acknowledge the diversity of MST realities and needs. Regional mini-laboratories then followed, which eventually gave birth to *Formação Integrada à Produção* (FIPs)¹¹—courses in which several *assentamentos* participated for a period of about 30 days. FIPs courses took into consideration local realities and became organized in alternating stages, allowing equal time for working the land and studying. These courses also took place at a regional level, and lasted anywhere from six to nine months. The Laboratories, mini-laboratories, and FIPs all served to emphasize the importance of collective organizing, linking this type of collective organization to production and their daily realities in their *assentamentos*.

The rise of a different kind of course did not mean that a previous course would no longer take place; for example, political formation courses during the National Coordination’s meetings

⁷ Young *militantes*, or activists

⁸ Emphasizing its independence from the CPT and the *Movimentos Sindicais*

⁹ One of the organizational bodies of its decentralized infrastructure.

¹⁰ Rural Organizational Laboratories

¹¹ Integrated Formation to Production

still took place when FIPs came into being. Furthermore, as the different Sectors became more organized, a new need arose within the MST: that of *capacitação*¹². Thus, the MST created its two National Schools, one focusing on the development of technical skills related to production (at the Escola Josué de Castro–ITERRA, in Rio Grande do Sul), and the other focusing on the political formation of MST *militantes* and *dirigentes* (at the Escola Nacional, which at this point did not have a physical location). In 1990, the MST administered its first national *Curso Básico para Militantes*.¹³ To date, it continues to administer this course, but does so in different locations every year to acknowledge and address the diverse needs of each MST locality.

In the mid 1990s, the MSTs methodology of political formation focused on addressing the intensification of neoliberal policies in Brazil. It created *formação de formadores*¹⁴, which focused on improving recruitment and organization techniques. During this time, the MST also began to create partnerships with public Universities to provide Pedagogical courses for *sem terra*, as well as courses on Brazilian History. Moreover, the MST began to forge relationships with other Latin American and worldwide peasant movements through the Via Campesina, recognizing the need for solidarity in the fight for sociopolitical, economic, and cultural autonomy.

In 2000, the MST approach to political formation focused on development at its different levels: *base*, *militante*, *dirigente*. For example, the Formation Program for the *Base* dealt with the political formation of those making up the MSTs *base* (focusing on increasing its level of consciousness and organization). Additionally, other national initiatives continued focusing on the political formation of the MSTs *militantes*. Together, these programs began to spark a debate about effective *dirigente* participation and leadership. At the end of these discussions,

¹² Concept of developing technical and scientific skills that will make one more capable of fulfilling tasks.

¹³ Basic Course for Militantes

¹⁴ Formation of those in charge of formation

“*dirigentes* became responsible for a specific number of organized *acampada/assentada* families, and not just a geographic region”(A Formação). Thus, the *capacitação* of these leaders becomes a more pronounced need for the MST, and the creation of a physical Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandes took place in 2005.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ESCOLA NACIONAL

“Feita a revolução nas escolas, o povo a fará nas ruas¹⁵”—FLORESTAN FERNANDES

On January 23, 2005, the MST inaugurated the Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandes¹⁶, a space for *sem terra* leaders to develop critical analytical and technical skills in order to better address the needs of their diverse communities and of the Movement as a whole. Although the Escola Nacional has been referred to as the MSTs national institute of higher learning¹⁷, it is not a University nor does it function like one. While the Escola Nacional provides its students with a University level education, its pedagogy embodies the MSTs ideology of political formation—one based on the *conscientização*¹⁸ of the landless and the reorganization of Brazilian society into an alternative socialist nation. Ândrea Batista, one of the six members of the *Coordenação Política Pedagógica*¹⁹ of the Escola Nacional, cites Paulo Freire and Ánton Makarenko²⁰ among two of the Escola Nacional’s major pedagogical influences.

Furthermore, Batista argues that for the MST nurturing and developing student’s processes of political formation and *capacitação*²¹ require a multidimensional approach, involving four dimensions: study, work, organization, and human relations. Such dimensions

¹⁵ “After the revolution has taken place in the schools, the people will start the revolution on the streets.”

¹⁶ *Escola Nacional* literally means National School. It is named after the Brazilian sociologist and intellectual.

¹⁷ For overseeing the highest concentration of national courses.

¹⁸ “Refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire 35).

¹⁹ Political Pedagogical Coordination

²⁰ I focus more on Freire’s influences throughout my essay.

²¹ Concept of developing technical and scientific skills that will make one more capable of fulfilling tasks.

and their intersections indeed allude to Freire's dialogical approach to an alternative 'emancipatory' education, along with Makarenko's thoughts on the importance of work, recreation, and 'conscious' discipline. In this essay, I analyze the Escola Nacional's multidimensional pedagogy based on work, study, organization, and human relations in training *sem terra* to better deal with the needs of their diverse realities and in providing them with the necessary skills to both envision and construct a popular project for the nation. In so doing, I examine its multidimensional pedagogy of resistance in relation to its construction methodology, its organizational structures, the courses it offers, and its physical mechanisms.

METHODOLOGY OF CONSTRUCTION: LEARNING HOW TO BUILD AN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

The Escola Nacional's construction began on March 22, 2000, in the city of Guararema, 60 km from the city of São Paulo. The MST had previously identified a need for a school that would work specifically on the *capacitação de quadros*²². While Batista states that the school is still under physical construction (currently building more dorm rooms, a bookstore, and an administrative building, as well as going through a process of restructuring certain aspects of school), the Escola Nacional celebrated its inauguration on January 23, 2005. During those five years, 1500 volunteers (mostly *acampados*²³ and *assentados*²⁴) built the school in collectives of about 30 people each called *brigadas de trabalho voluntario*²⁵. The groups of volunteers would stay for two to three months each, volunteering while learning technical construction skills from engineers, architects, and technicians who provided them with some orientation and guidance. Volunteers worked during the day and participated in three activities at night: 1) political formation (learning about Brazilian history, working class struggles, and the rise of the MST); 2)

²² Development of technical and scientific skills among MST leadership

²³ People living in encampments

²⁴ People living in settlements

²⁵ Volunteer work brigades.

technical skill building (sometimes receiving guidance/assistance from electricians, for example); and 3) literacy courses.

Batista remembers helping with some of the nightly political formation activities and states their important role in the volunteer's daily routine: "A big component of this is to rescue the value of volunteer work, which is vital in the construction of a new society and in understanding that volunteer work creates this methodology" (Batista, ISP Field Journal). Thus, volunteers would come to the construction site of the Escola Nacional and participate in literacy classes, expand their processes of political formation through access to important historical knowledge, all the while learning the necessary technical skills needed to collectively construct the Escola Nacional (which they would later surely use in their *acampamentos*²⁶ and *assentamentos*²⁷). Nevertheless, the Escola encountered some problems using this method of construction. When *brigadas de trabalho voluntario* returned to their homes and new ones came to the construction site, this would interrupt the pace of construction since new *brigadas* would have to learn basic technical skills. To address this, Batista mentions the school created a *Brigada Permanente*²⁸ that served as the liaison between the different *brigadas* that would come and go. Thus, the Escola Nacional's methodology of construction itself physically comes to represent a collectively constructed alternative space—a 'new school' fit for a new society in which work, study, and its internal organization helps cultivate human relationships that promote MST-espoused values such as solidarity, friendship, and responsibility.

Three thousand people showed at the Escola Nacional's inauguration. Shortly after, the school hosted a four day seminar to discuss previous experiences/approaches to political

²⁶ Encampments

²⁷ Settlements

²⁸ Permanent Brigade.

formation in other countries. The seminar brought together 1500 people, among them an educator from Nicaragua. The study and acknowledgement of previous resistance movements and political formation methodologies is incredibly important for the MST and plays an important role in (re)defining the needs of the MST as it encounters different historical moments; this constant self evaluation can be seen at all organization levels, from the *nucleos de base*²⁹ to the *Direcção Nacional*³⁰.

“THE MOVEMENT...IS A MACHINE”: LEARNING HOW TO ORGANIZE DECENTRALIZATION

The Escola Nacional, like the Movement as a whole, has its different *instancias*³¹ organized in collectives. For example, the General Coordination at the Escola Nacional is comprised by 10 people and has three different subdivisions: the *Coordenação Política Pedagógica* (or CPP, in charge of coordinating and overseeing courses), the Financial Coordination (in charge of bills and projects), and the Administrative Coordination (that takes care of maintenance, infrastructure, construction, etcetera.). Each of these subdivisions has a representative in the General Coordination that meets every other week. All members of these coordinating groups live on campus and make up the Escola Nacional’s very own *Brigada Permanente*, which much like the one erected during the construction of the school, serves as a liaison between members of the different *instancias*—students, professors, volunteers and members of the community who come and go (or may spend a limited amount of time at the Escola Nacional). This decentralized infrastructure facilitates the communication among the members of the *Brigada Permanente* and the community as a whole—the delegation of their

²⁹ All *sem terra* are part of its decentralized infrastructure. *Nucleos de base* are the most basic organizational structure (*instancia*) comprised of *acampados* and *assentados*.

³⁰ National Coordination

³¹ Organizational structure

tasks and responsibilities, general assessment of the Escola Nacional, as well as the exchange of diverse methodological and pedagogical approaches.

Wagner Queiroz, who lived in Assentamento Mariana (one of the oldest in the state of Bahia) with his grandparents and currently takes part in the Social Administration and Management course at the Escola Nacional, places this organizational approach within the context of the MST as a whole:

It's all an organizational process, the methodology of having a *Direção Nacional*³², a *Coordenação Nacional*, a *Coordenação Regional*³³. The Movement in and of itself is a machine, and everyone is involved in its production. This is a school under construction—of leftist movements and not just the MST. Everything here is mutable, nothing here is fixed. We can discuss together and make changes. It's a collective process of discussion and construction in terms of the ideological proposals of the school (Queiroz, ISP Field Journal).

Students themselves participate in this collective process of construction through participation in *nucleos de base*. Just as in *acampamentos* and *assentamentos*, at the Escola Nacional students also organize themselves into *nucleos de base* which serve as spaces for dialogue and constant self evaluation. Eight to ten students usually comprise a *nucleo de base*, and its members study, discuss, and work together. While *nucleos de base* at *acampamentos* or *assentamentos* may be organized due to proximity or kinship, the CPP organizes the *nucleos de base* at the Escola Nacional, taking into account the members' genders, states of origin, ages, etcetera, to ensure more diverse networking and learning experiences. The *nucleos de base* themselves have two coordinators, a man and a woman, as well as representatives that make up different school-wide *equipes* which deal with sports, health, gender, etcetera, and essentially function in the same way the MST *Setores*³⁴ do but on a smaller scale. While students have

³² *Instancia* comprised of members of the National Coordination.

³³ Regional Coordination

³⁴ Sector, another *instancia* comprised of representatives from different *nucleos*. The MST as a whole has the following National Sectors: Educational Sector; Health Sector; Communications Sector; Culture and Youth Sector;

assigned *nucleos de base*, they can decide what *equipe* they want to participate in. Moreover, the Escola Nacional also has its own *Setores* comprised by members of the *Brigada Permanente* (i.e. Sector of Pedagogical Support, General Services Sector, and the Financial Sector).

This organizational approach facilitates administering the Escola Nacional's different courses. First, the MSTs National Coordination identifies the kinds of courses the Movement currently needs, based on what the MSTs different Sectors have reported (and in effect, based on what the *nucleos de base* themselves have identified as needs). Batista explains that the CPP cannot always administer the courses (for instance, if they cannot find a partnering institution to co-sponsor it), but it remains on a list for future consideration nonetheless. Once the courses have been picked, each course has a corresponding member of the CPP that oversees the course from its conception (as part of the *Coordenação da Turma*³⁵ and of which *nucleo de base* student representatives participate in), returning to the CPP meetings with updates, information, complaints, etcetera. Similarly, a designated representative of the CPP reports back to the General Coordination of the Escola Nacional.

Professors themselves make up part of this organizational process through the *quadro fixo de professores*,³⁶ a group of professors that has been identified by the Movement or its partnering institutions as having a more consistent relationship with one or both. Since all professors work voluntarily and come when their schedule permits, most of them do not take part of the *quadro fixo*. However, *quadro fixo* professors take part in discussions and evaluations that take place twice a year to discuss general Escola Nacional pedagogical concerns. During its first year, the Escola Nacional did not have one of these meetings, but it intends to do so in

Gender Sector; Cooperation, Production and Environmental Sector; *Frente de Massas* Sector (in charge of organizing and mobilizing different MST activities, from recruitment to national marches); Human Rights Sector; Projects and Finances Sector; and an International Relations Sector.

³⁵ Class Coordination

³⁶ Fixed group of professors.

2006³⁷, which will undoubtedly further integrate Professors' opinions, ideas and criticisms into the school's continuous process of construction.

Whether or not professors make part of the *quadro fixo*, the CPP generally talks to the courses' professors about the needs of the specific class based on the class's profile, the course, and the Movement's needs. Batista states: "We come up with a detailed schedule of themes/issues collectively and we discuss with them their methodology"(Batista, ISP Field Journal). Some professors, for example, do a lot more group work than others. And while the Escola Nacional does not have a core curriculum, it does have a *currículo mínimo*³⁸ with a sequence of required themes³⁹. Philosophy and the history of social movements are two of these themes, which "is a component [the Escola Nacional is] rediscussing, in terms of where [it] want[s] to place more emphasis" (Batista, ISP Field Journal). And of course, the partnering institutions also have their own guidelines and conceptions of the courses that also become part of these discussions, as well as students' criticisms and suggestions. In effect, this organizational approach embodies the Escola Nacional's multidimensional pedagogy since the constant dialogue and collaboration between members of different *instancias* (i.e. *nucleos de base*, *equipas*, *Setores*, Coordinations, etcetera), help address their diverse individual and collective needs, while creating horizontal relationships among the *instancias* and their individual members. The various dimensions of work, study, organization, and human relations all interact and feed off one another through this type of decentralized infrastructure.

Another important aspect of this organizational structure is that assigned work is also organized by *instancias*. Students all take turns cleaning the school, working the vegetable garden, cooking on Sundays (when the cooking staff is off), doing their own laundry,

³⁷ Batista, ISP Field Journal

³⁸ Minimum curriculum.

³⁹ Whether they are formal or informal courses (which will be further explained in the next section).

cataloguing books in the library, guarding the front entrance on the weekends, and addressing any miscellaneous needs that may arise. This organizational model of collective work (and volunteer work) serves many purposes. On a basic level, it guarantees the Escola Nacional's self sustenance as an institution, since it does not have to pay anyone to work. And on another level, it creates a sense of discipline and shared responsibility among every single one of its members. Clairton Buffon, *assentado* in Santa Catarina and participating in the Escola Nacional's Social Administration and Management course says:

We don't feel like those organizing certain activities are responsible, we feel responsible. We talk about our needs, and the class takes it back to those in different *instancias* and coordinations, and this school is subordinated to the Movement as a whole. And so everything is through dialogue. From the *nucleos*, to the *Coordinação da turma*, to the General Coordination. So we never see the school as separate from the students. We are the school (Buffon, ISP Field Journal).

Thus, through its decentralized infrastructure (based on the MSTs decentralized infrastructure as a whole), members of the Escola Nacional's community develop expectations/responsibilities of the individual to the collective, as well as of the collective to the individual. These responsibilities then encourage a sense of auto-discipline, since the individual feels accountable to the collective, as well as collective discipline since the collective also feels accountable to the individual. This sense of 'conscious' discipline guides the individual and the collective towards feeling responsible for addressing the needs of their respective communities and the Movement as a whole.

INFORMALLY POLITICIZED: LEARNING INSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM

As mentioned earlier, the courses offered by the Escola Nacional fall into two categories: formal courses (those offered with partnering institutions and recognized by the Brazilian government), and informal courses (those not recognized by the Brazilian government but identified as 'needed' by the Movement, usually dealing with political and ideological formation

of *sem terra*)⁴⁰. Currently, the school has partnerships with 43 universities across the country (the majority of them public federal universities), which means not all formal courses will take place at the Escola Nacional. This allows students to matriculate into local or nearby Universities in courses jointly overseen by the institution and the MST. In this way, students do not have to travel to the Escola Nacional unless it is the only institution offering a particular course.

In the last year, the Escola Nacional offered the following courses: Theory of Knowledge, Rural Sociology, Political Economy of Agriculture, Brazilian History, Political Philosophy, International Relations, Rural Education (through a partnership with the University of Brasília-UNB), Social Administration and Management (through a partnership with the University Center of the Santo André Foundation), and Latin American Studies (through a partnership with the Federal University of Juiz de Fora-UFJF). These courses provide students with an education based out of an agrarian reform standpoint. The number of students in each of these course varies, but each one has at least one student from each state. Generally, a coordinating body within the state (whether it's the *Coordenação Estadual*⁴¹ or *Coordenação Regional*) will designate or identify the one or two students who will represent the state and the state's needs at the Escola Nacional. Courses vary in length, some formal courses taking

⁴⁰ These informal courses are generally said to form *monitores*, people who work specifically with the question of political and ideological formation within their respective states. In the past, some of these courses have discussed issues such as agroecology, but usually not at a technical level. Other courses touch on key subjects for *dirigentes*, people who serve as the *formadores* and who undertake the *trabalhos de base*, or recruitment projects in cities' peripheries as well as in rural areas. While having the Escola Nacional's informal courses formally recognized (and all students graduate with a 'legitimate degree'), could be a potential MST goal in the future, today getting government recognition for all schools currently in *assentamentos* and *acampamentos* represents a more urgent MST need, involving a much larger population of *sem terra*.

⁴¹ State Coordination

anywhere from two to four years to complete. All courses, whether informal or formal take place in alternating stages called *Tempo Escola*⁴² and *Tempo Comunidade*⁴³.

During *Tempo Escola*, students attend classes in the mornings, afternoons and evenings six days a week, and participate in other daily activities (i.e. film screenings, scheduled *místicas*⁴⁴, cultural nights, etcetera). *Tempo Escola* could last anywhere from 15 days to 2 months depending on the courses and whether they are formal or informal (informal courses usually being shorter). During *Tempo Comunidade*, all students are given homework assignments and/or research projects that allow them to put into practice what they have learned during *Tempo Escola*. Again, the length of this stage varies but lasts usually about 3 months. This methodology of alternating stages allows students to connect the theory they discuss and learn in and outside of the classroom during *Tempo Escola*, to the practice they gain in dealing with the issues and needs plaguing their communities during *Tempo Comunidade*. In this way, they exercise their acquired skills (i.e. some more technical than others), and return to the Escola Nacional during the next *Tempo Escola* with feedback, critiques, suggestions, etcetera. Another important advantage of this alternating methodology is that it allows students to continue assuming leadership roles in their communities. These students have specific tasks and responsibilities back home, and the Movement needs them to continue executing such tasks during *Tempo Comunidade*, while still developing skills to improve their strategies and approaches during *Tempo Escola*. In effect, it allows the MST *lideranças*⁴⁵ to work and study simultaneously, immersed in the Movement's permanent process of political formation through the constant correlation of theory and practice.

⁴² School Time

⁴³ Community Time

⁴⁴ Activities that reinforce the history of the MST to help construct a collective *sem terra* identity, such as poetry readings, music, etcetera.

⁴⁵ Leaders

In addition to these informal and formal courses, the Escola Nacional also provides Spanish and computer literacy classes for the surrounding community. Adaiana Mendes who gave me a tour of the school in early May 2006 and is part of the Political Pedagogical Sector of the Escola Nacional, noted that from the time of its construction the Escola Nacional has cultivated a good relationship with the community, “this is extremely important especially given the media coverage the MST gets” (Mendes, ISP Field Journal). Indeed, the media generally portrays the MST and the Escola Nacional in a negative light; for instance, few have focused on writing about the thousands of rural students who have been given access to institutions of higher learning and would not have been given such access had it not been for the MST. Buffon is a perfect example of one of these students:

To be honest it is extraordinary. Unheard of. Because for us, workers with calloused hands, to have access to a University—to be sitting at a desk inside of one—this is something that before the Movement never even crossed my mind, not even in my dreams. Because I believed that the University was not for the working class. The worker was to plant beans, rice, and corn and then try to sell (Buffon, ISP Field Journal).

Nevertheless, reactions to the Escola Nacional and its different partnerships have definitely been mediated by media coverage. For example, on May 16, 2006, Carla Borges reported in *O Popular* that the mere proposal for two co-sponsored courses, Land Pedagogy and Law, between the MST (and other social movements in Via Campesina) and the Federal University of Goiás (UFG), infuriated many. For instance, the President of the *Associação Pró-Desenvolvimento Industrial do Estado de Goiás (Adial)*⁴⁶, and Brazilian Business Forum⁴⁷ representative Cyro Miranda asked: “Who in the UFG will teach these courses for the MST? Are they teaching them how to occupy lands? [...] It’s preposterous that the UFG would buy into this.” Even within the

⁴⁶ Pro-Industrial Development Association of the state of Goiás

⁴⁷ Fórum Empresarial do Estado

UFG where the courses have already been approved (having received funding from INCRA⁴⁸ and now waiting for permission from the UFG *Conselho de Ensino, Pesquisa e Cultura*⁴⁹), a Law Professor stated that having courses for those involved in agrarian reform were unconstitutional since they cater to a specific sector of Brazilian society (without recognizing that these courses would not, in fact, exclude any sector).

Even in a personal email I received from an unnamed member of the Yale Club of Brazil (a Yale Alumni Association centered in São Paulo), the skewed lens from which the MST is generally viewed and propagated through publications such as *Veja* and *Estado de São Paulo*, is obvious. The alum writes: “You should be aware that most Brazilians view the MST as anarchists. I would hope that your Yale education gives you the ability to approach your subject with a balanced research approach [...] Perhaps, in the end, you can expose them for the anarchists they are. At least, I hope you will not consider a transfer to the Guararema ‘University’.” The alum wrote the email without even referring to the Escola Nacional by its actual name and dismisses the entire movement by using the word ‘anarchist’ without backing up his claims. Nevertheless, all of these reactions serve as testaments of the influential role these courses (and the Escola Nacional) play within the Movement, and in its popular project for Brazil; as implied by the tone and triviality of such critiques, these courses and ‘Guararema University,’ undoubtedly threaten Brazilian business executives’ interests as well as Yalies’.

A Case Study: Social Administration and Management

Throughout the MSTs history, organizing cooperatives and their effective operation has been a challenge. For this reason, the Escola Nacional offered a Social Administration and Management course at the beginning of this year, whose objective is to provide those within the

⁴⁸ Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária

⁴⁹ Council of Teaching, Research and Culture

Movement already working in cooperatives or administrative positions with the necessary tools and technical background to address their communities' present needs more effectively. The University Center of the Santo André Foundation co-sponsors the course and helped co-develop it; Batista asserts that "all courses we offer through partnerships require this dialogical approach of construction of courses" (Batista, ISP Field Journal). This partnership means it is a formal course of *ensino superior*⁵⁰ and has received governmental recognition. The course, which has more of a technical focus, has 58 students from all over Brazil (at least one from every state), and two of these students are affiliated with MPA (*Movimento de Pequenos Agricultores*⁵¹) and one with MAB (*Movimento dos Antigos por Barragens*⁵²).

Like most courses, this one has been organized based on different themes taught by different professors, depending on their area of expertise. Usually professors teach anywhere from one to six classes depending on the course and theme. While at the Escola Nacional, I had the opportunity to sit-in during one of this course's Philosophy classes. Professor José Antonio Fernandes, who had been hired by the Santo André Foundation began the class by asking students to discuss the previous nights' readings by Marx and Engels, among them excerpts from *The German Ideology* (1845)⁵³. Students then asked questions and they discussed amongst themselves while Professor Fernandes commented here and there. While the class had begun with a discussion on their doubts on theories of historical materialism, the conversation later touched on the rise of hierarchical systems in world history, the development of the lumpen, and the process of neo-liberal globalization.

Before the class went on a coffee break, Professor Fernandes asked the class to offer

⁵⁰ Higher learning

⁵¹ Movement of Small Farmers

⁵² Movement of those Affected by Dams

⁵³ *O Capital* by Marx rested on his desk, along with works by Francisco de Oliveira.

analogies from their own realities to issues they found in the texts. One of the students immediately raised his hand and brought up the issue of individualism in his *assentamento*. After he shared his frustration (with people who have difficulty with collective ways of organizing and living), Professor Fernandes talked about how on a global scale this individualism currently fuels World Bank initiatives. He suggests that “the MST [...] bet on the dialectic. It is through the contradictions of these different worlds, that the process of *conscientização* [begins]” (Fernandes, ISP Field Journal). The goal, he argues, should be to mobilize and politicize against the individualistic neo-liberal logic. The class agreed. Before the coffee break, he gave the class a short writing group assignment due the next week on the following topic: “The logic and classical dialectic and the path to Marxist thought as defined by historical and dialectical materialism.” He then left the classroom with them and socialized with the class during the break.

While Professor Fernandes admits that at first the discussion of such abstract theories may not seem relevant to a course on Social Administration and Management, he claims he specifically works on helping students make connections with their own experiences. He believes “their experiences can create a symbiosis [with the material discussed] that helps explain such abstractions” (Fernandes, ISP Field Journal). Professor Fernandes also cites Freire as the main influence on his dialogical approach and the methodology he employs inside of the classroom. His concept of the ‘symbiosis’—of the development of new knowledge and ideas based on the student’s past experiences and how these color their interpretations/analyses—is an example of Freire’s influence on his methodology. In addition, Professor Fernandes has taught other University students and mentions that since the students in this classroom “are *militantes*, they have a more critical vision of the world and are a lot more disciplined which is a product of

the Movement itself” (Fernandes, ISP Field Journal). Thus, the discipline developed through *instancias* and volunteer work, is also cultivated inside of the classroom. Professor Fernandes comments that students already have a developed critical consciousness as evidenced by the kinds of questions and doubts they bring into the classroom, and their discipline shows in the way they engage in the material, create study groups, and work in the construction and upkeep of the Escola Nacional.

Even though in this stage (the second *Tempo Escola* of the course), the focus is still more abstract and theoretical, Buffon, who carries out administrative duties in his *assentamento*'s cooperative, sees the benefit in this alternating stage methodology: “It is great because it provides you with a parameter of basic notions of social history, and helps you conceptualize [the technical]” (Buffon, ISP Field Journal). He believes that after the theorizing that takes place during this stage, you inevitably apply “it in practice back home. When you return for *Tempo Comunidade*, the situation is not the same as when you left it. It's a process of reintegrating yourself” (Buffon, ISP Field Journal). He says that while he feels he has already made contributions to his community in these first two stages, he recognizes the real contributions will come later once he acquires a better understanding of the technical aspects of effective administration and management. He emphasizes how cooperative administration and management has been an incredible challenge in his own community and in the Movement as a whole.

Further, Buffon argues that part of the reason rural workers have had such difficulty with the administration and management of cooperatives is the *cultura camponesa*:

As a rural worker, you don't have that habit of writing everything down, of archiving materials. So [we need to] make it so that rural workers are more careful with what they do, and analyze better. But this doesn't mean he needs to follow the catechism of capitalism (Buffon, ISP Field Journal).

Still the *cultura camponesa* cannot be completely at blame for the lack of rural workers' technical and analytical skills; this is also a product of hundreds of years of social, economic and political alienation (i.e. educational exclusion).

In addition to developing critical analytical skills, developing technical math skills benefits many rural workers in the management of cooperatives and in creating alternative economic models. Buffon makes the connection between the importance of connecting theoretical quantitative analysis to practice:

Sometimes we invest resources without analyzing facts and concrete statistics. It's not until after that we realize that we were mistaken. So that's one example of how [this course is] going to help. We will be able to better analyze with facts, research, proving with facts what we can really invest or not.

Queiroz, who has been working with the Movement for 10 years in Bahia and currently works in the Finances Sector, has had a completely different experience with the course. He says his goal "is to gain knowledge here, go back home and try to put together a cooperative"(Queiroz, ISP Field Journal). Unlike Buffon, Queiroz does not have experience working in a cooperative which means this will already make his learning experience very different from Buffon's. However, it is precisely this dynamic that characterizes the Escola Nacional's multidimensional pedagogy. *Sem terra* and members from various other social movements come to the Escola Nacional from different states of Brazil, having had completely different life experiences and experiences within their respective movements. Their exchange of ideas and experiences serve as an example of one of Freire's principal pedagogical beliefs, through which administrator and teacher, teacher and student, student and student, etcetera, learn more from a horizontal exchange of ideas, creating new knowledge and understanding amongst themselves. This process can occur through work and study (in and outside of the

classroom), guides the organizational structure of the MST, and promotes the development of human relations based on just and egalitarian values.

Moreover, Queiroz like Buffon, argues culture mediates the diversity of administrative experiences:

In the south they're more organized. The cultural question [comes into play], since they come from Europe. In the northeast, we have more of a legacy of slavery, and rural workers there used to be slaves. [This is] different from those in the South where there are a lot more immigrants. And the movement itself has advanced a lot more in the South of the country. Their process of self-sustenance is different from ours (Queiroz, ISP Field Journal).

This concept of acknowledging cultural differences and the way they mediate human relations and processes of political formation could potentially be considered the fifth dimension of the Escola's multidimensional pedagogy. Batista admitted to having discussions among the General Coordination of the school about whether or not it is, in fact, a separate dimension or if it is found in the other four. While all dimensions interact and feed off one another, I will argue in the section of this essay, "A Fifth Dimension: Learning to resist cultural dominion," that this cultural dimension is a separate dimension—perhaps one of the most critical dimensions in the construction of a popular project for Brazil.

MECHANISMS OF RESISTANCE: LEARNING HOW TO POLITICIZE PHYSICAL SPACES

While still under construction, the Escola Nacional and its different physical mechanisms individually and collectively also serve as spaces for the growth and expansion of students' political formation and *capacitação*. The *Prédio Pedagógico*⁵⁴, for example, serves as one of these spaces of 'vivencia coletiva'⁵⁵. It has administrative offices, three classrooms, a

⁵⁴ Pedagogical Building

⁵⁵ Collective living

*plenária*⁵⁶, the library, two amphitheatres, and *a sala de professores*⁵⁷ where professors can socialize amongst themselves (and which also serves as a reception area for visitors, equipped with MST reading materials, etcetera). The idea behind all of these components of the *Prédio Pedagógico* is to create alternative learning spaces for all members of the Escola Nacional, inciting collective exchange and action. For example, although the school boasts three formal classrooms, Mendes notes some classes have been held in the numerous kiosks located throughout the school. Even the dorm rooms (although not located in the *Prédio Pedagógico*), have their own *salas de convivência*⁵⁸ for lounging and/or studying, and students share them along with the rooms and take responsibility for their upkeep.

The two-story library located in the *Prédio Pedagógico* plays an incredibly important role in the political formation and *capacitação* of the Escola Nacional's students. The library currently holds 12,000 donated books and has a capacity for 31,000. Members of the CPP, students and volunteers have undertaken the strenuous task of cataloguing all of the books in time for its inauguration planned for August 2006. Students and visitors can find the bulk of these books along with a few computers on the first floor, and a quiet reading/study area and a video/DVD collection on the second floor. Consequently, the library encourages and aids in students' research—a vital component of the school's pedagogy in terms of cultivating and enhancing students' critical analytical skills through organization, human relations, work and study. Thus, all students complete a final research project before concluding a course. Some professors specialize on providing assistance to students with their final projects, and either come in for a day-long seminar, and/or stay in touch via email. In the past, students have written

⁵⁶ The plenaria is a big room where they have classes, assemblies, debates, and its capacity is 1000 people. One of the walls is decorated with numerous framed Sebastiao Salgado photos of the MST. The money he earned from his pictures he donated to the MST and was used to begin the construction of the Escola Nacional.

⁵⁷ Faculty room.

⁵⁸ Collective lounge rooms

about such diverse topics as the role of Agroecology in the construction of a new society, and fundamentals of rural education and its overall role in the Movement. These projects and the library encourage individual creativity, innovation, and emphasize the importance of research to better understand students' realities, before attempting to transform them. Thus, the research projects themselves do not simply serve academic or individual interests.

Students also conduct research and daily assignments in the Escola Nacional's computer cluster or *Telecentro*. The donated computers aid in students research projects, as well as provide students with an opportunity to communicate with friends, family members and others *sem terra*, as well as stay updated on current events. Additionally, to counter the globalization of Microsoft, all of the school's computers (as well as computers in many *assentamentos*) use Linux software—a product of Software Livre, which allows users to create their own programs⁵⁹. The act of researching and using the school's computers, thus, becomes a political act; for in using Linux, students, the Escola Nacional and the MST, make a political statement on the need for equality and social inclusion within a technological context. Thus, the computer cluster itself serves as a space of resistance and of creating new more egalitarian ways of communicating, working, organizing, and relating to one another.

Moreover, while one of the two amphitheatres is still under construction, the completed one is already being used for cultural activities and other '*atividades coletivas*'⁶⁰. Additionally, from Tuesday to Friday students watch the morning news together on Televisora del Sur/TELESUR, an alternative television network financed by the governments of Argentina, Uruguay, Cuba, and Venezuela. Since July of 2005, TELESUR has provided its audiences with information about Latin America, its social movements and struggles, generally not transmitted

⁵⁹ Would have liked to add more on how Linux works.

⁶⁰ Collective activities

by privately run networks. Examples of the issues the network continually raises include: the military presence of the US in Latin America, the campaign against ALCA⁶¹ and its relationship to the Alternativa Bolivariana para las Americas, Latino immigration to the US, and social movements in Latin America (among them the MST). This again illustrates the MSTs recognition of the need to create alternative means of communication⁶²; just as in using the Escola Nacional's computers, watching the news inside the amphitheatre also becomes a political act that informs students' processes of political formation.

As part of providing an alternative education, within which alternative means of communicating, studying, working and organizing take place, the Escola Nacional also provides alternative ways of producing in its very own vegetable garden. Mendes states that “the idea is to produce enough for self sustenance” (Mendes, ISP Field Journal). The land was donated by the next door neighbors specifically for this purpose, and currently produces grains and numerous vegetables, in addition to medicinal plants and herbs. Students take turns working in the vegetable garden, and through this work help construct an agroecological farming project. This project is meant to address a current need of the entire Movement (as articulated in the National Congress 2000), to defend rural livelihoods and forms of production (i.e. the use of herbal medicines and farming without the use of toxics and chemicals)—which essentially guarantees access to a healthy lifestyle. Working in the vegetable garden provides students with an opportunity to gain experience and knowledge on agroecological farming they can take back to their *assentamentos* and communities.

In the National Congress of 2000, the MST also identified gender equality as one of the

⁶¹ Área de Livre Comercio de las Americas

⁶² Something the MST has done throughout its history through its community radios (*Rádios Comunitárias*), newspaper (*O Jornal Sem Terra*), etcetera.

issues the Movement needed to focus on. The Escola Nacional, like the MST as a whole, has made a continuous effort to encourage female effective participation in all aspects of its multidimensional pedagogy. The *Ciranda Infantil* at the Escola Nacional represents a physical space that attempts to address this very issue, serving as a type of child care (many *acampamentos* and *assentamentos* now have them). Such child care services allow women to participate in new spaces within the Movement, whether they be coordinating a *nucleo de base*, participating in a march, or going to the Escola Nacional for a two to four year-long course. At the Escola Nacional women participate in all activities, from cleaning the school, to working in the vegetable garden, to leading group discussions or study groups. While most students will admit that women generally do not participate as much as men (i.e. some attribute it to timidity, others to the conservative *cultura camponesa*), the MST has continuously made an effort to incite female participation and the *Ciranda Infantil* is a physical representation of this effort. Other examples include the MSTs joint work with other agrarian reform Movements to grant women land titles, as well as the MSTs participation in an effort to register pregnant women with the government since Brazilian law grants registered pregnant women four months of state pay. These efforts along with the *Ciranda Infantil* illustrate the important role women *sem terra* play within the entire Movement, and the way in which the MST makes it a priority for both men and women to incite their effective participation.

A FIFTH DIMENSION: LEARNING TO RESIST CULTURAL DOMINION

Thus far, I have looked at the way the MSTs multidimensional pedagogy fuels the political formation and *capacitação* of those at the Escola Nacional, through the way its students, teachers, and staff organize themselves, work, study, and learn and relate from one another in diverse spaces (from the time of its construction). Nevertheless, in addition to its four

dimensional pedagogy of work, study, organization, and human relations, culture plays a critical role in *sem terra's* political formation and *capacitação*. While Batista admits that the Escola Nacional has been discussing the role of culture within their pedagogy, I believe that culture serves as the fifth dimension to the Escola Nacional's multidimensional pedagogy.

Just as using Linux and watching the news on TELESUR become political acts within the context of the alternative education offered by the school, the use of culture and cultural representations can also become politicized acts. For example, the simple concept of 'cultural literacy' has historically been associated with the Western Canon and Western Civilization studies. A deep knowledge of Western works, histories and ideas, thus define being 'cultured;' furthermore, oftentimes this Western model has been used to colonize 'backwards' peoples, and/or in the (re)construction of societies. In the past, this very allegation of 'backwardness' has been used by the Brazilian government to attack the MST and the methodology employed in constructing a new alternative nation (i.e. its land occupations, the set up of encampments, etcetera). Thus, I believe the MST politicizes culture and cultural representations by valorizing non-Western ideals and cultural beliefs (contesting the concept of 'cultural literacy'), and by attempting to rescue the *cultura camponesa* to help mediate new alternative forms of collectively organizing, studying, and producing. Therefore, the MSTs multidimensional pedagogy undoubtedly makes use of cultural politics as a tool of resistance in a world of cultural and economic globalization. I will examine some examples found within the Escola Nacional.

First, students routinely organize 'cultural nights' on the weekends at the Escola Nacional. Since students in courses come from every part of the country, such nights serve to educate one another on their country's own geographical and cultural differences. The Social Administration and Management course, for example, put together a cultural night on the

southern region of the country while I was at the school. The night started with some history of the region and a recognition of the way immigrants have contributed to the region linguistically, culturally, etcetera. Relating and discussing such cultural differences not only adds value to them, but it also adds value to individual experiences within such varying cultures. Within the context of collective living, learning, and making decisions, to value individual cultural experiences and how these mediate these individual's daily realities and needs, allows students to not only value their own experiences but others' as well. At the same time, students engage in a process of redefining and constructing alternatives to mainstream culture and gain a better understanding of the complexity and diversity of the Movement. Thus, in rescuing the *cultura camponesa*, students first acknowledge and value the differences among this very culture in each of the country's regions.

Students at the Escola Nacional defend the diverse *cultura camponesa* through different forms of cultural representations; for example, through the dissemination of films about the movement and other themes related to agrarian reform. Batista states, "we have what we call '*Cinema Na Terra*'⁶³ through which we screen films and then have debates" (Batista, ISP Field Journal). Such screenings and debates (which center not only on artistic production but content as well) take place in *assentamentos*, courses, and in different *encontros*⁶⁴—audio visually politicizing its viewers as well as through the ensuing debates. "We want to get to a point where people can produce their own films about the different *assentamento* realities" (Batista, ISP Field Journal). To represent their own diverse realities through film would become a powerful tool in countering what has been previously thought, represented, and propagated about the MST and agrarian reform in the past (in film and otherwise).

⁶³ Land Cinema.

⁶⁴ Conferences.

The Escola Nacional also provides other examples of how *sem terra* have appropriated other cultural forms of representation to resist cultural dominion. For example, MST youth theater groups have performed at the Escola Nacional. These theatre groups have performed in *assentamentos*, in public schools, and churches throughout the country, and at least one exists in every state⁶⁵. Kamila Martins, who has worked with the MST for seven years and represents the Health Sector in the National Coordination says the theater groups “don’t just represent [their realities], they study, research, dance and sing” (Martins, ISP Field Journal). In the past, they have mounted pieces on heavily politicized issues such as ALCA, and collectively participated in performances at the MST National March for Agrarian Reform in 2005.

Musical groups have also performed at the Escola Nacional. A group called “Cachoeira” recently gave a presentation on Afro-Brazilian music, how they make their instruments and even taught students some dances. Not only do these cultural activities provide exposure to popular Brazilian music, but they also help validate and rescue some of these art forms. The Escola Nacional has planned numerous other activities to encourage this cultural rescue and its cultural politics of resistance. As Batista relates:

We haven’t don’t this yet, but initially the idea was to offer dance workshops on different types of regional dances and even Capoeira lessons. We also thought of having bamboo furniture workshops. In some *assentamentos*, depending on the region, the houses are made of bamboo, as well as the beds and other furniture. So a “Bamboo Construction Workshop” might definitely be in the future (Batista, ISP Field Journal).

While the “Bamboo Construction Workshop” has not come into fruition, the Escola Nacional does offer a “*Lutieria*⁶⁶ Workshop.” It is the first of its kind in the history of the entire Movement, and teaches students how to make violins, guitars, and other wooden musical instruments in the Escola Nacional’s very own *Lutieria*, or musical wood shop. Mendes states

⁶⁵ A national collective theatre group also exists.

⁶⁶ Musical wood shop.

one of the most important aspects of the project is “to preserve the *cultura camponesa* and teach students how to make its instruments, play them, and in this way, ensure [the *cultura camponesa*] will not get lost” (Mendes, ISP Field Journal). Although it has been difficult even for the Escola Nacional to provide the necessary types of wood needed for this kind of work, it hopes some of its students will be able to take back what they have learned and start their own workshops in their communities. Moreover, “its initial incentive was not to produce to sell, but perhaps in the future, [the instruments] could become one of [the MSTs] agrarian reform products” (Batista, ISP Field Journal); such products range from jellies, to seeds, to agendas, etcetera, and can be bought anywhere from local markets, to the MSTs national Agrarian Reform Product Shop in São Paulo.

These Escola Nacional-sponsored cultural activities have also included several exhibits⁶⁷, a poetry night, and book readings⁶⁸. All of these activities—the cultural nights, film screenings, theatre productions, workshops, etcetera—illustrate the importance the Movement and the Escola Nacional place on (re)appropriating different cultural art forms to rescue cultural richness and diversity, as well as to resist the globalization of culture. Thus, while all dimensions of the MSTs multidimensional pedagogy interplay and depend on one another, to see the creation of cultural alternatives as a fifth dimension recognizes the critical role cultural politics play in the political formation and *capacitação* of *sem terra* at the Escola Nacional and elsewhere. I use ‘creation’ and not ‘getting reacquainted’ with such alternatives, because like the Movement, cultural alternatives and forms of representation constantly evolve with changing sociopolitical times and landscapes. While the roots of the *cultura camponesa* (and of the MST) should be

⁶⁷ The first, portrayed settlements in Brazil and in Paraguay. The second, focused on Mexican murals and featured works by Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco. The third displayed photos of the Massacre of El Dorado dos Carajas, and the fourth took honored Marxo on his birthday, and displayed pictures along with excerpts from his work.

⁶⁸ Authors who have recently released books have come to discuss important issues they raise in their works.

studied and integrated into present day struggles of cultural and political resistance, cultural productions and cultural needs cannot be standardized or fixed in time. For this reason, I believe culture represents the fifth dimension of the MSTs and Escola Nacional's multidimensional pedagogy. For it promises to transform with changing times and changing needs, allowing *new* and *old sem terra* to use it as a vehicle of expression and of cultural and political resistance; thus, it represents an essential tool in the process of constructing a new alternative society.

CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS: LEARNING HOW TO UNDO EMOTIONAL RESISTANCE

Batista admits this multidimensional pedagogy has its limits. Along with deciding what courses to offer and the general maintenance of the school, she notes an important challenge “is struggling to not have bureaucratic characteristics, with control of materials, students, [etcetera]” (Batista, ISP Field Journal). She notes the CPP and *nucleos de base* have an on going dialogue through which they evaluate and critique what things have been working and which ones could be improved upon. Students I had the opportunity to speak with had no qualms with sharing what things they would like to see improve. Queiroz, for example, noted that within the Movement as a whole some of these ‘problems’ include “maintaining youth involved, managing cooperatives and cultivating people skills.” I personally feel one of these necessary improvements at the Escola Nacional and within the MST is the issue of mental health.

Many of the students I spoke with complained about missing home and how isolated they sometimes felt. Some of these students left behind husbands, girlfriends, friends and even children and will not see them for the duration of *Tempo Escola*⁶⁹. While most do not mind the sacrifice, being away from home coupled with the demanding daily class schedule could become emotionally draining. Leandro Gonçalves, a 22 year old student in the Social Administration and Management course from Rio Grande do Sul, also mentioned wanting to go out at times, and

⁶⁹ Although they are allowed to receive visitors, few do due to costs and their family's responsibilities.

missing having some sense of privacy. While Batista did mention that a psychologist works with members of the Escola Nacional's *Brigada Permanente* on a biweekly basis, and with students if the need arises (and is identified), I feel this is an issue that needs to be dealt with on a more massive scale. People working within the movement hesitate to admit they need help—sometimes because members of coordinating groups or those taking on leadership roles are too busy to admit it or do not want to 'blame' the Movement, and at other times because for many therapy and the concept of 'mental health' have become bourgeois concepts that have no place in an agrarian reform resistance movement.

Martins asserts the Movement has been discussing this topic in depth in the last three years. She mentioned that a seminar has been developed to discuss the question with professionals and psychologists. This year, the national seminar called "The Land Question: Challenges to Psychology," is to take place from July 20-22, 2006 at the University of Brasilia. All Sectors of the Movement have been invited, with a special call for members from the Health, Education, Human Rights, and Gender Sectors. Still, Martins says it's an incredibly difficult issue to address since it is very subjective: "Some people have had relatives killed in massacres or know people who have been imprisoned due to the process of fighting for land. Sometimes its not like it happens and they show signs, sometimes it takes a while. And people don't make the connection: Why are they acting that way? Did they have a traumatic experience?" (Martins, ISP Field Journal). While the question of subjectivity is an important one, within guaranteeing healthy lifestyles for *sem terra* through alternative forms of production (i.e. the use of agroecological farming) and medicine (i.e. herbal medicines), lies the issue of ensuring their mental health and stability. Depression, for example, would undoubtedly affect all dimensions of the multidimensional pedagogy, from work to study, to communicating and participating in

organizational structures, to developing relationships and relating to others. Perhaps addressing this issue will have to involve creating alternative forms of healing, since most people (*sem terra* or otherwise) view therapy in a bad light. I feel this would unquestionably complement the notion of the MSTs Escola Nacional's multidimensional pedagogy of resistance; for it could come to represent the rejection of society's standard of how, when, and who should deal with mental health issues.

CONCLUSION: MST LEADERS RETURN TO THEIR COMMUNITIES

Thus far I have analyzed the Escola Nacional's multidimensional pedagogy based on work, study, organization, and human relations; its relationship to the Escola Nacional's construction methodology, its organizational structures, the courses it offers, and its physical mechanisms; and how such a pedagogy trains *sem terra* to create alternatives—whether these be alternatives of production in the vegetable garden; alternatives of communication in the computer cluster or amphitheatre; or cultural alternatives in the Lutieria, etcetera. I have also proposed that culture is a fifth dimension to the Escola Nacional's multidimensional pedagogy, as well as provided some personal critiques on the question of *sem terra* mental health. Nevertheless, one can still question how much of this theorizing and training actually materializes into practice in the *acampamentos* and *assentamentos* these students work in, once they return to their communities. In my conclusion, I will provide two examples of how I have seen this theory already materialize into practice.

The first is the *Instituto Técnico de Capacitação e Pesquisa Agroecológica Laudenor de Souza*,⁷⁰ in the *Assentamento* Fazenda Pirituba (Agrovila V), located in Itapeva, São Paulo. The school was under construction for a year, and recently celebrated its inauguration on May 6, 2006. During my visit to the Institute, I sat-in during classes, met with members of the

⁷⁰ The Laudenor de Souza Agroecological Institute for the Development of Technical Skills and Research

Institute's very own CPP, talked to professors, and students—much like I did at the Escola Nacional. The Institute itself is part of a state-wide intersectorial⁷¹ initiative to encourage alternative forms of agro ecological production; consequently, the same Agroecology course is scheduled to start in three different state locations (Ribeirão Preto, Itapeva, and Pontal de Paranapanema), in August of this year. At the time of my visit, the Institute had not finalized the course's relationship with a potential partnering institution; nonetheless, the Institute decided to go ahead and have a Preparatory Stage before the course officially starts. Twenty seven students participated in this preparatory stage, ages 14-41⁷².

In the “Fundamentos da Agroecologia⁷³” class I observed, students were discussing the history of agrarian reform using Marxist theories, deconstructing how private property and capital changed human relationships. During one of their group activities, students discussed both the advantages and limits to agroecological forms of production and all agreed agroecology represents a crucial political instrument in the construction of an alternative society. Students at the Institute, like at the Escola Nacional, also organized themselves in *nucleos*, engaged in processes of individual and collective evaluation, organized cultural nights, and took responsibility for the Institute's maintenance and upkeep. I was not surprised, then, to find out that Elaine Cristina Locan and Lidia Silva, both members of the Institute's CPP, had participated in courses at the Escola Nacional (Theory of Knowledge, and Rural Education, respectively). The multidimensional pedagogy employed at the Escola Nacional, and previously employed throughout the history of political formation within the MST, is clearly being employed at the Institute. Yet it is being redefined and reconstructed to fit the needs of this Institute's class, and

⁷¹ Members of the MST's national Production, Education, and Communications Sectors made up the CPP, emphasizing that the question of political formation is not just the Formation Sector's responsibility but involved all sectors at all levels.

⁷² The course is of *ensino medio*, or for students who have not finished high school.

⁷³ Agroecological Foundations

the needs of the MST in this locality, which is where Locan and Silva come in. As MST leaders who currently participate in courses and ‘train’ at the Escola Nacional, they can now apply and exercise what they have learned through their coordination of this course at the Institute; the first course of its kind in the state of São Paulo⁷⁴.

The second example I will provide is Fabio Henrique—one of Locan’s classmates in the Escola Nacional’s Theory of Knowledge course. While I had the opportunity to see Locan and Silva help coordinate a course, I saw Henrique doing *trabalhos de nucleo*⁷⁵ at an encampment in Ribeirão Preto, São Paulo⁷⁶. To a group of about 30 *acampados*, he explained a proposal put forth by a governmental entity that would purchase the *acampados*’ agroecological products—an incredible feat considering they did not yet have title to the land. Henrique started a dialogue with the group, and literally asked every member what they thought of the proposal before they made a collective decision.

Henrique then explained to the nucleo the political implications of their participation in the proposal, for not only would they be using their alternative agroecological forms of production, but the entity itself had made plans to then donate the products to local orphanages and charities. In other words, he was asking the *acampados* to ask themselves the following: How would the surrounding community want them expelled from the land if they continued to agroecologically work some of the most unproductive lands in the state, and furthermore, if their products helped feed orphans in the community? For some of the *acampados*, this was the first time they saw their actions working within a heavily politicized context.

In effect, these two examples illustrate how the Escola Nacional’s multidimensional pedagogy equips MST leaders to return to their communities and make contributions. Such

⁷⁴ At the secondary school level.

⁷⁵ Work with *nucleos de base*.

⁷⁶ Acampamento Mário Lago.

contributions could take place through different sectors (Production, Education, etcetera), and at different levels of political formation. For example, Henrique worked with the politicization of the *base*, while Locan and Silva's worked more with the politicization of *militantes*. I am not arguing that all MST leaders are making the same kinds of contributions nor participating in the creation of similar alternatives of production, communication, etcetera (in the process of working towards constructing a broader popular project for Brazil). However, these are but three of the 1500 students who have already participated in courses at the Escola Nacional, in less than a year and a half.

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INDICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

I originally became interested in doing my ISP on the MST because my parents both come from Mexican *campesino* families. Like the Brazilian *campesinos* who leave rural areas to move to the cities in search of socioeconomic survival (or even *campesinos* and city dwellers living in the Northeast who migrate down to São Paulo), my parents emigrated to the US about 30 years ago from Mexico. My personal reasons and academic reasons for taking on this project come together with the question of political formation. I always wondered how the process of political formation initially takes place. And through my field study I soon realized that this process starts at different times with different people, depending on their individual realities. Nevertheless, like any social movement, the MST has certain *linhas politicas*⁷⁷ that mediate this process, which themselves are mediated by the Movement's ever-changing needs. I guess the importance of my research really lies in looking at how the Movement's political aims are subtly (and not so subtly at times) incorporated within the Escola Nacional's multidimensional pedagogy. For anyone interested in further research, I would recommend a more profound examination of the previous courses and partnerships that have taken place. I would specially recommend looking at ITERRA and its role within the MSTs pedagogy of political formation. It would also be interesting to look at more examples of contributions made by those who have already studied at the Escola Nacional.

The role of cultural politics within this pedagogy can also be the subject of its own ISP, as well as the way mental health affects it efficacy and continuously challenges the Movement as a whole.

⁷⁷ Political aims.

ISP APPENDIX

1. I could not have done this project from the USA, since I would not have had physical access to the Escola Nacional. I would not have been able to see the Escola Nacional's multidimensional pedagogy at work: and sit in during classes, participate in an afternoon of volunteer work or in one of their Cultural Nights, and/or analyze how the Escola Nacional's physical spaces are used. My sources were unique to my visit to São Paulo—from my advisor, Gerardo Fontes (who serves in the *Direção Nacional* of the MST), to the students and staff I was able to talk to and learn from during my stay at the Escola Nacional.
2. I might have been able to contact someone from the CPP via email, and maybe they would have been able to provide me with professor and student contact information. But the project would have been completely different. I would not have been able to have the kinds of conversations I had with people via email. Also, I would not have been able to make any real observations, especially in terms of the way certain physical spaces are used, class dynamics, and the role cultural politics play in the Escola Nacional's pedagogy.
3. Doing my ISP at times added to, and at others inhibited my learning style. I did learn more during my ISP than in my last three years at Yale... about Latin America, myself, and people in general. I learned more from my conversations with people than I could have ever learned from reading any text book. However, the fact that I was working on my ISP sometimes made people uneasy, even if I wasn't interviewing them and just wanted to talk.
4. The majority of my monograph is primary data, mostly description and analysis based on interviews and observation.
5. I definitely had more data than I needed. I decided to divide my monograph into sections, and based on those sections, chose the data that would best explain my argument.
6. They were helpful in finding my way to places and collecting my data. I remembered and used the tips we read in the FSS readings when transcribing my daily notes, for example.
7. I think the emphasis on gathering data and taking copious notes. Although in the end I had a lot more than I included, it is definitely better to have more than to have gaps in your research.
8. I think one of the 'problems' was dealing with male interviewees. Although I felt uncomfortable a couple of times, I never felt disrespected.
9. The real time constraints came after the field research, when I had so much information and felt extremely overwhelmed. While I could have avoided this by writing parts of my project beforehand, I didn't know how I was going to structure my paper until I had collected all of my data.
10. My original topic definitely modified and evolved. For one, I didn't focus on the class I originally thought I would study, because it wasn't currently being offered at the school. And the issue of political formation was a lot more complex than I originally thought. The bulk of my research and what I learned during my ISP really dealt with the different ways this political formation works at different levels within the Movement, and the Escola Nacional is just one space of political formation, focused on *capacitação*.

11. In terms of finding sources, Gerardo was very helpful in arranging my visit to the Escola Nacional, and once there, I made friends with several people which made it easy to find possible interviewees. Adaiana gave me some materials from the visitor's reception, and Gerardo also provided me with some materials from the *Secretaria Nacional*.
12. My methodology focused on observation at the Escola Nacional in Guararema, São Paulo. I wrote in my ISP field journal extensively since I felt my observations would then allow me to ask more informed questions. For example, I first received a tour of campus, which was extremely important in getting acquainted with the different physical spaces. I had some questions I had planned to ask professors, students, and members of the CPP, but in general, my interviews were more informal and allowed for my interviewees and I to have more thoughtful conversations. I interviewed a member of the CPP; a member of the Setor de Apoio Pedagógico; the Professor of the course being offered at the time; and several students (three formal interviews, and the rest informal).
13. My advisor was most definitely indispensable. I would not have had access to the Escola Nacional, the materials I was able to look through, or have been able to build the friendships I did had it not been for him. He was most helpful when I returned from collecting data and could barely articulate my thoughts and observations—I was too overwhelmed. We sat down and worked through some of my ideas together. He also supplied me with some materials produced by the MST that would help me better understand how the Movement has approached the issue of political formation over the years.
14. No. While I did not include everything in my monograph, I definitely plan on applying it to my work in the future, academic and non-academic. Some of my work and research I may use in a book collaboration opportunity that arose in the MST *alojamento* in São Paulo (with Beverly Bell, author of *Walking on Fire*). I may also use some for my senior project, and I have already thought of applying some things to my work outside of the classroom (in terms of organizing and putting together activities for some of the organizations I participate in).
15. Through my ISP, I had my first contact with the southern region of Brazil. My notion of just how diverse Brazil really is definitely broadened. Through the Escola's cultural night, for example, I had the opportunity to eat food I had never even heard of, and dance to music I had not listened to. The Escola Nacional provided me with a space where there were Brazilians from every state represented, which was an incredible experience for me—not just in terms of learning about the diverse MST realities, but about diverse Brazilian realities in general.
16. The ISP process was when I really became integrated to the culture because I could not speak English at all. I didn't have my classmates around, and no one spoke English. Although I did speak Spanish with a couple of people, even this helped improve my Portuguese somewhat.
17. I learned to really trust in strangers (for directions, information, food, a place to sleep). I learned that the question is not what will I make out of myself, but rather, what will I make out of my life? Which are two very different questions. I learned that other worlds are not only possible, but they do exist. We just don't hear about them.
18. Be prepared for one of the most (if not the most) enriching learning experiences you could ever have.

19. Yes! If I could have stayed, I would have. I know that I will return; I owe the MST too much. I will forever be indebted to my friends—people I ate with, talked to, and who shared so much with me. No written monograph could even remotely describe or convey the richness of my experiences and the integrity, beauty, and selflessness I found in the people I met. As one of the girls put it: “*O tempo e a distância jamais poderão apagar de nossos corações a lembrança daqueles que conseguiram conquistar nossa amizade.*”