


Fall 2011

Constructing Cidadania: Shifting Visions of Citizenship in the MST settlement Assentamento 25 de Maio in Ceará, Brazil

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**SIT Brazil:
Social Justice and Sustainable Development**

**Constructing *Cidadania*:
Shifting Visions of Citizenship in the MST settlement
Assentamento 25 de Maio in Ceará, Brazil**

Submitted by
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An ISP Monograph Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of:
ISPR 3000
Date: 10 December 2011

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Abstract

The social movement known as *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST) was founded in 1984 with the intent of agrarian reform in a newly democratic Brazil. The movement arrived in Northeastern Brazil in the late 1980s and successfully organized a group of landless workers in the interior of Ceará on May 25, 1989 to create the first settlement the state had seen. The citizens of *Assentamento 25 de Maio*, as the settlement was later named, have undergone a unique social transition from circumstances closely resembling forced servitude and *latifúndio* to liberation. This transition affected the men and women who fought for liberation and who now comprise the elder portion of the communities in the settlement. Specifically, the concept of *cidadania*—or citizenship—underwent reconstruction as this group of elders transitioned from one social setting into another. More over, the influence from the MST has greatly contributed to the shift in how these elders define *cidadania* and suggests a change in social identification in the context of a social movement.

This paper aims to demonstrate said reconstruction of the term *cidadania* through the interpretation of observations and interviews conducted with four elders of the community *Paus Brancos* within the settlement and extensive reflection on the organization and ideologies of the movement MST. In addition, this paper will document the personal narratives of these four elders in order to better understand the experiences that influenced the definition of *cidadania* and to contribute to a more cohesive, unified understanding of the term.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the great trust and faith my family demonstrated in allowing me to travel nearly 4,000 miles away from home. Their unwavering support in my decision has kept my spirits high in times of difficulty and reminded me of how lucky I am to have such an amazing family. I would also like to thank the SIT faculty for giving me another amazing family here in Fortaleza who has not only welcomed me into their home and hearts but who have also given me such wonderful memories to take back to the United States. I only hope that I left them with equally beautiful memories and the desire to create more in the future.

Specifically, I would like to thank my Academic Director Bill Calhoun who was always, without fail, by my side when I needed his advice, his support, and his help; Oélito Brandão who made this semester a truly enjoyable one with his smile and dedication to the program; and Paula Santos who showed me so much kindness and support.

To those I met in *Quieto* during my first week at the *Assentamento*, particularly Dona Gorete, Marcirene, and Alex Victor. It was a privilege to stay in your home and spend my days sitting on the patio with you. I wish you all the best for the future and cannot wait to return and continue playing and sharing stories. To Oziel, who not only managed to get my giant suitcase from Madalena all the way to the *Assentamento*, but who always greeted me with a smile and helped me tremendously with my research on the MST. And, of course, to my host family in *Paus Brancos*: you welcomed me into your family with open arms and nursed me back to health when I could barely get out of my *rede*. I cannot imagine my time at the *Assentamento* without you and, frankly, I don't think I would have survived without your love and support. I'm

sorry I couldn't eat as much rice and beans as you wanted me to but know that I'm going to kick myself when I realize how much I miss them once I get back to the United States.

To the wonderful, vibrant, and loving Dona Preta, Batista, and Seu Chichico. It was a pleasure interviewing you all and I hope you share your stories with the others in your community. This paper is dedicated to you and could not have been possible without your trust in my work and me. I will do my best to tell the world about your lives, your struggles, and your achievements.

And finally, to one of the most amazing women I've ever met. Dona Maria Lima you were my rock. I remember presenting my idea for my ISP to Bill back in September and I remember writing down your name when he told me about this woman known as the mother of the MST. Little did I know that you would also become a mother to me. My days were brighter when you were with me and I will never forget that night we spent under the stars, swapping stories about our childhoods. I hope you always remain as young and spirited as I will remember you and that I can return one day. Thank you for providing me with a home and a family.

Definition of Terms

Cidadania: citizenship

Cidadão: citizen

MST: the Movement of Landless Workers

Assentamento: an MST settlement

Escola do campo: an MST sponsored high school

Paus Brancos: the community in which I lived and conducted my four principle interviews

Quieto: the community that hosts the *escola do campo*

Patrão: the landowner of a large estate

Fazenda: the farm and home of the *Patrão*

Latifúndio: Latifundium or the ownership of a large piece of land by one person who employs workers in a system closely resembling slavery

Sertão: the interior of Brazil where *Assentamento 25 de Maio* is located

Açude: reservoir used for agricultural needs

Roça: the fields/plantations where rice, beans, and corn are typically harvested

Methodology

The intent of my research while at the *Assentamento* was to gather as much empirical evidence as possible from six of the elders in the community *Paus Brancos*. This group of people was chosen primarily because of their age and ability to recall the lifestyle of the families living on the land before the movement MST arrived and organized the landless workers. The majority of my evidence, therefore, was taken from formal and informal interviews with these elders and other members of the *Assentamento* in October, November, and December of 2011.

In October I spent one week at the *Assentamento* living in the communities *Queito* and *Paus Brancos*. This preliminary experience at the *Assentamento* allowed me to determine the area that I would designate for my research (*Paus Brancos*) in the months of November and December when I went back for nearly three weeks. Because I was still unsure of where to conduct my research, the first week spent at the *Assentamento* was dedicated in large part to observation of day-to-day practices and interactions between the people of the two communities. The next two were spent interviewing the elders and continuing with my observations of daily activities and relationships while living with my project advisor Dona Maria Lima in *Paus Brancos*. The final week was spent transcribing interviews and revisiting members of the community for further information on specific material.

Unfortunately, two of the six elders I had hoped to interview were unable to participate in my study because of physical and mental health reasons. The other four, however, contributed two recorded interviews each—the first centered on their personal narratives and the second on their thoughts surrounding *cidadania* and the nature of the social circumstance they experienced before the arrival of the MST. These formal interviews, along with informal interviews and observations, have provided both empirical evidence towards the social

identification of a specific group of people in the context of a social movement and have also helped develop my own theories on the evolution of social identification and the importance of supporting social movements.

The informal interviews and conversations that have contributed to this research came largely from school professors or administrators, family members of the four elders I formally interviewed, and young adults in the *Assentamento*. Though I was able to speak to a variety of people, I was not able to gain every perspective and dedicate an equal amount of time to each person.

Secondary sources, both in English and in Portuguese, were also used to research the history, organization, and ideologies of the movement MST. Student dissertations, MST publications, and various other sources were used to complete this research. Articles concerning the concept of citizenship (on a universal scale rather than one limited to Brazil or even Ceará) were crucial in formulating several of the questions asked in the interviews and served as a foundation for my own vision of *cidadania*. These articles also demonstrated the need for empirical evidence in order to support the theories they described.

Given the short amount of time allotted to conduct fieldwork on such an extensive theme, my research is limited to the unique perspectives of only four people and my own interpretations of the community. It must also be noted that many of my interpretations come not only from the answers I recorded from each interview but also from the unspoken answers I received from body language, the nature of relations, social hierarchies, and power dynamics.

Location of Research

Assentamento 25 de Maio is located roughly 30 to 40 minutes outside of the city Madalena in the interior of Ceará, Brazil. Madalena is approximately 180 kilometers southwest of Fortaleza and located in a semi-arid, desert-like terrain. There are more than 18,000 residents of Madalena and an estimated 450-650 families living in the *Assentamento*.

The research for this paper was conducted in two of the 15 communities located in the *Assentamento*: *Quieto* and *Paus Brancos*. The former is home to the *escola do campo* and was reachable to me only by the daily trucks that commute from the various communities to the school. The latter is home to all four elders that were interviewed and is the oldest community in the *Assentamento*. *Paus Brancos* also boasts an *açude*, health outpost, a primary school, two snack bars, two grocery stores, and three churches (one is expected to be fully constructed by Christmas 2011). It is a small community but filled with both young and old members. Children go to school either in the morning from 7-11am or from 1-5pm and adults typically work in the *roça* from 7am until 5pm with a short break for lunch around 11:30am. Another 30 to 40 minutes of distance separate the two communities.

Introduction

The decision to focus my Independent Study Project on the concept of *cidadania* arose from my own general confusion with the term as it relates to Brazilian politics, society, and culture. Though the federal government boasts a website dedicated to perpetuating the understanding of this term, my experience in Northeastern Brazil has shown that many Brazilians struggle with defining what it means to be a citizen. The term *cidadania* appears to be both an objective and subjective one; the federal and state governments along with the Federal Constitution of 1988 enumerate the rights and responsibilities of Brazilian citizens but unique individual definitions suggest that the term goes beyond legal stipulations and includes socio-cultural aspects as well.

Literature on citizenship also fails to account for empirical evidence from “Third Wave democracies” like Brazil and instead focuses on theoretical definitions influenced by countries like the United States and Great Britain (Houtzager & Acharya, p. 1). This clear lack in empirical evidence from Brazil motivated me to structure my project around the individual perspectives of *cidadania*. The only questions that remained were where I would conduct my research and with whom.

To answer the first question I decided to take my project into the *Sertão*—the interior region of Brazil known for its droughts, rustic lifestyle, and the continued absence of government support. This area is historically marginalized by Brazilian politicians and suffers the worst distribution of natural and financial resources in the country. The concept of *cidadania* would thus be an important and relevant one to the people living in this area.

After answering the first question, it was apparent that I needed to find a group of people who faced particular life challenges that influenced their definitions of *cidadania*. I was in search of subjects who had undergone a drastic social change that directly impacted their conceptualization of what it means to be a citizen—both legally and socio-culturally. My answer lay in the social movement *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, or the MST as the organization is commonly referred to. Through the MST, a group that works to organize landless rural workers to pressure state governments into instigating agrarian reform, I found *Assentamento 25 de Maio* in the municipality of Madalena, Ceará. This particular *assentamento* is home to a group of elders who worked the land before the arrival of the MST and can recall the lifestyle under the *Patrão*. They have undergone a unique transition from social circumstances closely resembling slavery to liberation and said transition has challenged their notions of what it means to be a citizen of Brazil. I traveled to the *Assentamento* in hopes of redefining *cidadania* with the words of one of Brazil's most neglected populations. This paper will serve as a collection of empirical data reflecting the personal narratives of four elders and their shifting visions of *cidadania*.

Prior to any definition of *cidadania*, I will attempt to trace the origins of the social movement MST back to the colonial beginnings of sixteenth century Brazil and follow the history of its creation to present day. I will also focus specifically on the presence of the movement in the state of Ceará and its role in the creation of the *assentamento* where I conducted my research.

Once a historical foundation has been laid, I will discuss the various definitions of *cidadania* and the theoretical questions surrounding the general concept of citizenship. Then I will discuss the ways in which the MST has incorporated its conception of *cidadania* into the

educational program and the ways in which it has used Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed to influence and challenge the social identification of the once landless workers.

Following the historical context and theoretical basis of both the MST and *cidadania*, I will retell the stories of four elders from the community *Paus Brancos*. Through the use of the interviews gathered from these elders I will be able to formulate a cohesive and unified definition of *cidadania*. Finally, it is important to also respond to their concerns regarding the future legal and socio-cultural standing of the newer generations and to share my own conclusions as to how the definition of *cidadania* will continue to evolve as the community grows.

Origins of the MST

In order to better understand the nature of this research on *cidadania*, it is crucial to historically contextualize the social movement for agrarian reform that helped create the MST and *Assentamento 25 de Maio*. This section will provide a detailed history from 1530 to present day and examine the political, economic, and social factors that contributed to the creation of the MST. It will also serve as a reference to the organization of the MST and in particular its involvement with *Assentamento 25 de Maio*.

History from 1530 to 1964

When Pedro Cabral landed on the shores of what is now the state of Bahia in 1500, the concept of land distribution and agrarian reform were far from his mind. The Portuguese

Crown, after learning of Cabral's accidental¹ discovery, were interested solely in the exportation of natural resources and had no apparent desire to follow the Spanish Crown and colonize their newfound territory. It was not until 1530 that the Portuguese showed signs of the colonization fever that had taken hold of their European neighbors and in 1534 they divided the land and appointed Portuguese aristocrats to control large estates. As Joseph Page explains,

“Because incursions from other European powers threatened the vast new territory, the Portuguese Crown realized that colonization would be the only way it could retain access to the wealth of Brazil, but instead of directly under-writing the effort of occupying the colony, the Crown decided to let others do the job. So Brazil was divided into fifteen so-called captaincies, parallel strips of land bordered to the east by the sea and to the west by the line of the Treaty of Tordesillas. Each captaincy stretched at least ninety miles along the coast. The king bestowed them to distinguished noblemen or commoners who had rendered outstanding service to the Crown” (Page, p. 39)

This division of land not only granted the Portuguese noblemen control over the budding agricultural economy but it also granted them unlimited and undisputed power over the vast estates that they had inherited. The captaincies only lasted until 1549 when the Crown moved to centralize the government but they have had lasting impacts on Brazilian land distribution.

The most potent of these impacts was the *latifúndio* system of agricultural land management. “Under this arrangement,” writes Jeff Garmany, “a single landowner controlled a large plantation, and those who labored on the plantation rarely had any rights to the land they lived and worked on” (Garmany, p. 37). This same system is still seen today and is one of the leading reasons why various agrarian reform organizations and movements have sprung up throughout Brazil's history. The *latifúndio* system permitted the landowners to maintain control over the agrarian society that was forming and led to the need for imported labor. Because the plots of land were so large and the number of European colonists willing to work under such harsh conditions was low, the Crown began importing slaves from Africa in 1538. Slavery

¹ This is a disputed fact: some historians believe that Cabral intentionally sailed west and had prior knowledge or at least suspicion of land in that direction.

quickly became an institution in Brazil and the agrarian economy depended on its continuance; once the slaves were emancipated in 1888, the growing socio-economic gap pushed many former slaves back to the *latifúndios* where they joined peasant farmers.

In 1891 the new constitution gave the individual states the power to create their own landownership laws; however, rather than reform the current system of *latifúndio*, many of the states confirmed its legality. The Northeast was particularly affected as the powerful aristocrats of the area controlled state politics (Garmany, p. 38). The inequality between the wealthy elites and the marginalized poor grew as the 19th century came to a close. Political tension between the two classes reached its peak in 1924 when Luis Carlos Prestes organized the Communist Party and began to gather support throughout Brazil's rural communities. The southern elites in particular fought back and helped give rise to the populist dictator/president Getulio Vargas in 1930 (Garmany, p. 39). It wasn't until 1961 when João Goulart unexpectedly came into office that Brazil began to move towards agrarian reform. Though Goulart proposed a bill for major redistribution of land in 1963, he was only able to create rural labor unions in 1962. His efforts triggered a reaction from political and economic conservatives and Goulart was removed from office on April 2, 1964 in a military coup d'état supported by Washington DC. The military overthrow cast Brazil into an era of military dictatorship until 1985 and temporarily thwarted hopes of agrarian reform.

Birth of the MST

Even before the military dictatorship, grassroots for agrarian reform had taken hold of rural communities and from 1950 to 1964 three peasant organizations nourished hopes of

change. These three organizations are recognized as the first organized efforts by the people to influence land and agrarian reform.

The first organization was the *Ligas Camponesas*, or Peasant Leagues. It began to formulate in 1945 at the end of Vargas' dictatorship and was supported by the Communist Party of Brazil². They were "brutally repressed", however, once the Dutra government declared the PCB illegal and only reappeared in 1954 in Pernambuco (Harnecker, p. 24). The organization was the first in its time and is well known as the most radical: in the 1950s a part of the *Ligas* attempted to organize guerilla groups in order to forcibly push the government's hand in agrarian reform. The organization was disbanded in 1964.

The PCB created the second organization while the *Ligas* was beginning to resurface in 1954. It was known as the Union of Farmers and Agricultural Workers—or *Uitab*—and was, "a sort of association of rural workers organized at the municipal, state and national levels, to coordinate peasant associations" (Harnecker, p. 25). Once again the PCB attempted to solidify a political alliance between the workers and the peasants.

The last organization, created in Rio Grande do Sul, was known on a much smaller scale as the Movement of Landless Farmers, or *Master*. This organization appeared at the end of the 1950s with the intention to conquer land. Rather than simply fight to stay on the land, as the *Ligas* did, *Master* brought together peasants who forcefully occupied sections of great estates and demanded the right to own pieces of the land (Harnecker, p. 25). But like the other organizations, *Master* disappeared with the rise of Brazil's military dictatorship.

These three organizations all responded to the growing frustration of the rural peasants trapped in the vicious *latifúndio* system. But the military dictatorship was quick to silence their demands:

² Known as the PCB—*Partido Comunista do Brasil*

“[the dictatorship] violently repressed all the peasant movements alleging they were a communist menace. The main leaders were imprisoned, many had to go into exile, and hundreds of other leaders were murdered. Terror was installed in Brazil. Anyone speaking about agrarian reform was a candidate for several months in prison. [...] Repression was so harsh that the three [peasant] movements [already mentioned] were destroyed. Some unions of rural workers put up a very weak resistance but they completely changed their activities and came to assume the characteristics of a social assistance organization.” (Stedile & Sérgio, p. 14-15)

The dictatorship, however severe it was, could not completely remove the hope for agrarian reform that would later encourage the peasants to fight back. In retrospect the economic, political, and social policies of the dictatorship unknowingly engendered circumstances that drove the peasant workers to the brink and led to the creation of the MST.

The Vargas dictatorship of the 1930s shifted the Brazilian agrarian society towards an industrialized one that would finally modernize the country. This shift continued into the military dictatorship of the 1960s and soon a capitalist modernization of the countryside meant the replacement of human labor for machinery. The social and economic disaster that ensued for peasant workers was only worsened by the industrial crisis of the late 1970s that made jobs in the cities scarce. With no where to go the peasant workers turned towards new agricultural frontiers but unfit conditions like the lack of roads, no means of production, and no welfare for the workers meant an even harder life than the ones they had left behind. Soon wealthy individuals and companies began buying property rights to land that the peasant workers were attempting to work despite the harsh conditions. Because they had no legal claim over the land they cultivated, these individuals and companies were able to not only lay claim to the huge tracks of land but were also able to exploit the already existent labor in a clientilistic manner that resembled the *latifúndio* system of the sixteenth century (Harnecker, p. 27-29). With

nowhere to go³ the landless workers turned towards the Catholic Church as a safe haven. The new Christian movement known as liberation theology encouraged the landless workers to fight the injustices of the government and seek out economic, legal, and social rights that they had been denied for so long. The Church's Pastoral Commission for the Land⁴ took priests and laymen to the rural communities and *fazendas* to spread the concepts behind liberation theology and show support for an organized peasant movement that would "organize and struggle, and solve their problems not in heaven, but here on earth" (Harnecker, p. 30). Soon the prospect of not just agrarian reform but the transformation of an unjust society began to inspire the landless workers to organize and begin sowing the seeds for a future movement that would achieve these aspirations.

As the military dictatorship weakened due to the economic crisis of the late 1970s, the process of democratization began to take hold of the Brazilian population. The Sandinista victory in Nicaragua in 1979 generated a revolutionary fervor throughout Brazil and soon manifestations protesting the military regime began. Struggles for land redistribution and ownership first began in the Southern state of Rio Grande do Sul in Macali, Brilhante, and Anoni (Harnecker, p. 33). Macali is recognized as the first land conquest and inspired other occupations and conquests in Santa Catarina, Paraná, São Paulo, and Mato Grosso do Sul. These struggles lasted from 1978 until 1984 when talk of a new social movement known as the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* began.

The MST was officially founded in 1984 and held its First National Meeting in January of that year (Harnecker, p. 38). One hundred representatives from 13 states attended and the new organization was described as "an autonomous mass movement struggling for land [and]

³ The military regime was careful to disband any organized meetings that showed signs of political resistance and revolutionary talk.

⁴ Known as the CPT

agrarian reform” (Harnecker, p. 39). It was viewed as anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and utopist.

Today the social movement achieves land redistribution through a series of organized events that pressure the state government and the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform⁵ (Faber, p. 35). This institute was created in 1970 with the mission to:

“Further agrarian reform with a focus on complete and sustainable local development with a base in the principles of social justice, seeking to guarantee citizenship and improve the socio-economic conditions of the rural population.” (Faber, p. 35)

Many times INCRA’s involvement in one of its projects ends once expropriation is achieved; they offer no technical help to assist the newly founded community. For this reason, along with INCRA’s generally slow process of land redistribution, organizations like MST have achieved much more than government institutions in agrarian reform and land redistribution (Faber, p. 38). The way in which the MST gains INCRA’s attention towards a specific area is through the use of occupations. These occupations begin at the grassroots level of the newly organized landless workers: group discussions within the community are aimed at convincing the workers to unite and organize to claim property rights from the state government. Then, the organized landless workers occupy a piece of the land and typically occupy the state’s INCRA building as well. Sometimes temporary houses are constructed or tents are set up but either way it is known that the workers will not leave the land until INCRA has decided whether or not the area is being productively utilized and whether or not to grant the landless workers a piece (if not all) of the estate (Harnecker, p. 75).

Though the occupation of land has been scrutinized by the media in the past as an act of civil disobedience towards current laws, it also “puts into practice the constitutional mandate to carry out agrarian reform and make all lands fulfill their social function” (Harnecker, p. 81). In this way, the movement not only seeks to redistribute property but also to adhere to the

⁵ In Portuguese: *Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária* or INCRA

democratic rights that the constitution of 1988 guarantees all Brazilians regardless of socio-economic status or cultural affiliation. The movement traces its roots back to the era of captaincies and is even today influenced by its old communist and religious allies. The landless workers were not only seeking out land acquisition but also societal reform to build a just society for the future generations of Brazil—a dream they pursue to this day.

Assentamento 25 de Maio

Northeastern Brazil, comprised of the nine states Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte, and Sergipe, has historically represented one of Brazil's most impoverished areas. The state of Ceará, where the *Assentamento 25 de Maio* was established, occupies 148,920.538km² and supports 8,452,381 people as of the 2010 Brazilian Nation Census (IBGE website). Of that number, only 2,105,824⁶ people are recorded as “rural residents” and a staggering 53.89%⁷ of the total population is considered impoverished—ranking Ceará as the fourth state with the highest level of poverty in the country. As Joseph Page describes:

“A majority of *nordestinos* (northeasterners) live in abject poverty. Indeed, the area contains the largest concentration of wretchedness, both rural and urban, to be found anywhere in the Western Hemisphere.” (Page, p. 186)

The area where *Assentamento 25 de Maio* is located was the first to receive the attention of the MST back in 1989. General Wicar Parente de Paula Pessoa previously owned this land and 100 peasant families worked and lived there under his rule (Field Journal, p. 63). The

⁶ Also taken from the 2010 Brazilian Nation Census

⁷ Statistic taken from a 2003 IBGE report

fazenda was called *Reunidas São Joaquim* and was 22,992,498 hectares⁸—at the time it was the largest property of land owned by a single person (Field Journal, p. 63). When the General died, his son⁹ João Carneiro and then later his grandson Fernando Hugo inherited the land and maintained the same level of production General Wicar once demanded (Field Journal, p. 26, 38). Once the MST arrived in Ceará, its first project lay in the occupation of General Wicar's land. Dona Maria Lima of the *assentamento* recalls the movement spreading the word about the occupation to nearby communities under the false pretense that there would be a *feira* on May 25th so as not to draw attention to the clandestine operation¹⁰ (Field Journal, p. 28). Then, at dawn on May 25, 1989, the occupation began. It lasted approximately three months and after two months a delegation of 100 people was sent to Fortaleza to occupy the INCRA building (Field Journal, p. 62). After three months of occupation, harassment, and hardship, the people that once worked the land of General Wicar were granted property rights. Today, twelve communities of *Assentamento 25 de Maio* are registered¹¹ with INCRA and another three are unregistered¹² (Field Journal, p. 62-63). According to INCRA, the *assentamento* is home to 450 families but MST believes there to be an additional 200—making it one of the largest *assentamentos* in both size and population in Ceará (Field Journal, p. 63, 12).

Today the *assentamento* is reachable by dirt road from the neighboring modest city of Madalena (Field Journal, p. 7). The houses are made from either *taipa* or *tijolo* [clay or brick] and are all one story (Field Journal, p. 8). The *assentamento* boasts the first *escola do campo* of the

⁸ 56,815,700 acres

⁹ Referred to as the *Gerente* by those who live in the *assentamento* today.

¹⁰ The MST, when organizing occupations, retains a high level of secrecy as to the location, date, and time of the occupation so as to avoid confrontation with the landowners and, potentially, the police.

¹¹ The twelve include: Nova Vida I, Nova Vida II, São Nicolão, Quietão, São Joaquim, Angelim, Agreste, Perdição, Paus Ferros, Paus Brancos, Mel, and Caiçara.

¹² The three include: Raiz, Central, and Arveiras.

Northeast and contains a number of primary schools, a radio station, health outposts, several churches, a couple small grocery stores, and a couple snack bars (Field Journal, p. 3, 9). Though it is located in the geographically dry *Sertão*, the *assentamento* borders a number of *açudes* that provide the communities with fresh water year-round. The communities are small and quiet but filled with children and young adults who will, like their parents before them, share the right to claim a piece of land.

Theorizing *Cidadania*

The MST recognized the need to not only acquire property rights for landless workers but also the importance of building a community that supports the ideologies of the movement and the people's rights. In order to properly understand the ways in which the MST implements its notions of *cidadania* through its unique pedagogy, it is first crucial to begin defining *cidadania* and its relationship to the movement and the Brazilian people. This section will seek to define this complex term both according to the Brazilian federal government and in more universal terminology while examining the ways Brazil has put its principles into practice. It will then describe how the movement contributes to the democratic culture of Brazil and, more specifically, the methods that the MST utilizes to foster a culture of *cidadania* within the *assentamentos*.

Defining a Complex Term

The Constitution of 1988 ushered in a new era of democracy in Brazil and began by enumerating the rights belonging to every *cidadão* regardless of race, gender, age, or socio-economic status. Included on the federal government's website is a list of rights and responsibilities expected for every Brazilian. They include: the right to education, the eradication of child labor¹³, access to the Justice system, access to healthcare, freedom of discrimination based on race, color, age, gender, religion, and sexual orientation, and the protection of human rights (www.brasil.gov.br/sobre/cidadania). This definition of *cidadania*, however, is incomplete. It foregoes the incorporation of civil rights and fails to mention the importance of political and social participation. The confusion surrounding the term *cidadania* appears to come from the hypocrisy of the federal government's theory of *cidadania* and what is actually practiced.

At its most general, citizenship is the,

“formal membership in a nation and the individual rights and obligations that go along with it, such as that of voting and military service. Citizenship conveys the notion of rights held by individuals and protected by a state without violating a state's legitimacy.” (Mitchell & Wood, p. 2)

Yet beyond this simplified definition, there is also an element of participation in exercising the right to change the way the resources of a country are allocated. In this way citizenship encompasses political participation, representation, and human rights. The political and legal rights are easily defined by the state but the social rights, including human rights, constantly challenge current definitions of citizenship. Social movements organize citizens to fight to update the social rights expected by a citizen based on current social circumstances of the

¹³ Determined illegal if the child is below the age of 14.

country. Social movements then seek to constantly expand and improve the definition of citizenship to include measures towards social justice. The degree to which the government can guarantee the full and universal rights of citizenship that grow and change in accordance with pressure from social movements is thought to be an indicator of the progress made towards institutionalizing democracy in a particular country (Mitchell & Wood, p. 2). Brazil's inability to do so suggests that its transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one is still incomplete.

If the construction of citizenship is to be viewed in the context of nation building and historical development—as T.S. Marshal advocates—it becomes even more evident that Brazil's failure to transition completely into a democratic state has left it unable to grant its citizens full and universal citizenship (Mitchell & Wood, p. 2). Historically, Brazilians were never granted complete social rights across all demographics but rather were granted based on class: the wealthiest were treated as full citizens while the lower classes were notoriously denied even basic human necessities (Mitchell & Wood, p. 3). Brazil has thus far been unable to grant its citizens full and universal rights because the participation of the citizens—especially those that have been historically marginalized—is frequently prevented from impacting the distribution of rights to all demographics. Despite the fact that,

“the most recent Brazilian constitution (like the ones before it) denies status privileges and restrictions and reaffirms the inviolability of private property and the equality of all citizens before the law,...transition to an elected government is not a sufficient condition for the creation of an institutionalized democratic regime. The latter involves the reconstruction of state institutions and of civil society and the dismantling of antidemocratic forms of exercising power, which may be authoritarian, corporatist, or plainly coercive in nature. It requires a change in the rules that govern the distribution of power, as well as a recognition of rights and the legitimation of social actors. Moreover, it requires a change in the behavior of political leaders, who must abandon their recourse to arbitrariness and impunity, and the adoption of norms and values consistent with a culture of citizenship.” (Mitchell & Wood, p. 6)

Political exclusion, authoritarian political and social institutions, and clientelist networks have

prevented Brazil from equally distributing its resources to its people (Houtzager & Acharya, p. 2).

In order to reverse this situation, some believe that citizens must take a more active role in participating in civil associations. With the help of social movements, citizens can become what are known as “active citizens” (Houtzager & Acharya, p. 3). These movements and other forms of civil associations encourage citizens to actively participate in public politics so to influence policy and expand the definition of citizenship. Unfortunately in Brazil,

“...the greatest slippage between the status of citizenship and citizenship in practice is not in the exercise of political rights, but in those civil and social rights that come into play when citizens seek access to public goods and services. Large categories of citizens, when actively negotiating the terms of their access to legally-mandated public goods with agents of the state, are systematically ignored or treated with disdain; they can face ill treatment and the threat of physical violence.” (Houtzager & Acharya, p. 5)

Despite these setbacks, there is a proven correlation between associationalism and education and higher levels of active citizenship (Houtzager & Acharya, p. 25). So long as social movements encourage activism from citizens, the prospect of universal citizenship is much more realistic.

On the MST, Education, and Paulo Freire

The MST has, since its creation, worked towards the achievement of property rights for landless workers as well as the creation of a functioning community within the *assentamentos*. It “demands that the state play a more active role in social development” through demonstrations of public activism, civil disobedience, lobbying and bargaining, ad hoc societal corporatism, electoral participation, and maintenance of legitimate legal actions within the rule of law (Carter, p. 5). Whether through marches to the capital Brasília, occupations of government

institutions like INCRA, or demonstrations of support for the Workers' Party of Brazil, the MST does not in fact seek to sabotage the Brazilian federal government but rather to contribute to Brazilian democracy. It utilizes legal measures and publicity efforts to fight for the rights of a population that has suffered a tremendous injustice in terms of human rights and political representation (Carter, p. 20). Beginning first with the acquisition of land, the MST works steadily towards the creation of communities that foster values in social justice. "By improving the material conditions and cultural resources of its members," explains Carter, "the movement has fortified the social foundations for democracy" and has begun a process of expanding the definition of *cidadania* to include the social rights of the people (Carter, p. 20). It works to battle the "culture of *clientelismo*" [clientism] by building citizenship on the local level (Shapiro, p. 39)

In order to cultivate citizenship at the local level, the MST relies heavily on participation and education. The former requires attendance to meetings, involvement in discussions, presence at the land occupations, and an active desire to improve the communities in a given *assentamento*. The latter is considered one of the MST's most crucial and successful endeavors. The movement says "o Movimento é a nossa grande escola" [the Movement is our great education] and through the multiple stages of land acquisition and the establishment of the *assentamentos*, the MST educates the once landless peasants on what it means to fight for one's rights as a *cidadão* (MST, p. 5). There is a huge emphasis placed on the group over the individual and it is expected that the community will educate the younger generations and each other—that every member will be a teacher and a student all at once (MST, p. 8). Every opportunity is seen as chance to learn something new and rediscover the way in which we see the world and place ourselves within it. During an interview with professor and pedagogy coordinator of the *escola do campo* in *Assentamento 25 de Maio* Oziel Fernando dos Reis, I was told that the MST,

“é tentando trazer para o aluno aquela visão assim, abrir a visão de ele ver mesmo, ver o mundo, ver o mundo com outros olhos. [is trying to bring that vision to the student, to open the vision that he sees, to see the world, to see the world through a new lens]” (Field Journal, p. 48-49).

Professors are expected and encouraged to take the students outside of the class room so as to not only expand their vision of the world but also to challenge previous methods of education that limit the experiences of the student:

“A professora da biologia deve ter que sair por o açude. Deve ir ao açude para fazer relação com o açude, dos animais que tem o açude com o biologia. Entendeu? Mesmo jeito o professor de química. O professor de historia vai ter que tirar os alunos da sala de aula e ir para a comunidade para fazer uma pesquisa com os mais antigos para falar sobre a historia do Assentamento, entendeu? [The biology professor should have to go to the reservoir. He has to go to the reservoir to compare the reservoir, the animals that depend on the reservoir with biology. Understand? So must the chemistry professor. The history professor will have to take the students out of the classroom and into the community to do research projects with the elders to talk about the history of the Assentamento, do you understand?]” (Field Journal, p. 50).

Oziel continued to explain to me that it is not the state that holds stakes in the education of the young people at *Assentamento 25 de Maio*, but rather the MST itself because of what was sacrificed for the mere possibility of education. The fight “custou sangue, custou vidas” [cost blood, cost lives] but the result was a right to an education that would not only prepare the students for the possibility of future studies but also for a life working in the *Assentamento* and continuing the legacy that their parents began (Field Journal, p. 50). Education is the cornerstone to developing the communities at the *assentamentos* and fostering a culture of citizenship that the government has neglected to do. The social movement in this way is not only doing the job that the government should be doing, but it does it in a way that caters to the unique circumstances of the people and their situation.

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educational thinker of the twentieth century, is largely responsible for the pedagogy of the MST. His pedagogy of the oppressed influenced the social

movement not only in its method of instruction but also in its organization. The theory that the oppressed must overcome “the culture of domination” through the collective organization of their ranks to humanize not only themselves but also the oppressors inspired the MST to work alongside landless peasants and help bring them out of the oppressive state and into one of mutually shared respect (Freire, p. 54). Freire believed that,

“it is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves.” (Freire, p. 65)

This would be achieved through action, reflection, and dialogue between those participating in the liberation movement. The same principles were incorporated into the pedagogy of the MST and are believed to liberate the student from the false dichotomy of the student-teacher relationship that limits both the student and the teacher. According to Freire, it is imperative that the relationship of slave-master is broken and that both parties rise to the same level. Otherwise, the possibility of citizenship cannot exist for either the slave or master who are both trapped in an oppressive state. It is crucial that the oppressed, the student, the slave participate in its own liberation so as to recognize the active role it can take in its life path (Freire, p. 127). In order to obtain rights, and in order to construct a community of *cidadãos*, one must fight to exist outside of the state of oppression. This is the theory behind Freire’s pedagogy and behind the MST’s method of cultivating *cidadania* within the newly liberated communities.

The Shift in Social Identification

The theoretical basis for citizenship has helped shape our definition of *cidadania* but it has yet to solidify it. What the theoretical basis lacks is sufficient empirical evidence to prove it right. After spending a total of 24 days living in the community of *Paus Brancos* in *Assentamento 25 de Maio* and interviewing four elders, I will attempt to provide the empirical evidence that has previously been lacking from our definition of *cidadania*. First, it is necessary to share the personal narratives of all four elders in order to better understand how they arrived at their notions of *cidadania*. Once their stories have been told, this section will compare the individual definitions of *cidadania* and attempt to construct a new, unified definition that reflects the sentiments of this unique group of people.

A Look at the Past

As mentioned earlier, my research on *cidadania* was in need of individual stories from elders who had witnessed the arrival of the movement in the land that is now *Assentamento 25 de Maio*. I initially intended to focus my interviews with four elders around the concept of *cidadania* but I came to realize that the unique situation I had been placed in allowed me the opportunity to gather much more than a few answers to my questions about that complex term. I lived in an isolated community with people more than willing to welcome me into their homes and entertain my questions. What began as a list of only five standard questions that I presumed would be enough for my project, transformed into several lists of questions designed to not only discover the individual notions of *cidadania*, but also to elicit childhood stories, life

goals, personal struggles, and a life that many have tried to forget. These four elders—Dona Preta, Batista, Seu Chichico, and Dona Maria Lima—gave me the chance to record their stories from the past and their hopes for the future. Within each story lies a part of the definition of *cidadania* and later I will attempt to piece together the parts to create a unified whole.

Dona Preta

I noticed her smile and her wrinkles before anything else. It wasn't long before her strong personality—emphasized by her use of grandiose hand gestures—convinced me that this woman of 71 would be an ideal candidate for an interview. She accepted my request and we arranged to meet the following morning in her humble home (Field Journal, p. 10).

When I arrived the next day she was reclining in a hammock in the front room, waiting for me. Her manner was relaxed—as if she conducted interviews with American students on a regular basis. Yet rather than rush into our interview, she spent some time asking me her own questions about my purpose and my intent in the community. I never once felt that she was testing me but in retrospect I believe to a degree she was. Innocent curiosity masked her suspicion but again, this only became clear to me in retrospect. We began once she was done with her own questions (Field Journal, p. 14).

Maria das Dores Pereira da Silva, or Dona Preta as she is now called, was born on August 29, 1940 in the municipality of Quixadá. She was raised in a house made from clay and sticks—typical in that time. Her parents worked hard in agriculture to maintain what was then considered a healthy lifestyle for the family (Field Journal, p. 15). Dona Preta spent her childhood like most children are expected to: she played with her siblings, adored dolls, and

was quite the social butterfly (Field Journal, p. 16). Her childhood was “a coisa melhor qu’eu já passei em minha vida” [the best part of her life that she has already experienced] and when I asked her to describe it to me her face lit up and she began speaking quickly with excitement in her voice. She grew up with eight other siblings to play with but by the age of ten she was already expected to start working (Field Journal, p. 16). But work for Dona Preta did not mean going every morning at dawn to the *roça* like her older siblings and her father; work at this point in her life was centered around household chores and helping her mother look after her younger siblings. Despite the obvious shift from a carefree childhood to a life defined by work, Dona Preta tends to remember only the sweetest of memories. More than anything, she remembers her mother:

“Mas ela foi uma pessoa muito respeitosa: todo mundo chegaram na casa dela recebido pela melhor forma. Ela era muito alegre, ensinava nos como era professora, ela ensinava muitas coisas [She was a very respectful person: whenever people came to her house they were received in the best manner. She was very happy, and she taught us seeing as she was a professor, she taught us many things].” (Field Journal, p. 17)

She was able to attend school and learned how to read and write—qualities rarely seen among women of her age in the *Sertão*.

Unfortunately, once I began asking questions regarding her time spent on the land where the *Assentamento* now sits, her upbeat and excited answers disappeared and were replaced with more sighs and a language that suggested she could not fully convey to me her experiences. When I asked her when she came to this specific land, she sighed and confessed to having moved twelve times before settling down here. Her reason behind the many moves was because people change and therefore must also change where they live (Field Journal, p. 18). Once her father passed away she and her husband, José Gerom da Silva, moved one final time to this land and have lived here ever since.

The first time she heard of the MST was when talk of agrarian reform reached her husband's ears (Field Journal, p. 19). When she heard that the movement was organizing the workers, she seized the chance to join. Perhaps this is because the group promised a better future for the workers and for their children. Dona Preta repeated over and over again throughout the interview, “a gente sofria” [we suffered] and frequently thanked God for making today completely different from before. Her decision to join the MST could also stem from her desire for universal education. She could not stress enough how important education is (Field Journal, p. 19). She never once doubted the MST and she treasures the liberty that they have today—even going so far as to joke that they have too much (Field Journal, p. 19).

Today she is the mother of nine children and grandmother to 21¹⁴ and confessed that today it is significantly easier to raise a family than it was before the arrival of the MST (Field Journal, p. 20). Her one wish for the future generations, for her children and her grandchildren, is a well-rounded education.

Batista

When I first met Batista I was shocked by how young he was. Unlike the other three elders, Batista was significantly younger and the signs of a life of hard labor were nowhere to be seen. His home was also significantly different than the others': it was filled with furniture and two televisions boasted video game consoles that his two youngest sons were practically glued to. The day I asked him for an interview he gave me one despite his obvious nervousness.

¹⁴ She had some difficulty remembering how many grandchildren she had and had to have one of her granddaughters—who was in the room during the interview—help her remember them all.

Nevertheless he answered all my questions and after a few minutes passed, so did his nervousness.

João Batista Santos da Cruz was born in 1962 on a *fazenda* in the municipality of Boa Viagem. He remembers his childhood primarily as a lonely one. Despite his nine other siblings, Batista spoke about how isolated his family was from everything. He didn't have many friends and he remembers the majority of his childhood working in the *roça* (Field Journal, p. 42). What he told me of his parents was largely centered on their work: they both worked in the *roça* for the *Patrão* and never for themselves. His father was a *vaqueiro*—a traditional cowboy—and his mother made cheese (Field Journal, p. 42, 43). His father, who is still alive today, was described as a calm man but who only worked. The memories Batista has of both of his parents are few if not entirely focused on working in the *roça*. At the age of twelve Batista began working alongside his father clearing the forest and planting beans and rice (Field Journal, p. 43). He went to school sporadically because it was so far away and always required a great deal of planning ahead to find transportation. While he was at school, he met his wife Antonia Ledo de Santos Cruz. They married young—he was 17 and she was only 14. When I asked him what made them marry at such a young age he only smiled and laughed (Field Journal, p. 44).

He was only 27 years old when he first heard about the MST. He remembers hearing that they would bring good things for the youth—specifically a school (Field Journal, p. 45). He attended their meetings and spoke at length with the officials about agrarian reform and how it would impact the families living in the area. After learning more about the organization, he was satisfied with their goals and methods and joined their ranks. More than anything he was hoping that the movement would bring peace for all the families (Field Journal, p. 45). Under the *Patrão*, each worker was obligated to spend three days working solely for the benefit of the landowner. Men with guns and the son of the *Patrão* watched the workers in the *roça* to make sure they did

as they were told. Once the *Assentamento* was established, the people were finally free of these obligations (Field Journal, p. 45). Throughout the interview Batista repeated “tudo era difícil” [it was all difficult] much in the same way that Dona Preta repeated “a gente sofria” [we suffered]. It seemed hard for him to adequately describe why life on the *fazenda* was so difficult and so he had to resort to repeating that simple phrase over and over again. He mentioned that before there was absolutely nothing on this land: no neighbors, school, health outpost, transportation, nothing. After the arrival of the MST everything changed.

In addition to his two youngest sons he also has a son who is 30 and a daughter who is 25 but still no grandchildren. Due to his age it wasn't too difficult raising a family before the arrival of the MST (Field Journal, p. 46). His eldest son was eight by the time the movement arrived.

When I asked what he wanted for the future generations he talked a little about the *escola do campo* and the possibility to one day have a university or the opportunity to take university classes in the *Assentamento* (Field Journal, p. 47).

Seu Chichico

As one of my neighbors and a good friend of my host, Seu Chichico was a familiar face around my house. He was always very quiet, soft spoken, and I typically saw him returning from the *roça* despite his age. When I asked him for an interview he obliged and came to my house that very night. More than the other three, Seu Chichico's life revolves around the *roça*. He knows no other lifestyle and appears content with his current situation. In fact, I believe that he was the least affected by the *latifúndio* system because it did not change or worsen the lifestyle

he was prepared to have. Surprisingly, I found that the one thing Seu Chichico was missing from his life was the opportunity to make more friends (Field Journal, p. 58).

Francisco Alberta da Costa Filho, known as Seu Chichico, was born in 1938 in the municipality of Boa Viagem. Since his childhood he can only remember working alongside his mother, his father, and his 12 other brothers and sisters (Field Journal, p. 53). Everything in that time required work: if you wanted to make yourself a cup of coffee you had to bring home enough water from the *açude*, make a fire to roast the coffee beans, grind the coffee beans yourself, etc... (Field Journal, p. 53). He remembers that his parents were physical opposites: his mother was dark skinned and his father was shorter and much paler with blue eyes. Both were very calm and patient with him and the two of them rose what Seu Chichico referred to as a family “*muito unido*” [very united] (Field Journal, p. 54). He and his siblings played in the *roça* when they were still too young to work but at the age of six he was put in charge of clearing the forest with a long scythe (Field Journal, p. 54). He didn’t enjoy the way his professor spoke so he gave up his studies at a young age and never went back to school. At home, his parents taught him and his siblings never to get into physical fights or stick their noses where they didn’t belong—“*tipo viver*” [how to live] (Field Journal, p. 55).

When the MST arrived at the *fazenda*, Seu Chichico didn’t pay much attention to their efforts. He joined the organization because he was living on the land at the time and because they never said anything he thought to be suspicious or bad. He was already informed that there would be an agrarian reform of that land because some syndicates were trying to secure a small piece of land for the people; however, when the MST arrived they described a new way of obtaining land that would be significantly larger than what the other syndicates could guarantee (Field Journal, p. 55). While Seu Chichico spoke about his experience with the new arrival of the MST and the sudden influx of people, it was clear that he enjoyed having new

people around him. He made friends very quickly and he enjoyed the company that they had to offer (Field Journal, p. 56). He confessed to the difficulty of living under the *Patrões* but, typically, in comparison to the easy of living on the *Assentamento* today. He was obligated to work three days of the week for the *Patrão* and the profit they made off of their crops was miniscule (Field Journal, p. 56).

He continues to work most days out of the week from 7am to about 4pm and he hopes that the future will bring a greater sense of security for the new generation. Despite the fact that the interior is significantly safer than the urban areas of Ceará, Seu Chichico is concerned with the “bandidagem” [bandits, used as a verb] that is becoming increasingly common in the *Sertão*.

As we came to the end of our interview, I was concerned that I hadn’t gotten enough details about his childhood so I asked him if he could tell me something in particular about that time in his life. He struggled to answer so I asked him what he especially enjoyed when he was a child. His reply was that he enjoyed his mother and that in later years he had to learn how to get along with other people. Again we see the introverted, working man who simply desires to have more friends and meet new people.

Dona Maria Lima

My first encounter with my last interviewee and my host involved a welcome hug and God’s blessing. Dona Maria Lima, as she is affectionately called, is recognized as the “mãe do MST” [Mother of the MST] and spent the majority of her days attending meeting after meeting and cooking for her massive family. We spent many afternoons and nights reminiscing and

discussing the current politics of the *Assentamento*. She was always one to strike up a conversation with anyone passing by and the people of the *Assentamento* always showed her a great deal of respect and compassion. When I described my project to her she was beside herself with excitement and helped me organize and plan my interviews with some of her closest friends. There was never a doubt in my mind that she would top my list of interviews and that she would provide not only an intimate personal narrative but also an accurate retelling of the history of the *Assentamento* that secondary sources had thus far been unable to achieve.

She was born on March 13, 1937 as Maria Paz Pereira into a religious family in a mountainous region of Ceará. She was one of nine daughters and two sons that were raised to learn how to “respeitar, trabalhar, viver do suor do rosto, e ter paciência que nós ter um Deus que nos ajudava” [respect, work, live by the sweat of the brow, and have patience that we had a God that helped us] (Field Journal, p. 22). Her family worked the land planting manioc, among other crops. Her father was a mason and constructed houses in nearby towns to support his family. They moved several times—but always working under the various *Patrões* of the land. Childhood memories are largely centered on the close relationships she had with her sisters, who called her “cachita” [little rat] because she was the skinniest sibling (Field Journal, p. 23). They were a close family and the children worked from a very young age in the *roça* so to help their family save up the little money that was left to them after paying off the *Patrões*. She and her siblings began working at a very young age; Dona Maria Lima was only six when she first started working in the *roça* planting seeds and harvesting cotton (Field Journal, p. 24). Though the family always lived outside of town, Dona Maria Lima and her siblings were able to attend school despite the distance and difficulty of balancing work and studies (Field Journal, p. 24). At the mention of school she lit up and recalled a school play that she starred in. It is easy to tell

that this charismatic old lady was always meant for the spotlight and she swells with pride as she describes her role in the play and her talent for acting (Field Journal, p. 25). Before she married, Dona Maria Lima worked in her oldest sister's home taking care of her three children—sewing, embroidering, and taking care of other household chores. It was the greatest suffering she experienced, taking care of her nephews (Field Journal, p. 23). Yet the prospect of marriage was her opportunity to leave her sister's home and begin her own family.

At a young age Dona Maria Lima overheard her parents talk about agrarian reform and the Communist Party. While some praised the Party for its efforts to organize the peasant workers of rural Brazil, others claimed the Party was “um bicho de sete cabeças chegar a devorar a matar” [a beast with seven heads that came to devour, to kill] (Field Journal, p. 25). Then, in the 1980s, the people began to suffer from hunger, poverty, and misery. As peasants, they were ignored by the government and,

“...a concentração da riqueza fica toda nos poderosos. Aí o sofrimento foi grande. Vem seca e aí nós tivemos ir para a rua...” [the concentration of wealth was all in the hands of the powerful. The suffering was great. Then the droughts came and we had to take to the streets...] (Field Journal, p. 25).

It wasn't until missionaries from São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Bahia arrived that the people began organizing to fight back against the powerful *Patrões*. They created a syndicate but the *Patrões* refused to lose their cheap labor and a series of conflicts drove the people to the only haven left: the Catholic Church (Field Journal, p. 25-26). The Church was determined to help the people organize and fight for their rights. This support impacted Dona Maria Lima greatly and to this day she believes that it was the Church that gave her the strength to speak out and demand a better lifestyle. The Church helped the peasants realize the state of oppression that they were trapped in and spoke of the importance of change and improvement (Field Journal, p. 26). According to Dona Maria Lima:

“...nós conhecemos a lei maior que manda. A lei verdadeira. Que que deus, o nosso pai, a terra de deus é nossa também...” [we knew the higher law. The real law. That God, our father, that the land of God was ours as well] (Field Journal, p. 27).

The land was worth fighting for not only because it was their divine right to take part in it, but also because they wanted a more just society with equal rights (Field Journal, p. 27).

Once the MST arrived, Dona Maria Lima was a willing participant in their meetings, the occupations, and later the construction of the *Assentamento* where she now resides. Today she is the mother of 11 living children¹⁵, a grandmother to a countless number of grandchildren, a great grandmother, and soon to be great-great grandmother (Field Journal, p. 30). One of her sons works with the MST offices of Ceará and the Dona can be frequently found at MST meetings representing *Assentamento 25 de Maio*.

Constructing *Cidadania*

From the personal narratives it is clear that the unique life experiences of these four elders have contributed to the values that they hold dearest. Dona Preta spoke a great deal on the importance of education and the way in which it helped shape her childhood. She could remember her mother teaching her and her siblings and she has only fond memories of school. Batista also places great importance on education perhaps because he was never able to receive the same educational opportunities that his children are lucky enough to receive today. His concern for the youth of the *Assentamento* is quelled only by the educational advantages that this new generation has thanks to the MST. Seu Chichico spent the majority of his life working in the *roça*—seemingly indifferent to the politics of the land. Yet even this hard working

¹⁵ She lost three other children to childbirth, hunger, and disease.

agriculturalist found that the ability to create friendships and the freedom to do so are essential to a healthy life. Finally, Dona Maria Lima's story is one of constant refusal to give up and a determination to change the status quo. She embodies the need to participate in local politics and social movements. Thus, from these four stories, it is plain to see that these elders value education, social relationships, and public participation.

The aforementioned values were cultivated in large part during the most difficult part of these elders' lives: under the rule of the *Patrões*. Each one felt the need to reiterate several times over that life was difficult before the arrival of the MST. That the people suffered greatly. That it wasn't like it is today. But it wasn't until Dona Preta confided in me *after* I turned off my tape recorder that I began to imagine just how horrible life on the *fazenda* was. She told me the story of when her son, who was just a baby at the time, was starving to death. All of her children, in fact, were starving to death. They had no money to buy food and their crops were needed to pay off the *Patrão*. Dona Preta went to the wife of the *Patrão* and asked to have some milk for her baby but was denied that simple request. She turned towards the other families living on the land and finally found a woman who owned three cows and was willing to give Dona Preta some milk for her son. That night, her husband came home empty handed from his attempt to sell some of their personal belongings and the two were forced to kill their only horse in order to provide food for their children. The next morning, the three cows that belonged to the woman who had helped Dona Preta were found dead. Nobody was ever accused of the slaughter but Dona Preta has always believed it was the *Patrão's* wife, trying to make a point (Field Journal, p. 32).

But this wasn't the only story that I heard during my time at *Assentamento 25 de Maio*. I was told that the workers had to leave before dawn to walk to the *roça* and that they didn't go home until it was dark outside. Children were frequently left to themselves and sometimes days

went by without any sign of their father or potentially both of their parents returning home (Field Journal, p. 33). The houses—all made from clay and sticks—lacked running water and electricity (Field Journal, p. 33). Dona Maria Lima told me that families were regularly thrown off the land every two or three years because the *Patrões* were fearful that the workers would get too comfortable and demand better conditions (Field Journal, p. 38). She remembers one dry season when food was so scarce that “morreram duas crianças em uma semana só. De fome...as crianças sofriram muito” [two children died in one week. From hunger...the children suffered so much] (Field Journal, p. 39). Batista tried to explain to me that living on the land with General Wicar meant living as a slave (Field Journal, p. 61). These people were degraded, humiliated, and challenged every day to continue living. They knew no other way of life because beyond the *fazendas* was only *favelas*¹⁶ in the urban communities and at least under the *Patrões* they had work and a place to raise their children. To simply say that these people were living in circumstances *closely* resembling forced servitude is to do an injustice to the abject poverty and hardship that these people endured. They were slaves. This was modern-day slavery.

After hearing stories about life before the arrival of MST, I was hoping that the arrival had improved at least one aspect of their lives. Yet it became clear, after interviewing these elders and living among them for almost four weeks and observing their relationships with one another, that life is significantly better today than it once was. The transition from slavery to liberation may have been difficult and may have cost lives but it is plain to see that the people of the *Assentamento* honor and cherish the sacrifices made for their current social conditions. They are optimistic about the future and surprisingly resilient to minor setbacks in their day-to-day lives—perhaps they know that things could be worse. As Dona Maria Lima told me:

¹⁶ Slums

“Quando vou dormir e digo: obrigada meu deus, esse dia foi maravilhoso, o dia de ontem foi bom da hoje já foi melhor e da manhã, daquele ser melhor, cada vez ser mais. [She laughs] Muito bom! A vida, essa vida que deus da a gente é maravilhosa. É um bom de deus que tem que agradecer.” [When I go to sleep I say: thank you God, today was marvelous, yesterday was good but today was even better and tomorrow, that will be even better, and everyday even better. Very good! Life, this life that God gave us is marvelous. It is a good God that needs to be thanked.] (Field Journal, p. 31)

Of the four elders that I interviewed, three said they did not feel like a *cidadão* before the arrival of the MST¹⁷. Of the four elders that I interviewed, all four said they felt like a *cidadão* after the arrival of the MST¹⁸. When asked what rights a *cidadão* had, Dona Preta listed health care, proper nourishment, peace, good neighbors, good friends, property ownership, a comfortable lifestyle, and liberty (Field Journal, p. 34). When asked the same question, Batista responded with education, a stable and good job, health care, and to be respected (Field Journal, p. 61). Seu Chichico said that *cidadania* meant the right to carry out friendships and to be respected (Field Journal, p. 58-59). And finally, Dona Maria Lima said that a *cidadão* has equal rights, the right to an abundance of life, to be free from slavery, to work for their own person, and to build homes (Field Journal, p. 39). In summary, the rights of a *cidadão*, according to the four elders, are: freedom, health care, education, respect, friendship, a job, proper nourishment, peace, and a comfortable life. Of these rights, only two are listed on the Brazilian Government’s website.

The interviews that I conducted at the *Assentamento*, the conclusions that I have drawn from living among the people, and the secondary sources on citizenship theory have all contributed to what I hope is a more complete and universal definition of *cidadania*:

¹⁷ Seu Chichico was the only one that claimed to have felt like a citizen even during the time he was working for a *Patrão* (Field Journal, p. 58)

¹⁸ Seu Chichico admitted that he feels more like a *cidadão* today than when he worked for under the *Patrão* (Field Journal, p. 59).

The status of a native or naturalized subject of a state or commonwealth that shares in all legal, political, civil, and socio-cultural rights granted under universal humanitarian laws and federal laws. These include, but are not limited to: basic human necessities to live comfortably (eg. running water, plumbing, electricity); the right to healthy relationships in which mutual respect is fostered; the right to improve your person through proper nourishment, health care, and education; and the right to peace within the home, the community, and the country.

This definition is by no means complete. The limitations on my research and quality/quantity of secondary sources limit my knowledge of the subject; however, this definition is an accurate reflection of the empirical evidence that I obtained during my time at the MST *assentamento*. It should also be noted that a definition of *cidadania* should never remain concrete. From my interviews I learned that *cidadania* is always at the risk of being lost and that we must therefore fight for it and redefine what it is we are fighting for. The only way we can guarantee that the future generations will understand what *cidadania* is and what the rights that every *cidadão* deserves will be through education, the continued support for organized fights for social justice, and political activism within our communities. In this way, our children and our children's children will learn the importance of standing up for what is right and just through our own examples. As Dona Maria Lima told me:

“Eu quero dizer que eu tenho muito orgulho de quando essa nova geração que vem diz ‘aqui foi minha avó, minha bisavó, que ajudou...ela contribuiu muito. A ajudou para que essa sociedade fosse mais justa. E nós tivéssemos nossos direitos.’” [I have to say that I am very proud when this new generation says “here was my grandmother, my great grandmother, that helped...she contributed a lot. She helped so that society was more just. And that we have our rights.”] (Field Journal, p. 27).

Continuing the Fight

As we have seen, it is imperative that the *cidadão* continue to fight for her rights and a more just society; however, in the *Assentamento*, the adult community is concerned that the youth of the communities are *parados*—indifferent or ambivalent to the cause. This section will

confront the concerns of the adult population at the *Assentamento* and propose methods of engaging the youth in the need to fight for *cidadania* in the future.

The Youth

As is the case everywhere, the older generations of the *Assentamento* are concerned with the perceived indifference and ambivalence of the younger generations in regards to the continued struggle for social justice. Dona Preta was the first to tell me that the youth still has much fighting to do to secure their rights and many adults in the *Assentamento* share her opinion (Field Journal, p. 21). The youth spend the majority of their days split between school and relaxing at home watching the soap operas or playing ball in the streets. The *Assentamento* lacks youth groups that seek to challenge the views and opinions of the young adults. There are no after school programs, no books in the library that are not used as textbooks, and even worse there is no meeting place where they can come together and feel safe to discuss their ideas. It's no wonder that the adults are concerned. I spoke with several kids my age and in the high school and nearly all of them told me that they were bored living in the *Assentamento* and desperately looking for a way to get out (Field Journal, p. 64). Many adults believe that because the youth of today never had to live under the same social circumstances as the older generations had to with the *Patrões*, that they lack the understanding that rights are not simply given to you but that they must be fought for.

From the time I spent at the *Assentamento* it didn't appear as if anything was being done to spark activism within the younger generations. The adults frequently discuss the issue but there has yet to be an action taken towards solving it. In one conversation, a couple of adults

believed that the solution lay in incorporating more subjects into the education curriculum. These subjects would revolve around trades that students could pursue post-graduation. But the notion of changing the education curriculum is already being discussed; however, rather than discuss the possibility of expanding the curriculum, pedagogy coordinators and professors are discussing an expansion of the teaching methods. Many professors, though certified by the MST to teach in the Freirian method, fail to do so (Field Journal, p. 50). They are afraid to expand the classroom setting and thus challenge the students to apply classroom lessons to real-world situations. This fear comes from the professors' insecurities on falling short of the classic role of the educator: an all-knowing, authoritative presence. They are afraid that a student will ask a question that they cannot answer. Yet this sort of mentality is only contributing to the current dilemma with the youth; if they are not being challenged outside of the class or inside it, how can they be expected to seek out methods of challenging outside forces like the state or national government?

Future Involvement

The answer that I arrived at after my time living in the *Assentamento* is a stronger presence of the MST. Once the *escola do campo* was built, the MST seems to have left all questions of infrastructure to the uniformed community members. Though it may not be in the agenda of the MST to periodically modernize the *assesntamentos* they have created, they do advocate for a more just society; it is thus imperative that the Movement return to its seemingly forgotten *assentamentos* and teach the community members the various methods of building a functioning community that goes beyond providing basic rights to its citizens. They

have already accomplished much with the establishment of the *assentamentos* but now it is time to move forward and strive for a better community. The addition of a community center, for example, that provides after school programs like choir, art classes, or even specialized workshops would not only occupy the time of the youth, but would also intellectually challenge them and encourage a natural curiosity to learn more about their environment and the outside world. In this way, the youth would be supported in their choices to explore the world outside of the *Assentamento* and maintain an appreciation for the community that helped raised them and gave them opportunities to grow intellectually.

Conclusion

The creation of *Assentamento 25 de Maio* by the social movement *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* marked a transition in the lives of a population enslaved by the *latifúndio* system that has plagued Brazil since the sixteenth century. These people, now comprising the elder population of the *Assentamento*, have lived through two radically different social circumstances and provide unique perspectives into socio-anthropological topics like *cidadania*. In my time spent in the community of *Paus Brancos* within the *Assentamento* I found that before the arrival of the MST these people considered themselves slaves to the *Patrões* and their concept of *cidadania* was incomplete and foreign even to them. It wasn't until the arrival of the social movement and the change in social circumstances that these people were able to declare the rights they deserve and claim the title of *cidadão*. This change in social identification through the assistance of a social movement has helped shaped the ways that these people view their legal, civil, political, and socio-cultural rights. It has also provided sufficient empirical

evidence to support theories that associationalism and political participation encouraged by social movements fosters citizenship on local levels. Though the *Assentamento* has accomplished much in its short lifespan, it faces future challenges with the newer generations and the ways in which they define *cidadania*.

Indications for Future Research

Given the short amount of time I was able to spend at the *Assentamento* and the limited number of subjects interviewed, this topic of *cidadania* as defined by historically marginalized populations must continue to be studied. Moreover, the need for empirical data concerning citizenship is in high demand from the academic community and encourages future researchers to take to the field and begin a dialogue.

My own, personal shortcomings have also left gaps in my research. Though I was able to transcribe all nine interviews that I conducted while at the *Assentamento*, my Portuguese language skills rendered me incapable of perfectly transcribing each interview and thus open the possibility of misleading results. Also, my own classification as a white, female, international student undoubtedly affected the content of my research and the actions of those around me.

Another element that has limited my research was the quality and quantity of secondary resources available to me while in Fortaleza, Brazil and the travel limitations placed on my project. Because I was only able to live in one *assentamento* and in one community in said *assentamento*, my results are not reflective of an entire *assentamento* let alone a population or demographic. From my results alone I could discern that both gender and age impact conceptions of *cidadania* and this certainly presents another aspect of the proposed topic to be studied.

Finally the concept of an ever expanding and evolving definition of *cidadania* demands continued research into this topic.

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Appendix A

1. Could you have done this project in the USA? What data or sources were unique to the culture in which you did the project?

This project would not have been possible in the USA. It demanded empirical data from a specific population only present in Brazil. All the data collected at the *Assentamento* in the form of observation, participation, and interview was unique to the culture in which I did my project.

2. Could you have done any part of it in the USA? Would the results have been different? How?

The first part of my project, in which I retell the history of the MST and the information on Paulo Freire and citizenship could have been done in the USA simply because I used secondary sources. The results would have been different because I would have access to a wider variety of books.

3. Did the process of doing the ISP modify your learning style? How was this different from your previous style and approaches to learning?

This was my first time using primary research that I had personally collected. In writing research papers I have typically stayed within my community and relied heavily on secondary sources—this project was clearly the exact opposite. In regards to modifying my learning style, I would say that it certainly expanded it. I now feel confident in my abilities to conduct an interview and maintain a field journal.

4. How much of the final monograph is primary data? How much is from secondary sources?

I would say that roughly 70% is influenced by primary data and the remaining 30% is from secondary sources.

5. What criteria did you use to evaluate your data for inclusion in the final monograph? Or how did you decide to exclude certain data?

I was careful to only use excerpts from interviews that I was confident the Portuguese was correct. When comparing results I listed the full answers and I selected quotes that I felt captured the essence of what I was attempting to convey.

6. How did the "drop-offs" or field exercises contribute to the process and completion of the ISP?

The “drop-off” from the start of the semester did not factor into my ISP but our excursion to the MST settlement *Assentamento Lagoa do Mineiro* and my community project took place in my ISP location *Assentamento 25 de Maio*. The latter allowed me a glimpse into the community I was planning to return to and the opportunity to meet my project advisor/host as well as many of the community members that would somehow influence my project.

7. What part of the FSS most significantly influenced the ISP process?

Our professor Bernadete Beserra helped me to specify my project proposal and she edited my abstract. She had traveled to the interior before and worked on a very similar research project so her insights into the culture of the community were very helpful once I arrived in my own respective ISP location.

8. What were the principal problems you encountered while doing the ISP? Were you able to resolve these and how?

I struggled the most with understanding the Portuguese of the community members there. I was able to conduct my interviews with ease and my project advisor was very helpful in mediating any language or cultural barriers. I was later grateful that I had recorded every single one of my interviews as I discovered new information that I would have otherwise missed.

9. Did you experience any time constraints? How could these have been resolved?

Once I came back to Fortaleza I felt that I didn't have enough time to organize all of my research. It would have been nice to have an extra week so that I could have coordinated earlier with my Portuguese professor to get her help transcribing some of my interviews.

10. Did your original topic change and evolved as you discovered or did not discover new and different resources? Did the resources available modify or determine the topic?

As I found more and more information on MST's pedagogy and the influences of Paulo Freire I felt more compelled to include that into my project. I also interviewed a professor/pedagogy coordinator at one of the *escola do campos* after reading more about MST's views on education. The basis of my project, however, didn't so much change as expand. I found more and more information on my topic that I figured would be helpful background information.

11. How did you go about finding resources: institutions, interviewees, publications, etc.?

A majority of the secondary sources I used I found in the SIT library at our local school. The sources on citizenship were found online (JSTOR). Dona Maria Lima introduced me to the elders of the community and I interviewed those that I could.

12. What method(s) did you use? How did you decide to use such method(s)?

My research depended primarily on formal interviews and secondary sources. The interviews were necessary to proving my hypothesis correct and the secondary sources provided the historical and theoretical foundation that I needed for my project. I also used observation and participation to get a better sense of the community I was in and the people I was interviewing.

13. Comment on your relations with your advisor: indispensable? Occasionally helpful? Not very helpful? At what point was he/she most helpful? Were there cultural differences, which influenced your

relationship? A different understanding of educational processes and goals? Was working with the advisor instructional?

I could not have done my project without my advisor. Though she did not provide any academic insight, she was crucial in the fieldwork aspect of my project. She introduced me to everyone I interviewed, accompanied me to the interviews, and even reprimanded one of my interviewees for continually rescheduling our final interview. Dona Maria Lima was also my host and I felt right at home with her family. When I got sick with sun poisoning, she nursed me back to health and made sure that I was comfortable. I didn't feel the need for an academic advisor per se, but her connections and influence within the community were invaluable to my project.

14. Did you reach any dead ends? Hypotheses which turned out to be not useful? Interviews or visits that had no application?

I was unable to interview two of the women that I had originally hoped to interview. The first was because she wasn't in the appropriate mental state to be interviewed and I couldn't understand her Portuguese. The second one was taking care of her sick mother in Madalena and was fairly sick herself. I had the option of traveling to the city and trying to get an interview but I decided that it would be wiser to finish the transcriptions of the interviews I already had before returning to Fortaleza.

15. What insights did you gain into the culture as a result of doing the ISP, which you might not otherwise have gained?

My time at the *Assentamento* was certainly unique. It was a rare opportunity to live with a portion of the Brazilian population otherwise ignored and I learned a lot in the little time that I was there. My project also allowed me the chance to form close relationships with several people (those who I interviewed) that I would have otherwise never met or probably never connected with simply because of our age difference.

16. Did the ISP process assist your adjustment to the culture? Integration?

If anything, the community projects week was instrumental to my integration into the *Assentamento* culture. It allowed me to prepare later for my return and I felt significantly more confident going back the second time than when I first traveled there.

17. What were the principal lessons you learned from the ISP process?

To listen. After conducting nine interviews ranging from eight minutes long to one hour long, I certainly learned the importance and benefits of listening. Along the same lines, I also realized how useful the right question could be. The majority of my interview questions were fairly simple but once I started improvising during my interviews and asking more questions based on what the interviewee had just said, I found that I was able to get more information out of my interviewee and that they appreciated my active listening.

18. If you met a future student who wanted to do this same project, what would be your recommendations to him/her?

First and foremost to bring a portable, digital voice recorder from the United States—I had to use my laptop and it made the start of several interviews very awkward.

Second, I would suggest interviewing different people from a different community or *Assentamento*. If further research is going to be done on my topic, it is essential that the subjects be different so as to confirm (or deny) the same results over a larger sample size.

Finally, I would suggest organizing with several native Portuguese speakers to help with transcriptions once this student returns to Fortaleza.

19. Given what you know now, would you undertake this, or a similar project again?

Most definitely. It was an amazing experience that had me excited at every moment during the process. I now recognize that a project of this size, however, demands more outside help but it was certainly worth all the hard work and hours transcribing interviews.

Appendix B



Dona Preta—age 71



Batista—age 48



Seu Chichico—age 73



Dona Maria Lima—age 74