

Fall 2017

Convivendo na Lagoa do Mineiro: An Education in Living and Loving With

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SIT Study Abroad

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Convivendo na Lagoa do Mineiro:
An Education in Living and Loving *With*

Daniela Aldrich

SIT Brazil: Social Innovation and Community Development

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Acknowledgements

I had an incredibly inspiring and fulfilling three weeks at Lagoa do Mineiro. My experience at Escola Francisco Araújo Barros is one that will I will carry in my heart forever and one that will always be present in my thinking and acting from here forward. This is thanks to the people I had the luck to meet and connect with.

Thank you Ivaniza, every day with you was an adventure. You have taught me so much about the art of living and about the love in fighting for your values. Your energy is infectious and you allowed me to try and keep up with you, thank you for that. I will always be appreciative of how much you shared with me, not only were you open about your own story, but your family's story and your community's.

Thank you Lúcia for treating me like a daughter and making sure I saw as much of the settlement as possible. Thank you for the long conversations over coffee or tea with herbs from your garden, thank you for the natural beauty treatments and for your patience with my Portuguese. I will not forget about the time I casually mentioned I liked tuna and how you made it for dinner the next three nights.

Thank you Chiquinha, Mamãe, for your profound wisdom and generosity. Talking to you, listening to your stories and songs was an incredible experience in and of itself. Thank you for the delicious food and for the hugs. Thank you Raimundo for also sharing your story with me and always offering a kind nod and wide smile as I walked home from school every afternoon.

Thank you Espedito for taking me to the Acampamento on the beach. Thank you for so willingly sharing your own story about MST and about the struggles you went through as *frente de massa*. You made sure I broke out of my shell early on and helped me with my Portuguese every day. Thank you.

Thank you to all the teachers at EEMFAB for not only accepting me into your space, but also welcoming me and integrating me into your environment. I would especially like to thank Mara, Hilma, Geian, and Flavio. I have learned so much from each one of you about how to speak with conviction, how to adapt to last minute changes in schedules, and about how to articulate your passion for a better future in a way that is engaging and relatable.

Thank you to the women in the kitchen at EEMFAB. Your cakes and juices midmorning and midafternoon really got me through some of the hotter and longer days. Thank you for the most delicious and filling lunches I have ever had. You were also not afraid to repeat jokes to me twice or until I got them and were extremely encouraging with my language skills.

Thank you to all the students who shared their stories with me. Thank you for being the best educators I could have asked for during this experience. I was a temporary outsider hanging around your school for a few weeks, but you made me a part of it and allowed me to share what I knew with you. Thank you for making English classes so lively, thank you for everything.

Abstract

One of Brazil's most pressing issues is unequitable land distribution and agrarian land reform. *Movimento Sem Terra* (MST) is at the forefront of this struggle and has redistributed land to approximately 1,250 families so far. As well as access and right to land ownership, MST addresses issues from youth development, to education, to ecology and more with the mission to create a more just and inclusive Brazil by training its future leaders. This vision includes moving away from the capitalist system that currently enables hierarchies of power to control Brazil at the expense of many of its citizens and natural resources. The way in which MST forms its youth to understand and respect the land on which they live and work, as well as fight for their right to exercise their citizenship, is moving to me. I spent three and a half weeks at the Lagoa do Mineiro settlement in Itarema, Ceará to *conviver* with MST members and residents of the settlement. I learned from their meanings of well-being, justice, and environmental consciousness in order to look inward on myself and expand my ideas of these same things. In order to change the exploitative systems we live in, we must first change them within ourselves. This monograph is reflective of the questions that arose within me during my three week stay at the MST settlement Lagoa do Mineiro in Itarema, CE and of the unpacking of those questions.

Resumo

Uma das questões mais prementes do Brasil é a distribuição de terras e a reforma agrária. O Movimento Sem Terra (MST) está na vanguarda desta luta e redistribuiu a terra para aproximadamente 1.250 famílias até agora. Além do acesso e direito à propriedade da terra, o MST aborda questões do desenvolvimento juvenil, educação, ecologia. Tem a missão de criar um Brasil melhor e está treinando seus futuros líderes. Essa visão inclui o afastamento do sistema capitalista que permite que as hierarquias do poder controlem o Brasil à custa de muitos de seus cidadãos e recursos naturais. A maneira pela qual o MST forma sua juventude para entender e respeitar a terra, além de lutar por seu direito de exercer sua cidadania, é emocionante para mim. Eu passei três semanas no assentamento de Lagoa do Mineiro em Itarema, Ceará convivendo com membros do MST para aprender seus significados de bem-estar, justiça e consciência ambiental. Eu pude olhar para dentro de mim e expandir minhas idéias sobre as mesmas coisas. Para mudar os sistemas de exploração em que vivemos, devemos primeiro mudá-los dentro de nós mesmos. Esta monografia reflete as questões que surgiram dentro de mim durante a minha estadia de três semanas e a descompactação dessas questões.

Introduction

This semester with SIT was spent unlearning the ways in which colonial attitudes and modes of thinking are still ingrained in me and learning about pluralistic approaches to social justice. To conclude this journey, I spent three weeks at the MST settlement Lagoa do Mineiro. I had the opportunity to take part in a project of *convivencia* and learn about the reality and history of the settlement. I had the opportunity to learn about the agrarian reform movement and MST, I took part in the daily routine at the high school, Escola Francisco Araújo Barros, and I participated in events in the wider community. I used my experiences to critically reflect on the contradictions within me that limit how I can relate to myself and to others. The project began with a curiosity for MST and how its socialist ideology is not only more socially sustainable and just, but also environmentally. This narrowed to an interest in how the differentiated curriculum taught at the Escola do Campo, Francisco Araújo Barros, cultivated a truer relationship between student and land as the base of its emancipation education. With this broad objective, I had the freedom to use the knowledge being shared with me to conduct a self-reflective critique.

MST's approach to justice is one that I find I (and every individual and nation) have a lot to learn from. Traveling to Lagoa do Mineiro and sharing this experience with its community members was relevant to me personally because I struggle with asking myself how any justice in society can begin to be possible when the environment in which justice is trying to be reached is already doused in violence and injustice- the exploitation of nature, its gifts, and its laborers. As a student of social and environmental justice, I took it as a privilege to be able to

wrestle with questions like these at Lagoa do Mineiro within the context of agrarian reform, differentiated learning, and an incredibly resilient community.

This paper is the final draft up to now of the project I completed. However, I would like to stress that this monograph reflects a pause rather than a conclusion in my self-ethnography and critical reflection. I do not believe my work is done in terms of processing and digesting what I was taught at Lagoa do Mineiro (I am not confident that it will ever be), and for this paper to be as true to my experience as I believe it should be, I am going to embrace the spots where questions linger and ideas are still working toward completion. This paper is structured in two blocks and eight smaller sections. The first block consists of the Introduction and Literature Review. These blocks are meant to frame the context in which I was the three weeks I conducted my self-ethnography. The second block is less academic in its structure. It begins with Observations and Impressions. In the next section I discuss Positionality. The next section includes reflections on Ethics. I then go on to describe my methods of engagement before I expand on further reflections. I finish with my working conclusions.

It is important to understand the context in which I conducted my project in *convivencia* and self-ethnography. Assentamento Lagoa do Mineiro is a MST settlement located in the municipality of Itarema, CE. The 5.988 hectares that constitute the settlement are a testament to the 153 families that resisted and finally dis-appropriated the land in 1986. Until then, the landlord and priest who lived on the property and demanded exactly one half of every harvest be rendered to him, prohibited any personal planting in backyards that would be exempt from this rule. One Sunday after his mass, the Father informed everyone he would be selling it and that they were to leave and go elsewhere. Immediately following, people organized (not yet

under the banner of MST which did not arrive in the Northeast until 1989), and what ensued was a fight that took lives, tore apart families and kept people in a state of terror. Three men were killed during the fight for dis-appropriation and many more people were persecuted. It was not until 1989, the year that MST organized its first land occupation in the Northeastern region of Brazil (MST was founded in Rio Grande do Sul) that Lagoa do Mineiro joined the movement and flew the red flag above the settlement.

Today, Lagoa do Mineiro is an important reference in agrarian reform, resistance, and education. The fight against unjust and for-profit private land use continues, as wind farms and tourism are encroaching upon the surrounding area and greater municipality. The settlement is also facing new legal threats: a law has been passed at the federal level (Law 13.456/2017) stating that all MST settlements will be subject to emancipation. This means the land title for all settlements will be divided between the original *assentados*, breaking them into small privately-owned plots of sellable land and all the subsequent implications.

Escola do Campo Francisco Araújo Barros, founded in 2012 and named after a martyr of the movement, is the high school located in Lagoa do Mineiro. Students from the seven communities that constitute the settlement plus students from neighboring MST settlements all attend. The school is dedicated to a contextualized education for youth in rural areas. It offers the same core curriculum as the municipal high schools but includes an additional two classes discussed later in this paper. The school is not only different inside the classrooms, but in the food ways as well. The school is working toward being food sovereign. The kitchen uses and cooks with produce from the Mandalla, the productive area where macacheira is grown, beans

are grown, plus vegetables, herbs, and some fruits like banana and watermelon. Within this context, I was able to reassess my understandings of the way we view and create relationships.

Literature Review

In the article "The landless rural workers movement and democracy in Brazil" published in *Latin American Research Review*, Miguel Carter provides a contextual and historical overview of the *Movimento Sem Terra* (MST), examines the main sources of power and endurance of the movement, and reviews the various ways in which MST engages the Brazilian political process as it pursues a more just and equitable reality. Carter begins by pointing out that the MST is depicted by the main-stream media and established Brazilian intellectuals as a rowdy and violent organization that poses a threat to Brazilian democratic society (186). He reveals this favors the beneficiaries of the current imbalance of power maintained by the concentration of media control, oligarchic forms of governance, and by the relentless influence of Brazilian agrarian elite (190). Throughout the article it is argued and made clear that, in fact, MST is an essential and leading catalyst in the inclusive democratization of the country. The movement has expansive networks focusing in different sectors of this process, but foundational is the mobilization for agrarian land reform.

Agrarian land reform as shaped and conducted by MST in part originated from the rise of landless farmers in the 1970s (190). This rise was a result of the capitalist modernization of agriculture and government subsidies given to large commercial farmers. Throughout the 1980s and 90s, agro-exports and the subsequent formal agribusiness sector in Brazil gained more and more momentum and the landowning elite more power. Today, these forces work with the

Brazilian government and agro-food conglomerates that control the global markets for seeds, chemical fertilizers, and agricultural trade (190). Brazil is also a leading global producer and exporter of food stuffs. However, this contributes deeply and perpetuates the stark inequality in land ownership in Brazil. Carter cites the nation's land registry when he notes that one third of the nation's farmers only hold 1.6 percent of the farmland versus 1.6 percent of the nation's landowners controlling 47 percent of the farmland. Today, MST is the strongest and most active leader in land occupations and reform.

Carter attributes its endurance and power to its capacity for innovation and adaptation. MST is also multifaceted and dynamic. As a movement and as regional and local collectives, it addresses issues from finance, recruitment, organizing, health, production, culture, gender, youth development, education, and ecology (199). Carter cites the late 1990s for a specific example of MST's ingenuity. At this time, MST began to cultivate its appreciation and knowledge in agro-ecology. In 1997, the cooperative for organic seeds, BioNatur, was formed and ten years later it became the largest producer of organic seed in Latin America with 117 varieties of seeds (199). He also mentions the creation of the newspaper *Brasil de Fato*, and the full gender equality in the movement's leadership guaranteed in 2003.

Carter's article is a comprehensive introduction to MST and delves into the parts of the movement that fortify it and make it unique. All the components of MST undoubtedly feed off one another. For example, the possibility of MST having a stigma around it as an anti-democratic radical group is fueled by the monopolized media outlets. In reality, mainstream Brazil could have a lot to connect to within the MST mission. This article made me curious to

learn more about the mystique aspect of MST and I will be interested in learning about how I can relate it to my own life.

The article "Escola camponesa: a horta didática em área de reforma agrária" by Maria Alexandra de Oliveira and Antônio Jeová Moura Sampaio, focuses on the promotion of agro-ecological projects in schools in rural areas and on their importance in developing healthy eating habits. The authors first present an overview of the garden project lead by the Raimundo Facó school. Later, the authors discuss how MST's pedagogy is one committed to molding students who are socially and politically aware, who are aligned in social causes, and who share a responsibility to the earth. This strays from the hegemonic school system that is in place currently throughout Brazil and unable to provide a contextualized education that encompasses the daily lives of youth living in rural areas. With school curriculums like Escola do campo, students are able to learn theory and practice relating to agriculture and share experiences in the agro-ecological field owned by the schools.

Although the specific goal of the garden project at Raimundo Facó is to improve nutrition and healthy eating amongst its students, all Escola do campo projects share the mission to engage in and strengthen human-nature relationships (157). In this way, the garden projects are just one way in which the *do campo* formation resists singular educational pedagogies at the same time they question the capitalistic intentions of mass food production. I find this incredible and very profound because it speaks to the power of education and to the value of learning what you live. It is common for MST homes to have an individual garden plot and grow an assortment of plants, enhancing the influence and relevance of the garden project. Students can bring plants home from the school garden or vice versa and gain knowledge and

experience not by reading in a book and studying pictures, but by creating bridges between home and school and dismantling the four walls which we have been conditioned to believe a school must have in order to be legitimate. In direct opposition of agribusinesses, the garden projects follow agro-ecological practices which means that they do not use any type of artificial fertilizer, pesticide, agro-toxins, or genetically modified seed. They are organic and use permaculture to encourage genetic diversity in the field.

In “As Escolas do Campo do MST/CE Como Espaço Contra Hegemónico” José Filho Araújo Santos positions the Escola do Campo in Ceará as a space against the hegemonic model of a for-capital society that uses academic formation to prepare the new generation of capital workforce. Araújo Santos argues that MST has as its primary objective to prepare agents of change that will fight for social transformation and collective emancipation (5). This is one reason why the Escola do Campo is so fundamental and essential to the MST settlements. MST schools fight the forces that have longed worked to keep them invisible and without a voice (6).

This article also takes into account the identity forming process that is supported by Escola do campo. Not only is the school a place to accumulate knowledge and a sense of social responsibility, it allows for students to determine who they are. From there, Escola do campo can take on a social-political perspective in its pedagogy, embracing Karl Marx in its process. Escola do campo is unique and empowering in the way that it forms its students to be conscience of their history and daily reality. Escola do campo instills a sense of pride in place and history that is rare. It also teaches an ideology toward socialism that promotes a respect and comradeship between people and the land.

Observations at Escola de Ensino Meio Francisco Araújo Barros (EEMFAB)

The structure and size at the high school EEMFAB is different than what I experienced in the United States. The students would have Morning shift classes or Afternoon shift classes three days of the week and had Full Days Tuesdays and Thursdays. However, one of the things that struck me the most was how personal and strong the relationships were student to student, student to teacher, between teachers and between staff. This is something that people on multiple occasions told me they are proud of. A handful of teachers told me that the relatability and comradery the school foments is what drew them to accept their job positions at EEMFAB as opposed to a municipal school in Itarema. During one conversation I had with a teacher, he described the relationships between everyone in the school community as horizontal. He was adamant that he did not hold better knowledge or was wiser than his students and that his students taught him new things every day. He said the most rewarding thing he could do was simply share the tools he had gathered during his own education and give them to his students to develop into critical thinkers first and then into good students. He and Ivaniza stressed the mission of the school is to mold compassionate and critical thinkers. I felt inspired by our conversation that evening and asked myself why I had grown up at school with such distant relationships with most of my teachers. Ivaniza, who is the Director of the School, was never inaccessible to her colleagues or students, she knew about the family of every single teenager, knew which subjects each person had more trouble with, who was dating who, and ate lunch sitting on the floor with all of us together every day. I was struck by the humanity she leads with and by the ripple that expands throughout the entire school and community.

During my second week, I was able to attend the students' Science Fair. I was impressed by the ownership and personal connection each student had with their project. The projects ranged in topics: from studying the different systems of permaculture around the school to the benefits of sesame seeds, to the different uses for coconut oil and to proposed solutions for solid waste management. It was fun to walk around and listen to each presentation and note that every student had a personal connection to their project. Each project also had a connection to our immediate surrounding environment and I felt like through their science projects the students could deepen their sense of place as well as deepen their knowledge about specific seeds and systems.

One thing I observed that contradicted with a preconceived assumption of mine was that it is not the majority of the students who identify as active members of MST, but rather a small group of students. This came up one day while a group of 12th graders and I were chatting. They were weighing the pros and cons of staying around the settlement and leaving to live in an urban space. I asked if anyone was considering an MST high education course/training and the answer came in the form of unenthusiastic head shakes. I reflect more on this experience in the Further Reflections section of this paper.

Reflections on Positionality

Arriving to the high school, Escola Francisco Araújo Barros my very first day, I was aware of my positionality as a white, financially secure college student from the United States, visiting the settlement and high school for a short amount of time to complete an objective. My purpose at Lagoa do Mineiro and my positionality in relationship to everyone I interacted with there was always on my mind. There was a constant tension within me for a significant portion of the *convivencia* as I tried to keep these two things, purpose and positionality, transparent and yet not have them be barriers. This tension was strong until I was able to identify my own sensitivity toward my positionality and purpose as insecurities of mine. I was able to see that my attempt at transparency was off-point and that my carefulness in how I interacted could soon become the very barrier keeping me from making sincere connections to those around me and from genuine self-reflection. I was trapping myself within the positionality I had constructed. As the days went on, I allowed myself to be present in my conversations and consciously positioned myself as a human versus a student. For some strange reason, it took me a few days to realize these things were held separately in my mind. I had the same baggage, the same stats I did before, but how I navigated and managed them was different- not just more ethical, but much simpler.

I entered the settlement with one fundamental question, “What contradictions arise for me and my positionality through this *convivencia*? How do I choose to resolve these with a decoloniality attitude?” Having this question written and already in my mind made me feel more prepared when contradictions did arise for me. I also accepted that some contradictions

would not have a perfect resolution, and that allowing that discomfort to stay awhile once it had arisen was also an act of decoloniality.

Reflections on Ethics

Having the privilege to *conviver* with members of MST and spend my days at the Escola do Campo Francisco Araújo Barros allowed me to explore a magnitude of things, but the way in which I was able to reconstruct my understanding of ethics is one thing for which I am most grateful. I do not believe my un/relearning is finished, but I do have a new perspective as to how ethical relationships with oneself, with others, and with nature look, sound, and feel like.

My main ethical concern before going to Lagoa do Mineiro was not intruding upon people's daily lives and taking without giving. "How can I not simply take, but give too?" "How can I ask about people's lives and about MST without seeming goal-driven or being intrusive of their narrative?" "How will I balance my more academically seeming curiosities with our *convivencia*?" I am glad I had these concerns and I still will always have them, however, I surprised myself with the answers I developed. The answers I did develop came mainly from the experiences I shared with Ivaniza and the people I spent the most time with. People are generous, social beings. We are not objects to only admire the surface of from a distance and timidly tip-toe around. In the context I was immersed in, being respectful and ethical meant being present and alive and lively, it meant engaging and participating. It meant not being afraid to create a true relationship. If I got caught up in my short-term presence, I was disengaging from the potential to create solid and lasting bonds. My favorite moments from Lagoa do Mineiro are the ones when I let my guard down and joked, and those are also some of

the moments from which I learned most. I learned that in order to be most ethical, I was to be as present and open as I could. Showing yourself and the people you are with your own humanity is the only way that all barriers can be surpassed. By embracing our shared humanity, our differences were permitted to be present, and they then complemented rather than prejudiced our relationships and development.

Closeness was a way for me to practice ethics. However, I was always checking myself not to cross boundaries. I could not lose sight that I am an outsider: I do not share the same history of oppression, de-legitimization, persecution, stigmatization, or violence as the people living on MST settlements have faces and face today. These farming families' lives in the campo are villainized and their right to a dignified life with relevant education is something for which agrarian reform militants are still dying. I believe there exists a line between the eagerness one feels to be close and the erasure of one's struggle not shared by the other. I am reflecting on what Vanessa shared with us in Rio de Janeiro about "walking with". She explained the importance of *walking with* rather than *walking in front of* groups of people with different narratives. I had to remind myself that I could *walk with the group* but could never *walk inside the group* as that would be assuming myself the same and appropriating a history and narrative that will never be mine.

Description of Engagement and Methods

My days started at 6:30am when everyone in my host family woke up, got ready for school, and had breakfast together. I would arrive at the high school at 7:30-8:00 am Monday through Friday and from there on each day was different. I had the opportunity to sit in on Flavio's class "Pratitcas Sociais e Comunitarias". The classes I had a chance to sit in on were thought provoking and engaging lectures that would spark students' own input and inspire people to share lived experiences. One day we were talking about the history of capitalism and the next we were talking about the privatization of the Guarani Aquifer. In one class, Flavio posed the question, "Can love be bought?" and a passionate debate ruptured from the 10th grade class. On one day during last period, Flavio lead a Meditation and Reflection class.

I also accompanied Hilma and her class "Organização de Trabalho e Tecnica Produtiva" whenever they went to the field. This meant when they either had class at the Mandalla or when they visited farmers' productive areas. During these classes I learned about the diversity of the soil at Lagoa do Mineiro and about different methods of soil preservation being experimented at the school, whose results would be shared with the community farmers. Students would contribute in this class with knowledge they had from their home gardens or family planting areas. Hilma is trained in Agronomy and although not from the settlement originally, has an incredibly profound understanding of the area's environment and culture.

On Thursdays, I taught English with Mara. These were fun and relaxed classes where the students, Mara, and I talked about ourselves, our cultures, our hobbies and our favorite music as we learned what different things meant in English or Portuguese. Whenever I was not in a class I was either in the teachers' lounge chatting with the professors or in the financial office

where I spent time getting to know and build friendships with Franciene and Francilandia who are sisters and who taught me invaluable lessons through our conversations. The morning and afternoon snack breaks gave me a great opportunity to talk more to the students and learn about how different school etiquette is in Lagoa do Mineiro from my high school. Tuesdays and Thursdays were Full Days, meaning that instead of either having class in the morning or afternoon, everyone had class all day long. These days were rewarding for me because after lunch there was more time to talk with people and the soccer tournament was in full swing. Each class had a soccer team, one male and one female and two games were played by four teams. There was also a teachers' team who ended up winning the tournament final the week after I left.

In the evenings, I would play volleyball or visit different homes with Lúcia or Ivaniza to chat with different friends and family members. Francisca and Raimundo, Lúcia and Ivaniza's parents, were generous to feed me and share incredible stories with me about their lives and fight to reclaim the land from the landlord. I was able to attend church celebrations, community events, and MST reunions throughout the three weeks as well as explore the natural beauty around us.

My method of engagement was principally to be open and present. I kept the focus of critical analysis on myself as to not project or insert my own beliefs or ideas onto a reality I do not know deeply enough. I thought it important to harness my observations and impressions throughout my days into questions I could ask myself. I reflected upon how I was relating or not to my environment and what that could mean at an individual level and a broader level.

I arrived at the settlement with the idea of creating a photo essay about the high school students and their participation in the MST Movimento Jovem. However, once I got a feel for the atmosphere, I came to the conclusion that that project would not be the best fit, especially because the students I was meeting were not active in the movement. I also observed that the youth involvement in MST is something more complicated than I had originally assumed, not many in numbers were active participants and were reluctant to be. I also could tell that if I were to focus on this photo essay and do it in a meaningful way, I would have to sacrifice time that I was spending being with everyone I was meeting and bonding with. I decided I would put the photo essay project aside and keep my focus on analyzing myself.

Vanessa Andreotti's metaphors and frameworks for thinking about global solidarity were always present with me and as I reflected in my personal journal each night, I would revisit questions she had posed to us during our lectures in Rio de Janeiro and see how my own thinking was shifting.

Further Self-Ethnography and Reflection

After three weeks, I left Lagoa do Mineiro with many more questions than when I entered, but a much stronger sense of self and a stronger desire to keep asking new questions rather than just answer old ones. A week in, I was settling into the routine and dynamics and building relationships with more and more people. As I mentioned earlier in the paper, one day I was chatting with a group of students and plans for the future came up. When the majority of the students expressed eagerness to create a life that was not in the settlement and not a part of MST, I was disappointed. And as the days and conversations passed, I found myself being more and more disappointed and confused with what I was hearing. Not everyone, but rather a significant minority in numbers, of the community is active with the movement. There exists a hesitation amongst the teenagers I spoke with to identify with MST. And as I heard the people around me explaining why they rather not attend all the meetings and marches, I found myself wanting to tell them about their own reality. Inside my mind, thoughts were racing: "But your grandparents risked their lives for the right to live and sustain their family on this land... The air is so much less polluted and the quality of life can be so much greater... What about the fight against capitalism?" I revealed to myself I had not only romanticized life in *the campo*, but I was simplifying and negating people's complexities. I wanted to tell a group of people they were to live a certain way. To make matters worse, anytime I was tired or a bit homesick, I could just think about three weeks into the future when I was back at my own reality with some of the luxuries I could not indulge in at the settlement. This was a clear and big difference between the people I was around, my positionality allowed me an escape. As I reflected that night on my

reaction, I saw the danger in this colonial and rigid way of thinking. I could see my complicity in the global system that works to keep us separated in hierarchies. Who am I to visit an MST settlement and judge people for wanting to leave or experience a different life when I myself had moments of impatience just after one and a half weeks? This is the root of many acts of violence and oppression, whether the scale be individual, regional, or global. My feelings during this particular conversation confused me at first, embarrassed me, and then for a while left me feeling empty.

This made me reflect and question my intentions as someone so taken by the MST mission. How, with my positionality and baggage, with all the passengers on my bus (metaphor created by Vanessa Andreotti), could I be a true and transparent ally to MST? Could I be one? My last weekend at the settlement I had the opportunity to attend the Reunião da 'Brigada. The two-day meeting was a reflection and evaluation about the Brigada Francisco Araújo Barros, the MST chapter present at Lagoa do Mineiro. During this meeting, different speakers expressed their worries and hopes for the Brigada, an MST lawyer came to debrief everyone on the law passed at the federal level about the emancipation of settlements (Law 13.456/2017), we reviewed the agriculture projects completed in the past two years, and broke out into discussion groups on education, youth, and agroecology.

These two days provided a roller-coaster of emotions for me. As I walked into the school room where we were to begin, I was excited and honored to have been granted permission to participate. The meeting was held in an elementary school directly next to the house where the landlord had lived until 1986. The symbolism was powerful to me, that day and the next community leaders and MST militants would be discussing how to fortify the movement 30

years after it was reclaimed from the man who lived next door. As I looked around I saw most of the meeting participants were older members of the community, the majority being men who were farmers and *assentados*. As the reunion proceeded, people began to discuss the critical moment the settlement was facing. Numbers are down in participation, community tensions are present like in any community, and the federal government is criminalizing social movements like it did during the latest dictatorship. I began to ask myself “What?” I was doing at the meeting, “Why?” I felt compelled by it and “How?” I was going to communicate and act on my respect and admiration for everyone in the room. I came to the simple finding that my ideals align with those of MST, but my thinking is still latched onto colonial and divisive notions about how people should live their lives. At the conclusion of the ‘Brigada, as we all shared our words of gratitude for the moment and meaningful discussion, Flavio said something that will not leave me. He began by saying a few kind words about me and about my journey to MST and then he introduced me as, “Nossa companheira na luta, Daniela...” And that is what I would like to be, a companion in the fight for justice.

Working Conclusions

During this project, I learned about the hidden yet persistent ways in which colonial perspectives are still a part of my view of the world. I learned how to uncover these limitations within myself and deal with them using a decoloniality attitude and I expanded my notion of what solidarity can look like. I also learned about how one high school can be a reference for agro-ecological experimenting and how it can work (with success) to influence a greater community to adopt more sustainable farming practices. I am grateful for the relationships I was able to create with the people at Lagoa do Mineiro, the beautiful and fertile land Ceará has that provides for us and nourishes us, and for the relationship I was able to strengthen with myself. This opportunity to focus on looking inward instead of outward to study justice and decoloniality was invaluable and I believe I will continue to process, reflect, and act on the lessons I learned at Lagoa do Mineiro for a long time.

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