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Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra: Constructing Humanity

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SIT Study Abroad

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Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra: Constructing Humanity

By Phoebe Rosenheim, Pomona College '15

SIT Brazil: Social Justice and Sustainable Development
Fall 2013

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I am extremely grateful for the generosity of everyone I have encountered during my 3 months in Brazil. Thank you, Assentamento Palmares, for welcoming me warmly and allowing me the opportunity to work with such incredible people. I will never forget the wisdom and kindness of the community. In particular, I would like to thank my advisor, Pedro Neto, and his family for the physical and emotional resources I needed to complete the project. Your guidance was invaluable. I feel grateful not only for the help that Gisllene Gomes and her family offered me every day, but the friendship that we built. Thank you, Francisquinha Rodrigues de Sousa, José Paulo Alves, Francisco Rodrigues de Sousa, Antonio Flavio de Araujo, and Cezarina Maria Rodrigues de Sousa, for participating in my study and therefore trusting me to represent you. The courage of all the settlers has inspired me profoundly.

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Abstract

Neo-Marxist theory suggests that capitalist structures are dehumanizing and that alternative structures should be constructed to re-humanize the people. Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) constructs settlements of small, self-governing family farms as an alternative to the large agricultural estates that dominate Brazil. The settlements have transformed the way workers see themselves. They have successfully developed a humanizing alternative; MST members see themselves as subjects. It is important for Social Justice movements to understand how MST has achieved such powerful differences from Capitalist societies in order to replicate humanizing social structures. My study sought to understand how MST's agricultural system cultivates humanity, human dignity, and subjectivity in its community.

Assentamento Palmares, a MST settlement in Ceará, generously allowed me to pursue my research in their community. I interviewed 5 members of the settlement. I also participated in and recorded information about a regional MST meeting, a day of farm work, and a meeting of the settlement's women's group. In MST's farming system, workers have direct control over food production, which humanizes the communities in many ways. They can secure their health and human dignity by farming nutritious food without pesticides and they own the products of their labor, so they are not alienated from it. Life at the settlement requires sharing and fighting together for everyone's right to human dignity, so members to work together and help each other out, a collective consciousness that equalizes and humanizes. MST's leadership draws from the farming-class/working-class members of the settlements; this alternative to Capitalist divisions of labor encourages its members to voice their political opinions and creative expressions. The community promotes the knowledge that workers have valuable thoughts and feelings; they are human beings. However, my time with the women's group showed me that they are still fighting sexism in the settlement. Full humanization would require equal respect for women's work, bodies, and voices.

Introduction

Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) is a social movement that resists the violent social injustices of Brazilian society by fighting for Popular Agrarian Reform, as well as educational, nutritional, and political justice. The power of the movement comes from the people who organize to occupy large land estates and then construct self-governing settlements.

Assentamento Palmares is an MST settlement of two communities in Crateús that the people built in 1994.

I am interested in Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra because I am looking to develop my political vision for the world. I am angry about the injustice of the communities in which I grew up, and I am dissatisfied with liberal responses that do not seek to uproot power hierarchies. It gave me great hope to live in a community that is constructing a new world. I am interested in the ways society constructs our understandings of ourselves because among the pain around me, I have been most affected by my friendships with people who struggle against society's message to them that they are worthless. I have struggled with feelings of worthlessness myself, although I can see clearly that the structures around me constantly tell me otherwise.

Capitalist philosophies still affect me even though I fight to move away from them. I come from an Upper-Middle class household with many material resources, including kindergarten through 12th grade education in an "elite" private school. Now I study in another "elite" institution for my college degree. Although I try to fight against thinking this way, I am constantly immersed in the false message that students at my college and select others across the nation are superior to everyone else in our age group. A vast majority of the texts we study are written by wealthy,

Western-educated, straight white men, which means that I continue to have to re-learn the world around me to incorporate representative perspectives. Media representations of people I am supposed to identify with construct us as superior intellectually, aesthetically, culturally, racially, and sexually. Ethical responsibility will require a constant process of challenging the message that I have been fed that I am superior to the people I wish to learn from. Furthermore, it means that I have a very different reference point in terms of reflections on the self. Living in post 9/11 New York has made me very aware that my life and the lives of others that share my socio-economic status and race are viewed by the U.S. government as more valuable than the lives of Afghani and Iraqi people. Although I have been encouraged to have self-confidence and think of myself as an agent, I agree with Paulo Freire's argument that oppressors are also dehumanized by violent inequalities (2000). I see MST's liberatory work as wisdom relevant across class and race lines.

Study Participants:

- José Paulo Alves (Prefers the name Zé Paulo)
 - Interview on November 11, 2013
- Francisquinha Rodrigues de Sousa
 - Interview on November 11 and 19, 2013
- Francisco Rodrigues de Sousa (Prefers the name Chiquinho)
 - Interview on November 12, 2013
- Antonio Flavio de Araujo (Prefers the name Flavio)
 - Interview on November 14 and 20, 2013
- Cezarina Maria Rodrigues de Sousa
 - Interview on November 14 and 19, 2013

Important Definitions:

- **Fazenda:** The large land estates that compose the majority of capitalist agriculture in Brazil. Fazendeiro is the person who owns the fazenda.
- **Patrão:** The boss in Brazilian capitalist system that exercises significant authority over workers. In this essay, participants refer to the fazendeiro as patrão .
- **Mística:** Spiritual community ceremonies that encourage the community to reflect on MST struggles and victories.
- **Human dignity:** Health was an important part of Human dignity for the participants. Flavio also included a house to live in and land to work, education, health, time to relax, and expression of voice as the factors of Human dignity (Interview, November 14, 2013). Zé Paulo extended the definition to include happiness, when a person “feels happy in a general way, with everything” (Interview, November 11, 2013).
- **Liberty and Humanity:** These concepts are about more than control over your life. Chiquinho, Zé Paulo, and Cezarina defined these concepts as including the community. Cezarina defined liberty and humanity as living where everyone is working together to provide Human dignity for all (Interview, November 14, 2013). For Chiquinho, humanity means a community where people respect and help each other, a philosophy of “everyone united” (Interview, November 12, 2013). Zé Paulo said that humanity means human rights are respected, where people are treated equally despite difference (Interview, November 11, 2013).
- **Ser Humano (Human Being):** Flavio told me that to be a human is to not be an object, instead, a subject of history. Zé Paulo emphasized these sentiments in the importance he placed on the people having access to a voice to express themselves and criticize the system.

Literature Review

My study is a response to the past research that defines the dehumanizing effect of our global systems. Karl Marx wrote extensively about dehumanization, and neo-Marxist academics have expanded his theories to apply to current facets of the problem. For Marx, dehumanization is part of a phenomenon he called alienation, which I found to be very useful in understanding the success of MST (See Literature Review). He argued that the activity of capitalist labor and the products of the labor are inherently external to the workers. In a chapter of *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* called "Estranged Labor," Marx illustrates how the economy is structured so that the more product the worker makes, the less valuable the product is, and therefore the less valuable the worker's labor. Accordingly, the objects of production are inversely related to the interests of the workers and are oppositional to the workers. Alienation applies in a rural setting as well. Cash crops produced by rural workers are subject to global market pricing completely out of the control of the workers. The produce is owned and controlled by the landowners, who determine the wage of the workers.

The dehumanization occurs at the intersection of alienation and the worker's relationship to nature. Capitalist objects are produced from natural materials. Nature is therefore a part of the estranged objects. Furthermore, nature physically sustains the workers, yet the laborer must engage in alienating work in order to get access to the nature that sustains him. The sustenance he is able to acquire is structurally designed to sustain him as a worker, and only secondly as a person. So even what Marx calls "animal functions-- eating, drinking, procreating" are mediated by the estrangement. The issue of animality is significant. Marx argues that since labor and products are external to the worker, the only activities

that the workers have control over are those animal functions quoted above. As such, Marx presents an argument for the dehumanization of the worker under capitalism through his concept of alienation.

MST has been influenced by Marx other Leftist movements in Latin America inspired by Marx's theories. Alienation is an essential concept for MST because it supports the logic of rejecting the relationship between land-owner and rural worker. In the context of Marx's analysis, rural workers who own and control their farming would necessarily have the opposite relationship to the products of their labor. They would have more control over their lives than just their animal functions and therefore would be more human.

Paulo Freire also describes the dehumanizing effect of capitalism, but he defines it differently (2000). His ideas are part of a Catholic movement across Latin America called Liberation Theology, which has been integral to MST grassroots mobilizing. Accordingly to Freire, our system creates a binary of oppressor and oppressed. The oppressor believes that "to be is to have," a mentality that renders the oppressed as non-human because they do not have. The oppressor consciousness also dehumanizes the oppressors because exploitation is not realizing the "vocation of becoming for fully human" (Freire, 1979, 44). They impose their mentality onto the oppressed through violent prescription. The oppressed then have part of the oppressor within them by holding their consciousness, which leads to violence between the oppressed and engenders a philosophy of fatalism that prevents liberation.

Freire and Marx illustrate the importance of creating new social structures that do not dehumanize, that liberate people. Caitlin Christensen highlights the importance of alternate systems by describing the similarities between the

enslavement of the fazenda system, and the patronage of the powerful institutions in modern day Brazil (2008). Accordingly, Freire's call for Liberation gains added significance due to the continuing slavery that exists today. MST's institution of family farming is a much needed social improvement.

Discourse on the significance of MST's new agricultural system also emerges from authors within MST. João Pedro Stédile is one of the key figures in MST and has written many influential books and articles about MST. In "The Neoliberal Agrarian Model in Brazil," Stédile explains the two models of agriculture in Brazil, the neoliberal model that supports international agribusinesses and the campesino agricultural model that supports small farms of exponentially more people (2007). Stédile details the benefits of campesino agriculture using quantitative measures such as the number of people it would benefit and the material improvements due to organic techniques. In this article, he does not write about the spiritual, emotional improvements of MST's agricultural system. Stédile does describe the humanizing potential for MST farming in an interview for *New Left Review*, which MST has linked on their English website (2002). "But maybe the greatest success is the dignity the Sem Terra farmers have won for themselves. They can walk with their heads held high, with a sense of self-respect. They know what they're fighting for. They don't let questions go unanswered. That's the greatest victory. No one can take that class-consciousness away" (Oliveira, 2002). The fact that such a vocal and respected member of MST considers self-respect the biggest success of MST farming is one of the main reasons I chose to study this topic. However, Stédile does not write these sentiments into his academic papers, at least in English, which means that there is a gap in the English academic literature

concerning the significance of MST in resolving the dehumanization of neoliberal agriculture.

Even though the full picture is missing, a few American scholars have mentioned the issue of MST's personal liberation. Monica Dias Martins and Daniela Issa help to answer the question of what humanization might mean to MST members. Monica Dias Martins writes that the process of occupying and settling land transforms the workers and quotes their description of themselves as newly "free workers" (2000, 37). She argues for the significance of MST workers' new "capacity to create material and cultural commodities" (Martins, 2000, 37). This capacity is exactly what Marx writes is suppressed by capitalist structures, and what is dehumanizing about it. Martins argues that MST is revolutionary because they assert the right of the workers to transform the land into community-owned and family-owned farms. Since Capitalism is based on the ultimate right to property, MST's alternate institution challenges the whole system. It is precisely this challenge that creates free workers because a new agricultural system subverts the relationship of dependence of the rural workers on the landed elites. In the wake of the revolution is a new model of man and woman that has ownership over their work, the products of their labor, and the sustenance they consume.

Daniela Issa's work on MST *mística* ceremonies demonstrates how MST communities collectively reflect on the emotional significance of their new institutions (2007). *Mística* are community ceremonies inspired by Catholic, Indigenous, and African religions that encourage the community to reflect on MST struggles and victories. *Místicas* rely heavily on art and symbolism to communicate the spiritual value of their work and their new society. Issa writes that the

ceremonies contain “the more abstract, emotional element, strengthened in collectivity, which can be described as the feeling of empowerment, love, and solidarity that serves as a mobilizing force by inspiring self-sacrifice, humility and courage” (Issa, 2007). The ceremonies indicate that MST has its own framework for understanding the significance of humanization, and the spiritual resistance that their new institution constructs. Given that *místicas* focus on collective identity, the liberation seems to be a collective humanization. Although Issa does not detail the ways in which *místicas* reflect on the significance specifically of new agricultural system, but the words of Stédile and the concepts of Martins suggest that family farming is a large part of MST’s consciousness and goals. Like Issa, I found *místicas* to be a very important part of the liberating consciousness of MST.

I developed my research in response to the works described above. I was interested how the MST’s agricultural system creates the humanizing effect that Stédile defines in the interview and that Freire advocates, but that is not explored in their works or in that of the other authors. I asked MST members what humanity means to them and how the type of agriculture at the settlement has affected them on an emotional and potentially spiritual level. I studied how the new agricultural structure that Martins calls attention to changes the way people understand themselves as subjects, as opposed to the way the neoliberal system understands them as objects. Ultimately, I hope that it benefits the body of English-speaking academia to know how MST has created a solution to the problem of dehumanization that workers’ movements have been fighting for since Marx and his contemporaries started theorizing in the 1800s, and which has been a continuing source of reflection through the Leftist movements in Latin America, both political and spiritual.

Research Methods

My principal method of collecting information was a series of interviews with 5 members of the settlement. The interviews were semi-structured, I drew from a list of prepared questions but chose which questions to use based on the unique dialogue I had with each participant. I offered the participants the option of choosing a pseudonym, but they all asked me to use their names.

The first week I spent in the settlement, I introduced myself to the community in a variety of ways. Pedro Neto, my advisor and president of the settlement, took me to a meeting of settlement coordinators on the first night. I nervously introduced myself and my study, and then gave the group copies of my translated Problem Statement, Interview Questions, and Consent forms. Earlier that night, Pedro Neto had taken me to a meeting he led at a nearby encampment, where I also introduced myself and talked to occupiers and militants working with Pedro Neto. In the following days, Pedro Neto took me to the settlement radio. His intention was for me to be interviewed by a member for a broadcast, but I was too nervous to say anything other than “Thank you” and “Goodnight,” so the interview ended up being a conversation between Pedro Neto and the other member about my study. Pedro Neto introduced me to a dear friend, Gisllene Gomes, took me around the community to meet different people. By the end of that week, 8 people had approached Pedro Neto offering for me to interview them.

I was very happy with this process of identifying participants because it was structured so that everyone who participated in the study were enthusiastic participants, rather than a traditional recruitment process in which there is at the very least the social pressure of the researcher asking for a favor. From a

“scientific” perspective, the recruitment process meant that the participants were not a representative sample of the community. Most noticeably, there is a concentration of participants in community leadership positions. However, the participants had a variety of jobs and positions within the community, and were almost evenly divided between men and women. All participants work at least partially farming or raising livestock, which is the profession of the majority of the settlement. There were 3 other people that offered to be interviewed and I planned to interview, but I ended up not having time.

My original plan was to interview all the participants, join them in an activity that is important to them, and then re-interview them about that activity. I changed my plans for a few reasons. Pedro Neto invited me to a 3 day, all day meeting (Encontro) between many different settlements and encampments that took place at Assentamento Plamares. I decided that I should make time for that because it was a rare opportunity, and Pedro Neto probably has a better understanding of what would contribute to my research. I also realized that I had a lot of data already from the interviews, and it seemed more ethical to me to spend time engaging with the community by helping out with chores and attending community events than re-interviewing everyone. Along with the Encontro, I conducted participant observation at a meeting of the women’s group, which Francisquinha leads, and joined Chiquinho for a morning of work in his Roca. By the end of my stay in the settlement, I had interviewed everyone at least once, had a group interview with Francisquinha and Cezarina to ask about the women’s meeting, and had a second interview with Flavio to ask about the Encontro.

I interviewed all the participants at their houses. This meant that I was in a place they control, which puts power in their hands. They also chose where in the

house they wanted me to interview them. Since it is really hot at the settlement, Francisquinha and Flavio chose to have the interviews outside on their porches, and Zé Paulo in his side yard, so it was not very private. There were people close by in other houses and walking by. However, all of the participants asked me to use their names, so none seemed concerned about privacy. Flavio pulled up a chair for his mother to listen in to the interviews. Cezarina's interview was inside in the kitchen with her husband sitting next to her and her grandchildren passing through. Chiquinho's interview was in his living room with his wife sitting close by listening and offering suggestions. I explicitly offered him a more private space, but he declined. The group interview with Francisquinha and Cezarina was the only private interview. It was at Francisquinha's house in a closed room.

Below this section, I included a list of the research questions that reappeared in my interviews. I asked about their work, but also larger questions about the concepts related to humanity and human dignity. I decided to break with the Social Science tradition of just asking participants about their experiences and creating theories later. Instead, I asked the participants how they believe their experiences relate to larger structures and theoretical concepts. Asking these types of questions means that I am creating knowledge *with* them rather than just *about* them; I recognize that the participants are in the best position to make sense of their lives. I asked them to define the key terms we discussed, which was another way I tried to listen to how the community understands concepts rather than assuming that everyone has the same ways of thinking about humanity.

Engaging in the community was important to me, not to collect data, but because I wanted my role to be truly participatory. Treating the community like a hotel would not have been respectful. I helped with daily cleaning chores and had

many social meals with the participants and their families. There were two social community events that I attended, a forró dance and a football game between the adjoining MST settlement and a community close by. By the end of my study, I felt significant friendships with many community members and I was sad to leave.

Pedro Neto asked me to give a 30 minute presentation to the community about my findings. I used it as an opportunity to assess whether my findings were offensive to anyone or whether anyone had suggestions about improving my analysis. I received warm responses and no suggestions. However, not everyone attended the presentation. I wanted to check individually with all the participants to make sure that they were comfortable with my findings, and to say goodbye. Zé Paulo was not at the presentation, so I explained to him my findings and we had a debate about machismo in the community. We came to a compromise about how I was going to represent his differing opinion.

Key Interview Questions:

My questions varied depending on previous conversations I had with the participants. I also asked a lot of clarifying questions about the meaning of specific words. Below is a list of the questions that resurfaced throughout the interviews:

- When did you join MST?
- What is your work?
- Can you describe your feelings about Capitalism in Brazil?
- Can you describe the difference between [the community they lived in before] and the settlement?
- What is the agricultural system here?
- Can you describe how the agricultural system here is different from the fazendas?
- Eating food of this community, without hormones or pesticides, does it have an emotional significance for you?
- Does the community respect you?
- Can you explain or define the concept of human dignity or humanity?
- Can you describe or define the concept of human health?
- Can you give an example of what it means to live with dignity?
- Can you describe the liberty that the settlement offers?

- How does MST cultivate humanity?
- Why is [topic they talked about most] important to you?

Ethics & Ethical Responsibility

Academic research in the United States is undeniably violent. White Americans studying Black and Brown people invented lies about racial inferiority that continue to be used by the upper class to justify colonial violence, such as research that falsely represents Islam as inferior. Social Science research that blames the poor for their poverty forms the justification for government policies that cut social programs for families in need, such as the “Culture of Poverty” theory of Oscar Lewis. These horrors made me unsure of whether it was ethical at all to do research at MST. In another display of kindness, Pedro Neto discussed my concerns with me. He helped me understand that although it is impossible to separate Capitalism from my research, MST reads research proposals and accepts certain studies into the community because a variety of perspectives and lenses strengthens the movement.

I used many strategies for mitigating the power inequality that will always exist when one person writes about another, and that especially exists in an academic project. I reflected a lot on the things my college decides are knowledge (Positivism). Generally, a study is considered valid if the researchers do not write about themselves or their emotions in relation to the study, if they maintain distance between themselves and the objects of their study, and if the information they collect is about quantities, not qualities. I made a decision not to conduct my research using this philosophy because I believe it discriminates against the knowledge that workers have about social problems, which is based on their

personal experiences. I consider their way of knowing valuable, and I believe that it is impossible for me to analyze the community separately from my interactions with them because my emotional experiences affect the way I understand the situation in front me.

Empathy promotes understanding and meaningful connections between researcher and participants promotes responsibility within the researcher that is deeper than just filling out consent forms; they work harder to make sure that everyone is truly comfortable because they care about the emotions of the participants, not just the rules of their university. I became friends with many members of the community and I responded to their openness by sharing a lot about myself as well. I did not treat the settlement as a hotel. I helped with chores and strengthened my friendships by joining in fun community events.

I see myself as compatible with MST's mission to spread their movement because I agree politically with their goals and am using the ISP project as an opportunity to learn how to become a better revolutionary in their tradition. I hope that my position will mitigate the researcher/subject power inequality that ethnographies create. I know clearly that I am not saving anyone and that they are the authorities on their own experiences. Instead, I have the goal of learning so I can replicate their ideas in my home communities.

I designed my research methods to be as transparent as possible with the participants. I wrote out my informed consent form in Portuguese and ask a native Portuguese speaker to check for errors and clarity to make sure that my research was transparent and the participants had control over the situation. Everyone I interviewed signed a consent form. I did not interview any vulnerable members of the community, only adults (but not seniors) who have the mental health to

consent to the research. I did not intend to include a minor in my final essay, but Gisllene Gomes became such an important part of my time at the settlement that it would have been less ethical to not acknowledge her help. In my experience, taking notes during conversations can make people feel that they are objects of inquiry, so I took notes after the interviews.

The language barrier was another ethical challenge that I reflected on. If the participants do not know what I am writing about them, they have no control over how I am representing them. Before I wrote this essay, I presented my ideas in Portuguese to the community and then met individually with all the participants to check whether they were comfortable about my ideas for what I would write. Before submitting the essay to my professor, I emailed a translated version of Abstract and Conclusion as another opportunity for dialogue. I will translate the Data section and email the participants again before SIT Study Abroad makes the essay available to anyone else. The difference between English and Portuguese is not the only language issue. Universities teach students vocabulary that is inaccessible to people who have not had the privilege of attending them. I tried not to use exclusive language in my paper.

Data Presented & Discussed

One of the premises of my study is that Capitalism is a system that dehumanizes (See Literature Review). The participants felt similarly, and clarified further the way Capitalism has affected them and their communities.

Francisquinha told me that her parents were agricultural workers and growing up, her family suffered a lot because even when the harvest was enough, the patrão would graze his cows in their fields so much that they did not have enough to eat (Interview, November 12, 2013). The health of agricultural workers is not important to the patrão because under a capitalist system, workers are considered as objects of labor. Flavio spoke to the larger effect: many people all over the world and in Brazil die from hunger because this system does not prioritize Human dignity (Interview, November 14, 2013). Women's bodies face an intersectional disrespect. Flavio told me that his mother had 13 children without any prenatal care because Brazilian women used to have no access to public services. (Interview, November 14, 2013). Zé Paulo added that the fazendeiro does not care about quality of food sold or the consumer, just the profits, so he uses pesticides, which hurts people by making them vulnerable to disease (Interview, November 11, 2013). Given my participants' definition of human dignity, Brazil's economy is grossly insufficient.

MST's agricultural system is not controlled by patrões. Farmers have full control over their plots of land (Francisco Rodrigues de Sousa, interview, November 12, 2013). Farmers at Assentamento Palmares grow the food they eat and use water from cisterns they construct (C. Rodrigues de Sousa, interview, November 14, 2013). Unlike the fazenda system, they have control over their land and livestock. Zé Paulo explained the difference that this system makes, "The idea of the Movimento Sem Terra, MST, is to produce a product that is healthy, it is healthy for the health

of humanity” (Interview, November 11, 2013). While the fazendeiros are incentivized to use pesticides at the expense of their customers because it makes a profit, MST farmers are incentivized to prioritize their health because they eat what they grow. MST does not use any pesticides; members are less vulnerable to disease (J. Alves, interview, November 11, 2013). The direct connection between the farm and the table creates a new power of the workers to control the health of their food, which means they can ensure their Human dignity.

Cezarina experienced the differences in human dignity that MST has to offer (Interview, November 14, 2013). When she lived in Fortaleza, a lot of the food she ate was canned. Her health suffered greatly with constant headaches and insufficient nutrition. She explained that the oppression of city life under the control of the patrão and the unhealthy food produced by agribusinesses was hurting her health. When she moved to Assentamento Palmares, her headaches immediately went away and she gained weight quickly. Now, Cezarina eats the eggs of the chickens she raised. Her food comes from the community. The community drinks water from the cisterns she built. She explained the significance:

My cure was simply working with the land, working with people equal to me. The term egalitarian, it gives you—it animates you, your health. Living all the time with people who are equal to you gives me an emotional balance and you end up like we are, happy (C. Rodrigues de Sousa, interview, November 14, 2013).

Cezarina’s physical health is inseparably linked to the societies she lives in because the violence of oppressive societies have powerful effects on the body. MST improved her bodily condition not just because she had better access to resources, but because the emotional improvement of living in a peaceful egalitarian society has effects that she could feel in her body (C. Rodrigues de Sousa, interview, November 14, 2013).

Family farming reverses one of the problems with capitalism that Marx described. In a capitalist market, the more product the workers produce, the less valuable the product is (K. Marx, 1844). Workers do not have connections to the work they produce because the more they create, the less they earn for the produce. Since MST communities eat what they grow, the more food the settlers grow, the better nourished the communities are. The participants talked to me about loving their work and the land they work on. Chiquinho told me, "I work with excitement," (Interview, November 12, 2013) and I saw firsthand that this was the case when I helped him in his plot of land. He was proud to tell me that he harvested more than 60 sacks of corn in 2009, before the current drought. Chiquinho and the other settlers have complete control over their labor, they own their harvest in a way that farmers in fazendas never do (Francisco Rodrigues de Sousa, interview, November 12, 2013). Their direct consumption of their product and their control over it means that farmers are intimately connected to their product in a way that cannot be found in agribusiness.

Cezarina used to work in Fortaleza at a sewing factory, and she described the situation as dehumanizing (Interview, November 14, 2013). The food she was given for lunch disgusted her, so she would give it to the children begging for food on the street outside. Her boss reprimanded her for doing so because the factory also owned a store and the children scared away customers. The system incentivized the boss to practice violence indifference towards children starving in front of him. This is the opposite of how the participants defined humanity, which involved people helping one another. Individualism is encouraged within capitalism in a number of ways. In a factory job, if there are lots of workers available, the employer can lower the salary. This system means that the interest of

each individual worker opposed the interest of every other; it is inherently competitive. As Cezarina described, the competitiveness of capitalism creates a dehumanizing reality where people are desensitized to and even contribute to the starving of others (Interview, November 14, 2013).

The participants at Assentamento Palmares described a completely different relationship between workers. Flavio told me that the settlement is different than other places where people just think about themselves (Interview, November 14, 2013). Settlers have a collective mentality. Chiquinho told me about a campaign to raise money for a sick MST militant (Interview, November 12, 2013). I later witnessed the fundraising for her at the Encontro. After describing how the community gave more than 200 Reals for her treatment, Chiquinho said, “Humanity is this, when a person is going through a hard phase and we have—we help them” (Interview, November 12, 2013). Cezarina also considered the mutual assistance of MST to be an essential part of humanity (Interview, November 14, 2013).

Within the settlement, members seem to have a different way of understanding their possessions in relation to other people. Cezarina pointed out a community practice that I also found incredible; when people leave their houses, they put their keys in plant pots near their doors in plain sight of the rest of the community (Interview, November 14, 2013). Cezarina was happy to tell me that they trust each other in a way that does not exist in a big city.

Francisquinha described another collective that clarified why MST has such a different effect on its members than capitalist structures. Francisquinha joined Assentamento Palmares when it was still an encampment (Interview, November 11, 2013). She said that in the encampment phase, there was truly the mentality of “one for all and all for one” (Interview, November 11, 2013). The campers divided

everything. When the encampment won the right to the land and became a settlement, the community was still very collective. They raised communal cows and everyone had enough milk. Francisquinha told me that individualism crept back into the settlement and the community divided the cows. Now not everyone had access to milk (Interview, November 11, 2013). Although it has diminished, sharing of food still happens. Cezarina described Partilha, a party where everyone shares food (Interview, November 14, 2013). I witnessed and participated in food-sharing at the Encontro.

Francisquinha illustrates the connection between the MST structure and the collective mindset that results. The problems that resulted from dividing the cows show that it is in the nutritional interest of an MST individual to work with his neighbors. The collectivism at the encampment emphasizes that fighting for their rights involves uniting, not competing. Assentamento Palmares is constructed differently from capitalism because the settlers' interests do not oppose. They share produce and work together to fight for rights to Human dignity, so the more members there are, the best outcomes there will be for each individual, which is the exact opposite of capitalism. Accordingly, MST's structure breeds collective thinking and unity. Members fight to improve the health of the whole group, which leads to the humanization of working together and living in a community where people enjoy Human dignity together.

In my participants' experiences with Capitalism, they were not treated as humans using Flavio's definition of the term. Francisquinha told me that the mentality of the state is that agricultural workers can't study or learn (Interview, November 11, 2013). She proudly told me about her children passing the vestibular exam and getting into college. The system does not value workers' minds, nor does

it treat workers' as citizens; Chiquinho told me that workers in fazendas have no rights (Interview, November 12, 2013). When Cezarina told her patrão that she wanted to leave the factory, the patrão held her there working for 8 months before he liberated her (Interview, November 14, 2013).

I talked extensively with Flavio about how MST re-conceptualizes workers as thinkers, as independent agents in society, as subjects. I had the opportunity to witness this process in action at the Encontro. The first event was a *mística* that Flavio invited me to participate in. In an interview with him later, Flavio described *Místicas* as events that spiritually prepare MST members for the meetings and strengthens their understanding of the key concepts in the meeting (Interview, November 20, 2013) (See Literature Review). *Místicas* are unlike anything I have witnessed before. They felt like a combination of a ceremony and a performance. There were *místicas* every day of the Encontro. In each one, people from the audience volunteered to act out a reality specific to the working class; the second day they acted a patrão gunman shooting a MST occupier. They all involved music and pauses for reflection. Flavio stated, "The *mística*, it is a personal moment for each person that makes you feel; it creates sensitivity and comprehension" (Interview, November 20, 2013). By encouraging the awakening of the heart, mind, and soul, the *mística* recognizes that every person in the room has these elements, hallmarks of a human subject. Engaging the thoughts and feelings of the people in the room signifies a breakdown of the binary of lecturer and audience: the space recognizes each person as a contributor and an active reflector.

When I arrived at the Encontro the first day, the coordinators had used chalk and charcoal to draw on the floor in the front of the room. The piece had a thick line through it, which I interpreted it as two options, divide. On the right,

from the perspective of an audience-member, the biggest word was DEATH and the biggest image is a black cross. It had words surrounding it like veneno, which has a double meaning of pesticide and poison, and lack of consciousness. The other side had a sun with the MST flag in the center and sand forming the beams, and words like Socialism and Popular Agrarian Reform. The left side also had symbolic objects, like MST books and farming equipment.

I was one of 5 volunteers. We were each given a slip of paper with a couple of lines from a poem called "Questions of a Worker who Reads" by Bertold Brecht (See Poetry). When the *mística* started, we were scattered through the audience, sitting among the people. We took turns reading our lines from the poem by standing up on our chairs when it was our turn. We had also chosen beforehand an object from the *mística* in the center. I chose a book, I thought that was appropriate. After we said our lines, music played and we walked in a circle around the centerpiece and then stood while the music finished. Three other volunteers came into the room from the back holding signs drawn in chalk on printer paper that said Fight, Socialism, and Popular Agrarian Reform. They delivered lines that were rhetorical questions, like "Socialism or War?" Afterwards, we all put the objects back down in the centerpiece and returned to our seats.

The theme of the first *mística* reinforced the message of humanity that all *místicas* have. Flavio told me that the theme of the *mística* was questioning why the worker is the one who does everything in a society but is recognized for nothing (Interview, November 20, 2013). The lines I delivered really spoke to me, "Great Rome is full of triumphal arches. Who erected them? Did Byzantium only have palaces for its inhabitants?" (B. Brecht). Historians glorify Rome for its buildings, but do not record anything about who constructed them. Brecht calls

attention to this omission by asking a question, showing both that our society does not consider the builders worth recording, and that he feels differently. The following line criticizes the fact that the construction workers do not own or benefit from the products of their labor. Brecht asks the reader to recognize the workers as subjects of history, and to recognize that although the laborer is an integral part of every society, they are routinely disregarded.

The poem prepared the group for a lecture about the state of the working class in Brazil. Flavio explained the relevance of the poem:

The person who thought of the *mística* thought to see why it is that in Brazil, the working class is who does it all, those who put food on the table, us, the workers. Those who make education are educators, people who work, who strive. We worry most about paying taxes... The people who really make things happen in Brazil and in the world, they are not recognized (Interview, November 20, 2013).

By including the poem in the *mística*, the community is asserting that as workers, they are valuable members of society who deserve recognition. The *mística* was a powerful way that the community reflected on themselves as subjects and reclaimed that identity from a system that understands them solely as objects.

After the *mística*, an outside lecturer led a reflection about importance of asking yourself who you are. He began by asking everyone who wanted to participate (the majority of the room) to form an inner and outer circle with the exact same number of people in each. Then he gave a short speech saying that it is important for us to think about who we are. He gave us about 5 min to think about it, and then he asked us to pair up with the person nearest to us in the other circle. The outer circle started, we each had about 2 minutes to tell our partner who we are, and then he made a noise which indicated that the outer circle move over one

person and say it again. We did this for about 10 people, and the outside circle stood still and silent and the inside circle moved and spoke about who they were.

Afterwards, we arranged the seats back in the traditional style, facing the front, and the lecturer asked people to volunteer to come up and describe their experience in the dynamic. Then he gave a lecture about why knowing who you are is important. He stated that when you do not know who you are, other people can use you as an instrument by convincing you that you are the person they want you to be. The fact that a day of the Encontro was devoted to developing a way to describe who you is a strong statement about MST's belief in the importance of each individual life there in the room. I felt that it was very humanizing, especially in the way that Flavio described. The space became an opportunity to resist objectification by asserting that each individual should create their own identity, and then by collectively appreciating the self-constructed identity of the people in the room.

MST communities encourage members to voice their thoughts and feelings. In a capitalist division of labor, the jobs at the highest levels of society are assigned political voice and the working class is excluded as unfit to speak. Flavio explained that the Encontro is an example of the way MST organizes its structure so that the leaders are composed of the workers (Interview, November 20, 2013). The purpose of the Encontro was to select delegates for a statewide meeting that would make decisions about how MST would organize and what it would demand. The structure is bottom up, the working class is inseparable from the leading class, which means that working communities have control over the organization and the direction of their struggle. They have a voice and power that is humanizing (A. Flavio de Araujo, interview, November 20, 2013). Zé Paulo described how

Assentamento Palmares has expanded this political voice even further (J. Alves, interview, November 11, 2013). The community has an unregulated radio that they use to play local music, spread community news, and express political criticism. Zé Paulo feels that he truly has the freedom to express his political critiques, and therefore has the humanity of a voice (Interview, November 11, 2013).

Human subjects have hearts as well as minds, and it was very apparent to me that the participants recognized this aspect of their humanity as well. Zé Paulo stated, "Dignity is where people live well, content, satisfied, happy with their structure, with their family, with their life with the people around them. You feel happy in general, with everything" (Interview, November 11, 2013). For him, dignity is a location, it is about the community. He, Cezarina, and Chiquinho all explicitly told me they were happy living at the settlement. Every day of the Encontro, the community sang together, musicians played songs. I was touched by the immense creative expression all around me. The community has re-constructed the worker as more than a pair of arms, but as a feeler, an artist deserving of a voice to express creative potential.

Talking to women in the settlement, both informally and in interviews made me aware that the humanizing effects of MST were not evenly distributed by gender (C. Rodrigues de Sousa and Francisquinha Rodrigues de Sousa, interview, November 19, 2013). Cezarina constructs cisterns, a job that is usually dominated by men (C. Rodrigues de Sousa, interview, November 14, 2013). When she and the women she worked with were commissioned to build cisterns at Assentamento Palmares, she suffered gendered discrimination because construction work is considered men's work. "Here there are many male builders, and among them, there was still a lot of discrimination when I started" (C. Rodrigues de Sousa, interview, November 14,

2013). Furthermore, at the Women's Group, many women talked about how the work they do inside the house is not recognized and valued on the same level as the traditionally male work outside the house. Male and female participants told me that the workers' connection to the products of their labor is an essential reason MST is humanizing and different from Capitalism (See Literature Review). Since the community men do not always respect women's work, they are denied full participation in the humanization.

Discussions with Francisquinha revealed gendered violence within the community. During her time at Assentamento Palmares, her husband abused her (C. Rodrigues de Sousa and Francisquinha Rodrigues de Sousa, interview, November 19, 2013). Thankfully she was able to get out of the situation and he no longer lives in the community, but she emphasized to me that her experience is not an isolated incident. Assentamento Palmares reflects the gender hierarchy of the rest of the world; women face an added threat of violence, both physical and psychological. The experience of human dignity and bodily liberation that the participants praised about MST is incomplete because women's bodies do not receive the same level of respect. Many participants said that equality was an essential part of humanization. Unfortunately, the experiences of the women I talked to indicate that although the settlement represents an astounding victory in the fight for an egalitarian society, it must continue to fight the feminist struggle in order to achieve full humanization.

Since the participants recognized that Human dignity includes a voice, it made me very hopeful to see women like Francisquinha and Cezarina expressing their disagreement with Machismo. In this way, they too conceptualize themselves as subjects in concert with the larger community's vocalization through meetings

and radio and song. The Women's Group asserts their right to time to relax, a concept Flavio and others defined as part of Human dignity (Interview, November 14, 2013). The group organizes fun events, which are often denied them through the division of labor where women work a double shift inside and outside the house. Unfortunately, the feminist dissent is often discredited by some (although not all) of the men in the community, a reality that the women told me but also that I observed firsthand in conversations (C. Rodrigues de Sousa and Francisquinha Rodrigues de Sousa, interview, November 19, 2013). The settlement's women see themselves as subjects and organize to fight for full and equal Human dignity. The community needs to start recognizing their voice.

The settlement's Feminism also illustrated the connection between Capitalism and Machismo and the importance of this analysis for constructing humanity. At my college, I take many Feminist classes and participate in Feminist organizing. The priorities of the Feminist movement there reflect the Socio-Economic status of the women who lead it. In my experience, the mainstream Feminist movement's idea of "equality" is an upper-class women's so-called right to exploit just like upper-class men. It gave me hope to see that Feminism in the settlement is a working-class Feminism that recognizes the ideological consistency between a movement for economic equality and a movement for gender equality. In fact, I have found that the way Capitalism is structured to commodity human bodies breeds the commodification of the female body, among many other ways Capitalism frames the gender hierarchy in our societies. Accordingly, I believe that social movements that wish to cultivate full humanization need to listen to the people that have integrated a critique of Capitalism with a critique of Sexism.

It is very important to me that each participant in this study feels comfortable with this monograph. Zé Paulo disagrees with my findings on gender relations within the community because he disagrees with Cezarina and Francisquinha's statements to me. He told me that he believes that there is very little Machismo in the settlement.

Conclusions

Liberal social movements that have retained the individualist mindset of capitalism should note that the participants in the study all told me that humanity requires working together. For an individual, human dignity does not mean having land, education, food, and health. It means living in a community where everyone has these needs met. In creating change, we need to build structures where it is in every individual's best interest to support each other. MST demonstrates one possibility for a structure like this, where people share food and where the movement's success depends on the strength of many working together.

People's Organizations with similar grassroots leadership structures and neo-Marxist frameworks can also learn a lot from MST. Místicas are a unique way to engage people in a reflection of their significance in this world and within the movement. It is a powerful tool in re-conceptualizing workers as subjects because it engages the heart through song and poetry and theater. A deeper study into Místicas and the work they do in cultivating humanity would be especially useful for People's Organizations. The radio has a similar function, and the power of alternative media should not be underestimated. Media has the potential to both to promote the lies of the state and to give voice to the people.

Women at MST are in a special social position to understand the problems with Capitalism and Sexism. They hold knowledge about how these dominating social systems interact because these systems interact directly in their bodies and lives. It is in the interest of radical organizations to listen carefully to their suggestions and critique because their insights are unique and valuable.

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Informed Consent Form

Phoebe Rosenheim

Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido

Terra e Alma: Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra e suas Construções da Humanidade

Prezado(a) Senhor(a),

Eu sou uma estudante numa faculdade nos Estados Unidos chamada Pomona College, e eu estou aqui neste assentamento do MST para fazer um estudo para um curso de Ciências Sociais. Eu li que a comunidade e a agricultura familiar dos assentamentos do MST são muito diferentes da fazenda brasileira e outras grandes empresas brasileiras, porque as fazendas e empresas não respeitam a humanidade dos trabalhadores. Espero estudar como comunidade e a agricultura familiar afetam a maneira como os membros do MST sentem sobre si mesmos, e eu estou especialmente interessada em saber como o MST aumenta a sensação de poder, auto-confiança, e a humanidade dos membros. Essas respostas são importantes para o trabalho de justiça social, porque outros movimentos sociais poderia usar a informação para criar mais sociedades em que as pessoas sintam a dignidade humana.

O que significa participar do estudo?

Obrigado por considerar-me ajudar com o estudo. Se você decidir participar, eu vou pedir para acompanhá-lo durante uma atividade comum para você. Você deve decidir o que funciona melhor para você, mas eu estava esperando que eu pudesse fazer o trabalho junto com você um dia, ou participar e observar durante uma cerimônia mística. Mais tarde ou outro dia, eu gostaria de saber o que a atividade ou o trabalho significa para você, numa entrevista de cerca de 30 minutos. Outro dia, eu gostaria de entrevistar a você novamente por cerca de 30 minutos. Depois que eu vou começar a pensar e escrever o ensaio, você tem a opção de discutir o que eu escrevi sobre você antes de eu enviar o ensaio para meu professor. Poderíamos falar pessoalmente, enquanto eu ainda estou aqui, ou através de e-mail ou Skype.

Benefícios e Riscos:

Pode ser bom falar sobre a felicidade ou a sensação de libertação que se sente ao viver no MST. Estou muito interessada em seus pensamentos e sentimentos, o que pode fazer você feliz de ouvir. Mas falar sobre as razões porque o MST é importante para você pode fazer você lembrar os momentos infelizes em sua vida. Eu não quero que isso aconteça, por isso, devemos falar antes sobre como tentar certificar-se de que você está confortável o tempo todo.

Você pode parar de participar a qualquer momento, por qualquer razão, ou por nenhuma razão.

Se eu te perguntar uma coisa que faz você se sentir desconfortável ou deprimido, por qualquer razão, por favor me diga que você quer pular a questão. Isso não é um problema. Eu não vou ficar chateada e nada de ruim vai acontecer, se você quiser parar de participar no estudo. Você é livre para me dizer mais tarde ou enviar um e-mail para mim se você decidir depois que você não quer que eu o inclua no estudo.

Se você tiver alguma dúvida ou preocupação, a qualquer momento, por favor contacte-me em:

phoebe.rosenheim@gmail.com

Ou você pode contatar a pessoa que supervisiona o meu trabalho, Bill Calhoun, o Diretor Acadêmico, em:

calhoun.bill@gmail.com

Confidencialidade:

Depois de nosso trabalho juntos, eu estarei escrevendo notas em meu caderno. No ensaio para a minha universidade, eu pretendo escrever sobre as coisas que você diz e faz, enquanto nós estamos falando em uma entrevista ou o tempo designado para me observar, a menos que você me diga para não fazer isso. O ensaio estará disponível online. Por favor, me diga se você não está confortável com isso ou não quer que eu escreva sobre você ou cite algumas coisas que você disse durante a entrevista ou a sua atividade, e eu vou tirá-lo do meu ensaio de modo que ninguém nunca vai vê-lo. A confidencialidade é muito importante para mim, então eu vou manter o meu caderno no meu quarto e nunca deixá-lo em um lugar público. Meu computador está protegido por senha. Se você não quer que eu use o seu nome, por favor, escolha outro nome que vou usar no ensaio, e ninguém vai saber quem é você. Depois de eu apresentar o ensaio, vou apagar os arquivos com as anotações que fiz durante a entrevista. Eu não incluirei detalhes sobre você que o identifiquem para a pessoa que vai ler o ensaio. Meu programa de intercâmbio acadêmico, SIT Study Abroad, vai colocar o ensaio em seu site.

Eu, _____ (Seu Nome), li o exposto, e eu entendo o seu conteúdo e concordo em participar do estudo. Eu declaro que eu tenho 18 anos de idade ou mais.

(Data) , ____ de _____ de 2013.

Assinatura do Participante
(Sua Assinatura)

Assinatura da Pesquisada

Posso gravar a nossa entrevista?

Se você está confortável sendo gravado, eu posso gravar nossa entrevista em um gravador, ao qual ninguém terá acesso a exceção de mim mesma. Vou guardar as fitas no meu quarto e eu nunca vou deixá-los em um espaço público. Assim que eu as tiver transferidas para o meu computador, eu vou destruí-las. As fitas são só vai ser usadas para o meu trabalho, por isso ninguém jamais vai ouvi-las. Eu poderia citá-lo no papel, mas não vou incluir informação suficiente, então ninguém vai ser capaz de identificar você.

Eu, _____ (Seu Nome) dou o meu consentimento para ser gravado.

(Data) , ____ de _____ de 2013.

Assinatura do Participante
(Sua Assinatura)

Translated Abstract and Conclusion

Resumo

A Teoria Neo-marxista sugere que as estruturas capitalistas são desumanas e que estruturas alternativas devem ser construídas para re-humanizar as pessoas. O Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) construiu assentamentos de agricultores familiares auto-governados como uma alternativa para as grandes fazendas que dominam o Brasil. Os assentamentos transformaram a forma como os trabalhadores entendem a si mesmos. Eles desenvolveram com sucesso uma alternativa de humanização; membros do MST se entendem como sujeitos, donos de sua própria história. É importante que os movimentos de justiça social para entendam como o MST tem conseguido realizar estas mudanças poderosas das sociedades capitalistas, a fim de replicar estruturas sociais humanizadoras. Meu estudo pretende entender como o sistema agrícola do MST cultiva a humanidade, a dignidade humana, e a subjetividade em sua comunidade.

O Assentamento Palmares, um assentamento do MST no Ceará, generosamente me permitiu prosseguir a minha pesquisa em sua comunidade. Eu entrevistei cinco membros do assentamento. Eu também participei e escrevi informações sobre um encontro regional do MST, de um dia de trabalho agrícola, e uma reunião de grupo de mulheres do assentamento. No sistema agrícola do MST, os trabalhadores têm controle direto sobre a produção de alimentos, que humaniza as comunidades de várias maneiras. Eles podem garantir a sua saúde e dignidade humana ao cultivar alimentos nutritivos sem agrotóxicos e eles possuem os produtos do seu trabalho, não sendo assim alienados deles. A vida no assentamento requer a partilha e a luta conjunta pelo direito de

todos pela dignidade humana, então os membros têm de trabalhar juntos e ajudar uns aos outros, uma consciência coletiva que equaliza e humaniza. A liderança do MST retira da classe trabalhadora os membros dos assentamentos; esta alternativa às divisões capitalista do trabalho encoraja seus membros a expressar suas opiniões políticas e expressões criativas. A comunidade promove o conhecimento de que os trabalhadores têm pensamentos e sentimentos valiosos, pois eles são seres humanos.

Conclusão

Os movimentos sociais liberais que mantêm a mentalidade individualista do capitalismo devem observar que todos os participantes do estudo me disseram que a humanidade exige trabalhar juntos. Para um indivíduo, a dignidade humana não significa ter terra, educação, alimentação e saúde. Significa viver em uma comunidade onde todos têm essas necessidades satisfeitas. Na criação de mudança social, precisamos construir estruturas em que sejam do melhor interesse de cada indivíduo para apoiar uns aos outros. O MST demonstra uma possibilidade para uma estrutura como esta, onde as pessoas compartilham comida e onde o sucesso do movimento depende da força de muitos que trabalham em conjunto.

Organizações radicais com estruturas neo-marxistas similares e liderança participativa também pode aprender muito com MST. Místicas são uma maneira original de envolver as pessoas em uma reflexão de sua importância neste mundo e dentro do movimento. É uma ferramenta poderosa para os trabalhadores se reconceituarem como sujeitos, pois envolve o coração através da música, poesia e teatro. Um estudo mais profundo em místicas e pelo trabalho que fazem em cultivar a humanidade seria especialmente útil para as organizações dos

trabalhadores. O rádio tem uma função similar, e o poder da mídia alternativa não deve ser subestimada. A mídia tem o potencial tanto para promover as mentiras do Estado comodar voz ao povo.

As mulheres no MST estão em uma posição social especial de compreender os problemas com o capitalismo e sexismo. Elas detêm o conhecimento sobre como estes sistemas sociais dominantes interagem porque estes sistemas interagem diretamente em seus corpos e vidas. É do interesse de organizações radicais ouvir atentamente as suas sugestões e críticas, porque suas ideias são únicas e valiosas.

Appendix

The opportunity to visit an MST settlement is very rare. Without the framework of the Independent Study Project, I would have had a very hard time gaining entrance. Needless to say, even if I had visited as some kind of tourist, my role within the community would have been very different. Given the fact that many people warmly complimented my desire to expand the message of MST in the US, I suspect that my ability to participate in the community to the degree that I was able to depended on the fact that I was positioned as someone working to promote MST. Studying at Assentamento Palmares was unique because although the US has social movements, they have not realized alternative agricultural institutions anywhere near the scale of MST and with the political power that MST has, so it would hardly have been possible to study of the humanizing effects of an autonomous institution.

My advisor Pedro Neto organized the framework for my interactions with the community. He set up times for me to present and introduce myself to the

community and then he connected me to people interested in participating. So he was the principal way I discovered interviews and resources. I discovered publications beforehand in two ways. I searched Ebscohost (??) and Jstor using keywords like, "MST liberation." I also looked up the articles recommended by MST on their English "Friends of MST" website. I was most comfortable with publications found using the latter method because mainstream academia includes many ideologies offensive towards working class and Brown people, among many groups. I reread Marxist and neo-Marxist theories to give me a theoretical background on the significance of MST's communities and to show the reader where I was drawing my research questions about humanization and dignity.

My friendship with Pedro Neto was indispensable for many reasons. Primarily, he reduced the ethical problems inherent when approaching people about participation because they approached him. He is an insider, so he had that valuable insight to direct what events I should attend, like the Encontro. He connected me to people who would later become my friends and key emotional supporters. One of the biggest stresses for me was an internal ethical debate about whether I should be doing the research at all, considering it comes from a capitalist institution that is a major part of the violence towards workers. He patiently discussed and resolved the issue with me.

I am not sure exactly how to analyze my experience with reference to the term "cultural difference." I felt the way my privilege has shielded me from certain realities that they face and I felt aware of how my home society has tried to teach me to view these differences in experience as divisive. I certainly felt the language barrier strongly. It was definitely an obstacle. I come from a different religious background so I felt that mildly too. My eating habits are slightly different. But

differences in eating habit seem negligible in the face of the friendships and the similarities of ideology. It felt very natural and right for me to be in a community where people share with me certain core truths, like the belief that everyone should have human dignity, and *can* if the people fight for it. I feel so much further away from the community I was raised in, which socialized people to believe they deserve to exploit.

The methods I used are based on the ethnographic methods I was taught at my college, Pomona. I was taught semi-structured interviews and participant observation. In terms of the SIT activities beforehand, the drop-off activity had very little relevance to my time at MST, but the 3 days at Assentamento de Terra Livre helped me prepare for what to expect at Assentamento Palmares.

My topic did not change during my time at the settlement. The participants had a lot to say about the concepts I had researched beforehand. Of course, they had their own definitions, which I wrote into the paper. The more open-ended research methodology allowed the study to go in the directions most important to the participants and to Pedro Neto. I did not have any experiences that felt like dead ends. However, there was definitely a learning curve in figuring out how to phrase questions. Asking directly what is the emotional significance of working the land was not as productive as asking to define human dignity or the difference between life at MST and outside, because participants brought up their emotions on their own in the context of definitions.

Poetry

Perguntas de um Trabalhador que Lê

(version given to me)

-Bertold Brecht

Quem construiu a Tebas de sete portas? Nos livros estão nomes de reis.
Arrastaram eles os blocos de pedras?
E a Babilônia várias vezes destruída, quem a reconstruiu tantas vezes?
Em que casas da Lima Dourada moravam os construtores?
Para onde foram os pedreiros, na noite em que a muralha da China ficou pronta?
A Grande Roma está cheia de arcos do Triunfo. Quem os ergueu?
A Decantada Bizâncio tinha somente palácios para seus habitantes?
Mesmo na lendária Atlântida, os que se afogavam gritaram por seus escravos na
noite em que o mar a tragou.
O jovem Alexandre conquistou a Índia sozinho?
César bateu os glauques não levava se quer um cozinheiro?
Felipe da Espanha chorou quando sua armada naufragou. Ninguém mais chorou?
Frederico II venceu a Guerra dos Sete Anos. Quem venceu além dele?
Cada página uma vitória.
Quem cozinhava o baquete?
A cada dez anos um grande homem.
Quem pagava a conta?
Tantas histórias.
Tantas questões.
Poema 1913-1956
Bertold Brecht

Questions from A Worker Who Reads

By Bertolt Brecht

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
In the books you will find the name of kings.
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?
And Babylon, many times demolished.
Who raised it up so many times? In what houses
Of gold-glittering Lima did the builders live?
Where, the evening that the Wall of China was finished
Did the masons go? Great Rome
Is full of triumphal arches. Who erected them? Over whom
Did the Caesars triumph? Had Byzantium, much praised in song,
Only palaces for its inhabitants? Even in fabled Atlantis
The night the ocean engulfed it
The drowning still bawled for their slaves.
The young Alexander conquered India.
Was he alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Did he not have even a cook with him?

Philip of Spain wept when his armada
Went down. Was he the only one to weep?
Frederick the Second won the Seven Years' War. Who
Else won it?
Every page a victory.
Who cooked the feast for the victors?
Every ten years a great man.
Who paid the bill?
So many reports.
So many questions.

"Fragen eines lesenden Arbeiters" - translated by M. Hamburger
from *Bertolt Brecht, Poems 1913-1956*, Methuen, N.Y., London, 1976