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### Peasant Territories: Resistance and Existence in the Struggle for Emancipation in Brazil

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# Peasant Territories: Resistance and Existence in the Struggle for Emancipation in Brazil

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## Introduction

With many neo-liberal governments across the world taking up elements of authoritarianism and right-wing populism (Thomas and Tufts 2016, Bruff 2013), peasants are facing new threats (Scoones et. al. 2017). In Brazil, right-wing populism<sup>1</sup>, in combination with neoliberal ideologies, leads to austerity measures that dismantle pro-poor and pro-minority policies, and to policies that support and promote the insertion of agriculture and food production into global markets (Cunha 2017). These measures contribute to the economic marginalisation and social exclusion of groups such as peasants and indigenous people (Bruff 2013, Cunha 2017). Scoones et. al (2017) argue that emancipatory alternatives, alternatives that allow people to be different and to do things differently, are necessary to counter, and protect peasants from, processes of social exclusion and economic marginalisation.

Brazilian peasant movements have historically created emancipatory alternatives by constructing peasant territories: geographical and socio-material spaces that are shaped in accordance to peasants' own values (Camacho and Cubas 2011, Escobar 2008). In the Zona da Mata region in Minas Gerais, peasants have risen from their territories to protest against austerity measures and the government that has implemented them. Their territories have offered resistance against global markets from affecting and controlling their ways of farming and ways of life, both now and in the past. The new Brazilian federal government that was established after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2015 has triggered a new wave of resistance and has reaffirmed peasants' desire to do things differently and to construct alternative farming, education, innovation, market and other practices that strengthen their territories and foster their own emancipation.

Few studies explore how peasant territories can foster emancipation. First, most of the literature in peasant and social movement studies see large (trans)national peasant or food movements, rather than peasant territories, as the primary agents for peasant emancipation (see for e.g. Claeys 2015, Holt-Gimenez 2011 and Wittman 2009). Second, peasant territories are often described as a product of continual conflict, as "territories of resistance" that are shaped in reaction to "territories of domination" (see for e.g. Fernandes 2009). Such a view does not adequately explain how other, non-reactionary wishes shape territorial resistance and foster emancipation. Third, little is known about how peasant territories respond to wider socio-political environment changes, particularly when neo-liberal governments become more authoritarian and take up elements from right-wing populist movements, and how these responses affect peasant emancipation.

This article seeks to contribute to a better understanding of peasant territories as an emancipatory alternative by looking at how two peasant territories in Brazil have engendered and engender the wish for difference and different forms of resistance. In the next section we elaborate on the concepts of territories and the link between resistance, existence and emancipation. We then discuss the context of agrarian development in Brazil and the region of Zona da Mata, after which we offer a detailed account of the case of two peasant territories in the Zona da Mata. The article concludes by discussing how peasant territories in Brazil are a major vehicle for resistance and peasant emancipation.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that in Brazil and Latin America populism refers to the establishment of popular rights. In this article we define populist movements as those that seek to acquire popular support by building societal antagonisms, mechanisms of 'othering', and rhetoric devices. In addition to this right-wing populism depicts the political left as irrationally favouring cultural minorities and being prone to corruption.

## 1. Territories: Resistance, existence and emancipation

### 2.1 Territorial assemblages and emancipation

To explore peasant territories as an emancipatory alternative we move away from viewing territories as fixed entities and from understanding territorial change as a linear process. Instead, we understand territories as performed through assemblages: a constellation of ideas, human, and non-human agents held together by desire (Woods 2015, Anderson and MacFarlane 2011, Delanda 2006, Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Territorial assemblages include people, soil, markets and so on that appear close by but also agents and ideas that operate at a distance such as NGOs and government policies (Davies 2012, McFarlane 2009).

The concept of assemblage allows to move away from seeing territories as a geographical object targeted by external forces, permitting the idea that the wishes and desires of agents that partake in the assemblage also shape the territory (Haraway 1993). As assemblages, territories are also not only defined by powerful agents within the assemblage. Instead, agency is distributed across the assemblage and it is not the degree of power but the way that different actors encounter, relate, and align their wishes with respect to one another that defines the territory (Anderson and MacFarlane 2011). By approaching territories as assemblages we also recognise that territories are not static but dynamic. Every time that territorial assemblages are performed, changes occur in agents' desires, meaning that even when external circumstances remain the same, the territory carries a potential for agents to re-align or disperse and thereby change the territory (Davies 2012). Territorial dynamics may also change when ideas, agents, or elements from other assemblages enter or collide with an existing territorial assemblage (Müller and Schurr 2016).

For the purpose of this study, we distinguish between two types of territorial assemblages: a type that performs neo-liberalism (with authoritarian and/or right-wing populist elements) and a type that performs a peasant way of life and that cares for socioecological relations and social reciprocity. Neo-liberal territories are expansionist and rely on scaling: the use of particular blueprints, technologies, laws and policies that allow them to repeat the same activities in different places (Tsing 2012, 2015). These activities rely on the often invisible labour of humans and non-humans (e.g. mycorrhizal fungi, gendered labour relations, and so on). Peasant territorial assemblages do not rely on scaling but seek progress by improving their own resources and by forging productive alignments with nature and (Tsing 2012, Van den Berg 2018b, Van der Ploeg 2010).

Expanding neo-liberal territorial assemblages collide with peasant territorial assemblages. Peasant territorial assemblages enact different farming, education, innovation, advocacy, as well as economic and knowledge-exchange practices. These practices are (per)formed when particular ideas, human and non-human agents come together in *lines of alignment* (Delanda 2006, Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Policies, discourses, markets and other non-human agents enter these lines of alignment when they are seen to support and nurture existing practices. These practices cease to exist when agents disperse in *lines of flight*. Lines of flight can be triggered when an agent changes or leaves a given alignment. A farming practice may for instance disperse when a farmer chooses to follow another career path, when the market price of fertilisers increases or when the soil becomes degraded and ceases to produce a particular crop. Lines of flight can also be triggered when territorial assemblages collide with agents or assemblages that are part of different, or opposing territorial assemblages. *Lines of flight* need not lead to the complete disappearance of a given practice; the practice may persist or revitalise when agents realign in a different territorial assemblage.

Emancipation entails enhancing peasants *freedom from* being affected by external threats and their *freedom to* be and act differently (Escobar 2008, Van der Ploeg 1998, Slicher van Bath 1978).

Expanding neo-liberal territorial assemblages threaten peasants' *freedom from* by attempting to link peasant practices to (global) markets (Scoones et. al. 2017, Schneider 2010, van der Ploeg 2008). Once part of these markets peasants have to compete for resources with banks, agro-industries, the state and with each other. Under these circumstances, the global market enters peasant territorial assemblages not only as a form of exchange but also imposes laws, policies, techno-scientific prescriptions and ideals around profit and competition that support the functioning of these markets (Schneider 2010). These may all trigger lines of flight and lead peasant territorial practices to disperse.

Peasants' *freedom to* be and act differently is in part made possible by, but does not completely depend on, their *freedom from* external threats. Enhancing the *freedom to* entails not only defending existing practices but also having the capacity to construct new practices – practices that may be based, for example, on logics other than those of competition and profit. This capacity lies in the construction of a socio-material base (Van der Ploeg 2008, Sen 1999) which is constituted by, human and non-human agents that hold the potential to align into new territorial practices.

## 2.2 Peasant territorial assemblages: resistance and existence

To increase emancipation, and enhance *freedom from* and *freedom to*, peasant territorial assemblages have to be able to inhibit territorial practices from dispersing in lines of flight and/or foster the (re)alignment of new territorial practices. This entails some form of resistance. Resistance may be performed by causing damage to, inhibiting the entry of, reducing dependency on, or the circumvention of neo-liberal agents and ideas. To obtain a better understanding of the different ways through which resistance is performed one can analytically distinguish between different forms of resistance. In peasant studies, four forms of resistance are commonly distinguished: overt resistance, everyday resistance, resistance of the third kind, and rightful resistance (see table 1).

The *freedom to* is not only realised by resistance as a *fight against* but also a *fight for* a different way of life, a different way of doing things; or, as Sherwood et. al. (2017) and Daskalaki (2017) propose, a fight for *existence*. Resistance and existence can also be understood as assemblages performed in lines of alignment. They are not mutually exclusive, but are often closely linked. A *fight against* may be a small part of a *struggle for*, when agents' desire is not only to defend their practices or territorial assemblages from neo-liberalism, but also create room for something else. Likewise, a *fight for* something different often entails challenging, or fighting against, dominant ideas and assumptions. Existence can be linked to different forms of resistance.

**Table 1. Characteristics of different forms of resistance**

	<b>Constituted by</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Organising practices</b>
<b>Overt</b>	Alignments around peasants' own political ideas	Confront powerful alignments through public demands	Formal and informal
<b>Everyday</b>	Alignments that link powerful agents to peasants everyday life	Damage alignments of powerful agents without confronting them	Informal, horizontal objectives not predefined
<b>Third Kind</b>	Alignments within peasants' production and distribution practices	Minimize dependency on powerful alignments	
<b>Rightful</b>	Peasants' alignments with powerful agents and their ideas	Negotiate with powerful agents	Formal, hierarchical, clearly defined objectives

The most visible form of resistance is when agents align around political ideas and engage in an “overt” struggle such as road blocks, strikes, rebellions, demonstrations and occupations (Wolf 1975). Overt resistance has been described as revolutionary expressions of class struggle (Wolf 1975, Paige 1975) as well as defensive responses to changes that threaten peasants’ livelihoods (Scott 1976). However, agents that align in overt struggle need not do this for defensive or revolutionary reasons but may do this out of existence: because they want to realise something different. Vergara-Camus (2009) has for example shown how peasant rebellions were employed as a political resource to sustain pressure on authorities to acquire land and build a new livelihood.

The second type of resistance is covert or everyday resistance - which occurs when agents seek to cause damage to alignments of super-ordinates, such as landlords, employers or government officials, in the practice of everyday life (Scott 1987). This form of resistance is informal, subtle, indirect and non-confrontational compared to overt resistance, and includes instances of foot-dragging, petty theft, or sabotage or foot-dragging. Damage need not be material but may also be directed at symbolic elements that hold the alignments of super-ordinates together (e.g. rumours, jokes about super-ordinates). The transformative potential of everyday resistance lies not in the acts themselves but in their nourishment of a “supportive subculture” that carries criticisms of prevailing political conditions; these may feed into other forms of resistance, but may also cultivate existence or the desire for alternatives (Kerkvliet 2009, Malseed 2008, Scott 1985).

The third type is “resistance of the third kind” which in contrast to other forms of resistance, resides *within* rather than outside production and distribution practices (van der Ploeg 2010). Resistance of the third kind is realised by creating or tuning production and distribution practices, for example, machinery, fertilisers, markets, so that they become more autonomous from agri-business and global markets, and governed by alternative values such as reciprocity or solidarity (van den Berg et. al. 2018a, Sabourin 2009, Van der Ploeg 2010). Peasants may do this by buying less and producing more of their own inputs, and/or by establishing their own processing plants, food markets, labour arrangements and/or credit schemes rather than rely on those linked to global markets (van den Berg et. al. 2018a, Pahnke 2015, Schneider and Niederle 2010). These practices may also be expressions of existence, for example when they are constructed in favour of something different. Often, they are both.

The fourth type of resistance is “rightful resistance” (O’Brien and Li 2006; O’Brien 2013). Like overt resistance, rightful resistance is confrontational. However, whereas overt resistance openly challenges governments, rightful resistance engages with governments through negotiation. In doing so rightful resisters strategically employ the ideas and commitments of the powerful to change policies or laws that will serve their own interests (O’Brien and Li 2006). Rightful resisters often use divisions within the state by for example aligning with some government institutions to exert pressure on others. Rightful resistance has been employed both to defend vulnerable groups from threats such as privatisation or legal reforms as well as to advance existence, for example through policies and laws that support alternatives (O’Brien 2013).

## **2. Methodology**

This paper draws on original data from action research carried out in the municipalities of Espera Feliz and Araçuaia, in the Zona da Mata region in Brazil. On the one hand, the research addresses an action defined at a meeting peasant organisations, researchers from the Federal University of Viçosa and the Centre of Alternative Technologies (an NGO working on agroecology), namely: to map how their organisations were performing under the austerity measures of the current government and to explore how new collaborations could strengthen agroecology and their territories. On the other hand, the research contributes to the academic study of how peasant territories as an emancipatory alternatives. This paper is a product of the latter.

At the heart of the academic part lie two focus group meetings, one in each municipality, and 25 interviews. At the focus group meetings peasants and representatives from peasant organisations identified agents that were contributing positively and negatively to their territories and reflected on how these were being affected by the government. In-depth interviews were carried out with these and other agents. Care was taken to select peasants that were both more and less involved in the organisation as well as to ensure a balance in gender and age. This was supplemented with data from participant observation at meetings by peasant organisations and documents. To understand how territories foster emancipation territorial practices were identified and analysed for resistance and existence.

### **3. Peasant movements and the Brazilian state**

Land and improved rights for rural workers has, for a long time, been the central concern for peasant movements and organisations in Brazil (Welch and Sauer 2015, Fernandes et al 2012). The struggle for land and rights was put to a halt when the military seized power in 1964 and peasant organisations were banned<sup>2</sup>. The government's pursued a project of agricultural modernisation and export-led growth and policies were directed at the scaling and mechanisation of large rural estates. As a result many peasants were displaced from their land, because they had to make way for these projects, and many rural workers were replaced by machines (Meszaros 2000).

To support peasants, the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) was founded in 1975 by the left wing of the Catholic Church (Fernandes et al 2012, CPT 1997). During the period of military control only Church based organisations were allowed to work with and organise the poor, enabling these organisation to secretly support the development of peasant movements (Wolford 2010, CPT 1997). At the time considerable parts of the Catholic Church in Brazil had embraced Liberation theology which, in contrast to the spiritual perspective taken by most churches, is based on a rational materialist perspective of society and interprets the teachings of Jesus Christ in terms of liberation from unjust economic, political, and social conditions (Boff and Boff 1986). CPT's support ranged from mediating between peasants and government officials, to providing lawyers to support peasants in disputes and giving advice to peasants on nutrition and farming practices (CPT 1997).

After the restoration to democracy in 1985, peasant movement openly struggled for land and rights for rural workers. Many new peasant movements and organisations arise. One of these organisations is the Brazilian landless workers movement (MST) which occupies abandoned land, demands for its redistribution, and establishes new peasant territories (Wolford 2010, Stedile and Fernandes 1999). Another movement that emerged in the 1980s is that of the Base Ecclesial Communities (CEB), self-organised, autonomous groups that engage in politically oriented readings of the bible with the purpose of improving their own conditions. The CEB are set up by the Catholic Church, but are led by community members. With support from the CPT the CEB provide a basis for the foundation of new local rural workers' unions (STR). During this time until the 1990s governments continue to almost exclusively invest in mechanised, chemical and export-led agriculture. This model comes to be known as the Green Revolution and is later also promoted under family farmers<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG) and some members unions continued to exist under a new leadership assigned by the government. The organisations were used to extend the arm of the state and enhance its control over peasants, sharecroppers and rural workers (Fernandes et al 2012). According to some authors (Welch and Sauer 2015, Houtzager 1998) CONTAG was never fully co-opted; it continued to work on agrarian reform but within the limitations of the state's agrarian capitalist development plan and with peasants whose needs were acknowledged by the regime. CONTAG was at the time, and continues to be, Brazil's largest peasant federation. Although the progressive wing of the Catholic Church supported efforts by CONTAG during the dictatorship it saw the need to found the CPT after witnessing episodes of violent conflict between the military and peasants (CPT 1997).

<sup>3</sup> In 1995 peasant begin to receive some support when the state creates a distinction between "family farms" and "agri-business". This division is institutionalised when two agricultural ministries are established in 2003, the Ministry of Agrarian Development, which supports the former, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and

In the 1990's the emphasis of many peasant movements shifts from land reform and rights for rural workers to a struggle for an alternative rural development paradigm (Favareto 2006). New organisations including the Federation of Workers in Family Farming (FETRAF) and the Movement of Small Farmers (MPA) are founded. These movements begin to criticize neo-liberal development and the Green Revolution and construct alternatives based on principles of sustainable development, solidarity, and social and political democracy (Silva et. al 2014). Peasant movements also form new alignments with environmental NGO's and researchers which leads to the creation of a new discourse of agroecology (Dias, 2004).

In 2003 the Workers Party (PT) rises to power and, under the pressure of peasant and other social movements, new policies and laws that support peasants and other marginalised groups are established. These include programmes that provide credit to access land, funds for rural education, and support for the establishment of institutional food markets (Costa 2017, ANA 2014). This come to a halt in the 2010s when right-wing populist opposition movements, nourished by right-wing Brazilian media empires, rise against the PT government (Viera 2017, Firmino 2016, Pimentel 2014). Opposition culminates in the impeachment of president Dilma Rouseff at the end of 2015. Under the newly inaugurated president Michel Temer austerity measures have been put into place. Policies supporting peasants, indigenous and other minorities have been and are being dismantled while support for agri-business has increased (Cunha 2017).

The history of peasant movements in Brazil is intertwined with the development of peasant territories in Araponga and Espera Feliz. In the 1980s hundreds of CEB groups were established in both Araponga and Espera Feliz. CEB members from both territories later approached the CPT to found an STR in Araponga in 1989 and one in Espera Feliz in 1986. The initial objective of the STR was to protect rural workers and sharecroppers from landlords. In Araponga the focus shifts to land when the Land Conquest Movement arises in 1989, through which landless sharecroppers and rural workers begin to buy land.

In the 1990s both territories become more focused on alternative rural development. Farmer associations, credit cooperatives and local markets are established. Peasants and peasant organisations align with the Centre of Alternative Technologies (CTA) and the Federal University of Viçosa with whom they devise new and re-discover existing agroecological farming practices. The STR from both municipalities affiliate to large peasant federations, FETRAF and FETAEMG respectively, that pressures the government for supportive policies and leads to the establishment of land credit programmes, institutional markets, farmers school in Araponga and Espera Feliz. With the new government these policies are being dismantled.

### ***5.1 Overt resistance***

When the Michel Temer government seized power 2016 after the impeachment of Worker Party's Dilma Rouseff a wave of protests took place in Brazil. The most visible protests were those against social welfare and labour reforms (PEC 287). One of changes proposed by PEC 287 is a reform of the pension system. The new law abolishes the right to pension after 35 years of work for men and 30 years for women and sets a minimum pension age at 65 years old for both men and women. It also requires peasants to pay an extra monthly contribution for each family member next to the income taxes and other taxes from which pensions used to be funded. Peasant movements argue that this is unfair because they are already paying more to the government than that they get back. They also argue that peasants and workers will be hit hardest by these reforms because they start working at an

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Food, which supports the latter. Family farms however only received 15 to 20% of the funding granted to agribusinesses and the Ministry of Agrarian Development favoured a one sided, Green Revolution model for smallholder farmers (Sabourin 2007).

early age and because their professions demands heavy labour. Peasant women who have a double workload, by working on the farm and at home, will be hit even harder.

“Reform of the pension system is bringing us back to slavery. For me, there is no other word. It will have negative consequences, if we need to contribute on a monthly basis to social security. Anyone who lives from agriculture knows that you don't have a monthly income. Basically our income is annual when the harvest comes.” Member of Peasant Youth Group in Araponga

Peasants' organisations, federations and confederations, including the FETRAF, FETAEMG, MST, CONTAG and CONTRAF, as well as other workers organisations and social movements, aligned to mobilise people and organise protests against PEC 287. Peasants and peasant organisations in Araponga and in Espera Feliz were involved in some of these protests, including a large protest in Brasilia in December 2016 and the first nationwide general strike, since 23 years, in June 2017.

“We were very moved, it was our first vote. We voted for President Dilma then a little later they stole our vote. He took our vote. So we said: ‘we have to do something’. The fire was burning in ours veins: ‘let's go to the street and make a demonstration’. The first thing we did was go together to Brasilia.” Member of Peasant Youth Group in Araponga

Another large anti PEC 287 demonstration was the “For the life of Women! Against Welfare and Labour Reforms” demonstration in Belo Horizonte on women's day in March 2017. The demonstration was not only a *fight against* PEC287 and the reform's disproportionate impact on women. Women also mobilised because the current government was taking them backwards in what they accomplished in their *fight for* existence within the state, including rights and recognition for their work.

“You have to try to change things. The fact that we are woman doesn't mean that we don't have rights. So we are defending our rights.” Participant of the “For the life of Women!” demonstration from Espera Feliz

“With the entrance of this new government, instead of going forward we are going backwards.” Representative STR Espera Feliz

This also applies to other anti PEC 287 demonstrations which also showed discontent that the new government was taking peasants backwards in their struggle for existence. Overt opposition to PEC 287 was also organised in the near vicinity of Espera Feliz and Araponga when on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2017, youth and other peasant organisations in Araponga, Espera Feliz and neighbouring municipalities blocked two highways, the BR116 and the BR265.

Overt resistance was not only organised against PEC 287 but also against other reforms. One of these was the occupation of the Education Department of the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV) on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2017. Students, including peasants from Araponga and Espera Feliz, and university staff protested against severe budget cuts in the “Education for and by the Countryside” programme (Barbosa 2017) as well as against “Education without party” reforms. The former is a new university programme on innovative teaching methods that value peasants' experiential knowledge and practices using the pedagogy of alternation. “Education without a party” is law that aims to limit political discussions at high schools, by for example banning subjects such as philosophy. Peasants' main concern with the law and budget cuts is one of existence: that they will restricts peasants freedom of expression and devalue peasants' knowledge.

“With these changes in secondary education, instead of changes to improve, they are creating a type of education in which you have no voice, you are the receiver of what the teacher teaches.” Student of Licena from Espera Feliz

Next to a struggle *for* existence and *against* reforms, protests were also a site in which new alignments for existence and resistance were cultivated or strengthened:

“At the manifestations we are all united. We get to know each other, other groups.”  
Member of the Raizes da Mata women’s group in Espera Feliz

## 5.2 Everyday resistance

Perhaps the most important forms of everyday resistance in Araponga and Espera Feliz is found in the reflection groups of the Base Ecclesial Communities (CEB). The CEB emerged in the 1980s when neighbouring farmers, sharecroppers and rural workers in several communities in Araponga and Espera Feliz aligned to pray, sing and reflect upon their daily lives using Liberation Theology. During these meetings members began to criticise the idea of sharecropping: they had to do all the work while receiving less than half of the harvest, were often abused by landlords, were forced to work also when it was raining or when they were sick, had little choice over what, when and how to plant. While the idea of sharecropping was first seen as something natural they were now seen as unjust.

“In a way she [the CEB] awakens the oppressed.” Representative STR Araponga

This led peasants in Araponga and Espera Feliz to align in what became the Rural Workers Unions (STR), which offered legal protection to sharecroppers and rural workers from landlords.

In Araponga peasants also came to see the distribution of land as unjust. Land ownership would moreover allow them to be completely free from landlords. These ideas led to the emergence of the Land Conquest Movement (see section ‘resistance of the third kind’).

“The necessity arose for us to discover a way to distribute land. The problem was that we were poor, we didn’t have any money. [...] We had to think of a different strategy to conquer land.”  
Representative STR Araponga

The CEB cultivated not only resistance but also existence. The Arapongan Land Acquisition Movement arose not only in opposition to the landlord-sharecropping arrangement but also out of peasants’ desire for a different life; a life where peasants could decide when, what and how to farm themselves (Botelho et. al 2016).

Later, meetings at the CEB led peasants to challenge dominant, and form ideas about alternative, market, education and farming practices. Next to these practices, new organisations arose from CEB meetings.

“The union is CEB, the CTA is CEB, the EFA is CEB. All these organizations were born from her. She is not an institution [...] she pushed people to think and pushed people to create these institutions. Let’s create these institutions so you have the strength to fight. She awakened the people. [...] She made the movement. She appeared first.” Coordinator Arapongan Land Conquest Movement

Next to the reflection groups themselves, the CEB also came to mean what peasants in Araponga refer to as “life”, affinities between agents that nourish existence.

“She [the CEBs] is the mother because she is patient with you, she gives you warmth, she feeds you, she takes care of you. The father [which is the union] gives direction, he imposes order. But the CEBs is very caring. [...] She is a force that is more internal in people, that says: go, you can do it. You can do it, go. [...]” Coordinator Arapongan land acquisition movement

“She doesn’t have a church. She doesn’t. She was initiated by the Catholic Church, but there are also people from various Evangelical churches and even people without one. The CEB doesn’t

have this thing of being Catholic or Christian. She has an awakening role.” Representative STR Espera Feliz

Despite its achievements, the number of CEB groups has diminished in both municipalities. In the 1980s Espera Feliz counted over 400 reflection groups, in 2017 there were 267. The activity of groups has also diminished. According to representatives of the STR in Araponga and Espera Feliz reasons for this include: the rejection of Liberation Theology by the Vatican, a shift in activity to more formal peasant organisations, increased dependency on public policies and division within the CEB on issues of agro-toxin use. However, with the current government in power farmers’ unions in both Araponga and Espera Feliz have re-directed their hopes and efforts in the CEB.

“[Nowadays] You hardly see the CEBs in Araponga. But when our organisations weaken she returns. She is the mother that lets her children go to the city, let’s them fall on their face and then picks them up again.” Coordinator Araongan Land Conquest Movement

“The CEBs are returning and becoming stronger because with the government people came to themselves, to reality. Because this is what happened: everything was very good and everyone was in themselves, doing their own thing. The situation changed and everyone opened their eyes [...]. Now it is like this: or we unite or everything is over. Because the struggle is big. The struggle is huge.” Representative STR Espera Feliz

Next to the CEB, everyday resistance is present in self-organised women groups, of which various exist in Espera Feliz. At these meetings women challenged the idea that the use of pesticides is necessary to have a decent income and life. Instead, pesticides came to be seen as damaging to their environment and health and tied to a system that exploits farmers. Women also challenged the idea that coffee production is a male domain, as it significantly relies on the labour of their wives and children.

Like the CEB, the women groups also nourish existence. They do this by organising farm visits, recipe exchanges, workshops, food tastings, meetings and conversations. At these meeting new ideas formed and new practices emerge around for example: forgotten plants, vegetable garden, handicrafts, medicinal plants and ecological manicure. They also stimulate women to express themselves.

“Here we learn many things, to make soaps, several things. The self-esteem of the woman improves. When I came in here, I had no courage to speak to people. I did not have the guts to pick up things and nowadays I am the secretary of the group. So I think, the group of women help us a lot to raise self-esteem.” Member of the Raizes da Terra women group, Espera Feliz.

Everyday existence and resistance were sometimes found to feed into resistance of the third kind. The government austerity measures for instance have motivated women groups to work on becoming more self-sufficient in terms of food, medications and so on (see section on ‘resistance of the third kind’). Everyday resistance and existence were also found to feed into rightful and overt resistance as women were stimulated to join demonstrations, the board or working groups of the STR and other peasant and women organisations.

### **5.3 Resistance of the third kind**

Resistance of the third kind can be found in several farming practices, many of which were constructed in response to the Green Revolution. Under the Green Revolution peasants were pressured to use chemical fertilisers, specialise in the production of coffee and produce in monocrops. The production of food crops was discouraged. It was said that food crops could better be bought in the supermarket. To earn an income peasants had to produce enough coffee that could at least pay back investments they had made in farm inputs and their own food. However the price of chemical

fertilisers and food in the supermarkets was increasing. Green Revolution practices were moreover causing land degradation which led to yield declines. This was putting a lot of pressure on farmers.

“I was so busy with producing coffee that I could not take care of my mother when she became sick”. Peasant in Araponga.

Peasants in Araponga and Espera Feliz aligned with the CTA, the STR and the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV) to construct agroecological practices which reduced farm dependency on input markets. In Araponga this led to the development of coffee agroforests. In these agroforests alignments are made between coffee and trees that capture nutrients that are not available to the coffee. Examples are: mycorrhiza hosting trees that can adsorb phosphorus that is tightly bound to the soil, leguminous trees that can capture nitrogen from the air and deep rooting trees that can take up nutrients at great depths. To stimulate the mineralisation of these nutrients, so that they become available when the coffee needs them, practices were devised to increase the presence of micro-organisms. Practices were also developed to protect and regenerate soils. Next to planting trees these include green manuring, cover cropping and selective weeding.

These and other agroecological practices also contributed to the strengthening of a socio-material base: a more fertile soil, regeneration of water springs and the discovery of a large variety of plants, that allowed peasants to experiment with and construct new practices. As a result they were able to grow a larger variety of crops, keep more animals and devise several productive combinations of trees, crops and animals.

Resistance of the third kind was also found in farming practices that reduce peasants dependency on food markets. This includes the production of own foods. Farmers in Araponga and Espera Feliz began to produce (more) beans, maize, cassava, potatoes and a large variety of vegetables and fruits. Many farms also keep chickens and pigs for own consumption. Trees were also planted in the agroforests for their fruits and wood. Some of these foods are processed. Cassava and maize are for instance processed into flour, pig fat and avocados into soap, sugarcane into sugar, milk into cheese and fruits into jams and juices.

These and other agroecological practices were not only employed to reduce dependency on commodity markets but also for existence. Many peasants wanted create a type of farming that allows them to live and work according to different values than those promoted by the Green Revolution. They wanted more freedom to decide when and how to work, to farm with more respect for nature and for their farm to be a pleasant and healthy environment for their family to live and work in. Foods were not only grown to avoid the supermarket but also because peasants valued the taste of their own varieties. Some trees were kept because they had beautiful flowers or because they offered shade to peasants when working in the field. Some products such as cheese were produced to be given as gifts. Sugarcane was produced to share with fellow farmers that help with the harvest.

Resistance of the third kind was found not only in farming practices but also in practices through which farmers acquire land and credit for land. The Land Conquest Movement, for example, functions as an alternative land and credit market in Araponga (Campos 2014). Strict conditions and high interest rates make it unfavourable for peasant to acquire credit from banks and land is often expensive and sold in large tracts. With the Land Acquisition Movement peasants form groups, pool their financial resources and collectively buy land. To ensure that each peasant has enough money to pay for their share of land the movement also facilitates the establishment of informal lending arrangements through which peasants can borrow money from fellow group members or from other community members (often CEB colleagues, see section on ‘everyday resistance’). The Land Conquest Movement also tries to ensure that land that peasants want to sell is directed to other peasants, so that land remains within the peasant territorial assemblage.

“With the land acquisition movement the people themselves do everything. They pay for the land, they build their own house, plant their fields. People do everything with their own

resources. Sometimes they even have to work outside to sustain themselves. But in between, he was taking care of his own land.” *Coordinator Arapongan Land Acquisition Movement*

The land acquisition movement is also an expression of existence. While it enables peasants to access credit out of, and keeps land from entering, neo-liberal markets, the movement is also seen as a project to create an agriculture that is based on values that respect the land, animals and neighbours. These values are also reflected in the “ten commandments of land conquest” drafted in 1995, which contrary to what the name suggests are not rules but a set of principles such as “recover and preserve the soil”, “use leguminous species”, “visit your neighbours farm”, “recover and preserve the soil”, “take care of animals” (CTA-ZM 2002:26).

Resistance of the third kind was also found in alternative food markets that makes peasants less dependent on the coffee market and that allows them sell more directly to consumers. In both Espera Feliz and Araponga peasants founded a cooperative through which they run a farmers’ shop and an open farmers’ market. The shop and the open market sell fruits, vegetables, cassava, coffee, beans, maize, maize flower, cassava flower, sugar, honey, syrup and other products directly to consumers.

“When you are able to get things directly from producer to consumer, both gain. Because you can sell for more while the consumer pays less. Unfortunately it is usually the middlemen that take the largest share.” Peasant in Araponga

To support these markets the cooperative in Espera Feliz has established processing plants that for example grind coffee into powder and package maize flower and beans. Next to selling within the municipality, the cooperatives in Araponga and Espera Feliz have aligned with the CTA and the UFV to establish the Rede Raizes da Mata, a network that links farmer cooperatives to open markets and shops in Viçosa. The cooperative in Espera Feliz has also aligned with consumer cooperatives in the major cities of Brasília, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte and São Paulo. Next to consumer markets the cooperatives in Araponga and Espera Feliz have also created an institutional market through which they provide food for the school lunches. This is made possible by the instruction of a government law (see chapter rightful resistance).

#### 5.4 Rightful resistance

Rightful resistance is largely found in practices through which peasants negotiate for new and claim existing government policies and laws. Through their involvement in large peasant federations FETAEMG and FETRAF, the STR of Araponga and Espera Feliz were able to negotiate for several policies and laws that support peasants.

“It was because of the struggle by movements, not only by the one in Espera Feliz, that we conquered public policies to access to land, access markets and access dignified housing. It was the result of the struggle by social movements.” Representative STR Espera Feliz

One of these policies is the Land Credit Policy (Credito Fundiario) which provides loans for farmers to buy land at low interest rates. Later, the Housing Policy (Politica de Habilitação) was also established which provides finance for farmers to build a house on the purchased land. The STR in both municipalities mediated access to these policies. However, rightful resistance did not end once these policies were established. The STR had to make claims on them which often involved going through large bureaucratic hurdles and pressuring government representatives in Belo Horizonte or Brasília. Peasants were also required to have a whole range of documents including land titles, an identity card and a producers card, which they often didn’t have.

With the impeachment of president Dilma Rouseff the land credit and housing policies were frozen until further notice. The STR in both municipalities are currently negotiating with government

officials to accept the applications for credit that were made before the policy was frozen.

“We are fighting nine years to get a proposal for the Land Policy approved to settle 38 families. So we have the dreams of 38 families in our hands. We have other pieces of land that we are trying to get for farmers that are pending for two years, four years. And we have a huge waiting list for people that want to have a little house from the programme.” representative farmers’ union Espera Feliz

Peasants have little hope that the policies will continue. Nevertheless peasant territories have been able to acquire a lot of land as a result of them. In Espera Feliz 100 families acquired land and 80 people a house. They also establishment a new settlement: Assentamento Padre J3sus. In Araponga land acquisition continues through the land conquest movement (see section on ‘resistance of the third kind’):

“The land conquest movement slowed down after the Land Credit Policy [...] But today people are going back to the old model [the Land Conquest Movement].” Coordinator Land Conquest Movement Araponga

Rightful resistance can also be found in the Food Acquisition Programme (PAA). The PAA finances the acquisition of food stocks for social welfare organisations. In Araponga and Espera Feliz the programme is coordinated and mediated by peasant cooperatives. Like with the Land Credit Policy the PAA faces continuous bureaucratic hurdles. These include getting proposals approved, getting all institutions registered for the programme, negotiating with individual farmers the amounts they will deliver and make sales reports of every delivery. According to a farmer representative in Espera Feliz, just making the report is almost a day’s work. The food acquisition programme has also been frozen. However, peasant cooperatives in Araponga and Espera Feliz are confident that what they build (through resistance of the third kind) will stay.

“We established other markets. We did not only focus on public policies. [...] Because if the public policy stops, the doors would shut. [...] These markets are not affected by government. They give the cooperative independence.

Rightful resistance is also found in the National School Feeding Programme (PNAE). PNAE is a law dictating that at least 30% of the ingredients in school meals from public schools should be produced by family farms. Like with the PAA, the peasant cooperatives coordinate this programme by maintaining contact with the different schools and farmers and synchronising supply and demand for a wide range of foods. Unlike the other conquests, PNAE is a law that is not easily removed and it is currently still in place. By allowing engagement in feeds into resistance of the third kind (see section on ‘resistance of the third kind’)

Rightful resistance is also present in the continuous claims that the peasant high school EFA-Puris has to make to access the Bolsa Aluni, the Fund for Rural Education and other subsidies upon which the school depends. Subsidies from the Fund for Rural Education have been cut by 50% between 2015 and 2017 and are planned to be cut by another 86,1% in 2018 (Intini, 2017). EFA-Puris has to apply for funding every year and on several occasions funds were not transferred, resulting in time consuming negotiations with government officials. In a few cases negotiations failed and the school resorted to more overt forms of resistance, including a protest in Belo Horizonte and a petition, to get their money.

The policies that peasant movements have negotiated for, and made claims on, are also expressions of existence. Land is not only acquired for the sake of ownership it is also “a dream”, a basis to establish a different way of farming and a different way of life.

“Acquiring land is not acquiring land to simply have land. It is much more social. Because with land the family will live better, will be able to produce without using pesticides. Sometimes

farmers don't have this independence where they live. Sometimes they are obliged to do things they are told to do because they don't own the land." Representative farmers' union Espera Feliz

"A farmer without land is like a bird without wings. It knows that it cannot fly." Representative Farmers Union Araponga

Like land the markets created through the PAA and PNAE also support farmers in their struggle for a different type of life and farming, by for instance enabling them to combine farm diversification with sales, . T

Similarly, the EFA-Puris school seeks not only to offer access to education but also to construct a different type of education; one that values peasants' knowledge, experiences and practices. This is done through farm excursions, talks by farmers, reflections on the work on their own farms, applications of the curriculum to farm practices (e.g. making soap during chemistry lessons and making EM mixtures during biology). Much of the material teaches students how to become less dependent on external knowledge and farm inputs thereby feeding into resistance of the third kind. The school also teaches the history of their territory and its people, many of who are descents from an Indigenous group called the Puri.

"We teach the students to love the land. That's a Puri thing. The Puri for us has two meanings, do you know? Love for the land and fight for freedom. So you are free, you walk with your own legs, walk with your head up. You will not be anyone's employee." Coordinator Rural High School Araponga

Overall, government austerity measures has had large impacts on the practices and prospects of rightful resistance. However, the STR in Araponga and Espera Feliz are not worried that this will have a lot of impact on their territories.

"There is a lot of work that we do that started before this government. What is happening? We notice that with the dismantling and by knowing how this government is, makes us go back to how it was before. How was it before? The CEBs, the base work." Representative farmers' union Espera Feliz

"More and more people are visiting us at the union. [...] The persecution of the government is awakening the memory of the people. The people are waking up, and feel the need to unite and organise themselves." Representative farmers union Araponga

Instead, they trust that most territorial practices will continue to exist and that new forms of resistance and existence will arise from the territorial assemblage.

## 6. Discussion

This article shows that different forms of resistance have emerged from the peasant territorial assemblage which defend the territorial assemblage in different ways. Overt resistance was found in protests against policy reforms. Everyday resistance occurred in informal gatherings where dominant discourses on the position of landlords, pesticides, and mono-cropping were challenged. Resistance of the third was found in the construction of better soils, in the forging of productive alignments between coffee, trees and micro-organisms and in the construction of peasants' own land, credit and food markets. Rightful resistance was found in negotiations for, and claims to, policies that allow peasants to acquire credit to purchase land, build institutional markets, and run a peasants' high school. These different forms of resistance fed one another. Everyday resistance for instance often developed into rightful resistance or resistance of the third kind. Together these forms of resistance defended peasants from neo-liberal agents and ideas and the austerity measures from the state.

Territorial practices were not only built in a *fight against* neo-liberalism, many were also born out of a *fight for* existence. Existence was found in alternative farming, education, innovation and market practices. Existence and resistance were not mutually exclusive but were found to be linked to each other in different ways. Protests that *fought against* government reforms were part of a larger *struggle for*. They did not only take place because of the threat they held to peasant livelihoods but also because the new government represented a step back in women's and peasants' longer struggle for existence within the state. The CEB and other informal groups harboured not only everyday resistance but also existence by fostering alignments around new ideas and alternative practices. Resistance of the third kind was often built within existence practices including agroecological farming practices and in alternative land, credit and food markets.

What binds different forms of resistance to existence is that ultimately they all protect, enable or advance a different way of life. A life in which peasants have more freedom to decide what they want to do, where they can work in a more respectful way with nature, where their own resources, day to day experiences and histories are valued and where they can work together on basis of cooperation, trust and friendship.

Combined, the notions of resistance and existence help understand how emancipation can be fostered. They show that emancipation resides not only in rights and the organisation of production but also *within* practices of production and distribution and in the creation of local discourses. The *freedom from* external threats was not only protected through demonstrations against less favourable pension rights. It was also realised by challenging neo-liberal ideas that were inserted in everyday practices and by altering production systems so that they become less dependent on neo-liberal markets. The *freedom to* be and act differently was realised by building alternative practices that allowed or supported them to live in a different way, farm in a different way and work together in a different way. Emancipation was also realised by building socio-material bases that allow for the construction of new practices. One of these bases was produced by building a fertile soil, increasing the amount of water held on the farm and by planting a wide range of trees and other organisms. New agro-ecological farming practices emerged from this base. Another base was produced through peasants' ongoing work at the unions, cooperatives and other formal and informal peasant organisations. This base harbours skills and capacities that allowed peasants to claim particular policies and put them to work. Both of these bases relied, in part, on a base of affinities that peasants and other agents have with respect to one another. This base is produced by working together and in participating in informal groups, demonstrations, and other meetings where peasants feel free to express themselves and align with others. At these gatherings new ideas and values come to be articulated that may lead to the construction of new practices, or new forms of resistance or existence.

## **Conclusion**

Peasant territorial assemblages in Araponga and Espera Feliz adapted to changing political conditions by shifting between different forms of resistance and existence. Under the Workers Party government many peasant movements directed their efforts at rightful resistance through which they negotiated for new policies and laws. This allowed them to build new territorial practices and expand their territorial bases. When the Workers' Party president Dilma Rouseff was impeached and austerity reforms were put in place, efforts shifted to more overt forms of resistance aimed at inhibiting these reforms. At the same time these protests also continuously questioned the legitimacy of the new government. Despite the dismantling of many policies that supported peasants, rightful resistance efforts were not in vain as many territorial practices were to some degree autonomous from government and continue to exist today. Now new forms of resistance and existence are beginning to emerge from the territorial bases. This article shows that for national and transnational peasant movements to effectively contribute to emancipation they need to be grounded in peasant territorial assemblages. The case of Araponga and Espera Feliz show that policies and laws are not enough to increase emancipation. Peasant territorial agents, such as peasant unions and cooperatives, are necessary to claim and cash out on these policies and to ensure that newly created laws are protected and enforced. Peasant territorial assemblages also feed peasant movements with financial resources, people and ideas needed for the

movement to survive. This is especially important when governments turn against peasant movements. Peasant territorial assemblages also keep peasant movements connected to on-the-ground problems, aspirations and potentialities through the many linkages that exist between territorial practices and formal peasant organisations. This allows movements to demand and negotiate for policies and laws that contribute to the actual emancipation of peasants and the strengthening of their territorial practices.

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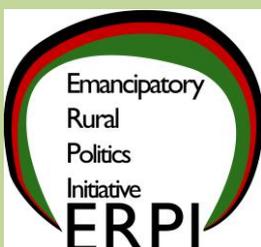
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