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Peasant Movements and Agrarian Change: Venezuela and Brazil compared

Movimientos Campesinos y Transición Agraria: Venezuela comparada con Brasil

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Table of Contents

List of illustrations

Figures

Tables

Acronyms

AD	Acción Democrática, Democratic Action)
BANDAGRO	Banco Desarrollo Agropecuario SA, the Bank for Agricultural Development
CAN	Comisión Agrícola Nacional, National Agricultural Commission)
CANEZ	Coordinadora Agraria Nacional Ezequiel Zamora, Ezequiel Zamora National Agrarian Coordinator
CBE	Comunidades Eclesiais de Base, Ecclesiastical Base Communities
CONCRAB	Confederação das Cooperativas de Reforma Agrária do Brasil, Confederation of Agrarian Reform Cooperatives of Brazil
CONLUTA	Coordenação Nacional de Lutas, National Coordination of Struggles
CONTAG	Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura, National Confederation of Agricultural Workers
COPEI	Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente, Political Electoral Independent Organization Committee
CPT	Comité Pastoral do Terra, Pastoral Land Commission
CUT	Central Única dos Trabalhadores, Unified Workers' Central
CVA	Venezuelan Agrarian Corporation, Corporacion Agraria de Venezuela
FALN	Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional, Armed Forces of National Liberation
FCRSB	Revolutionary Campesino Front Simon Bolívar, the Simon Bolívar Revolutionary Peasant Front (Frente Campesino Revolucionario Simon Bolívar)
FCV	Federación Campesina Venezolana, Peasant Federation of Venezuela
FEDEAGRO	The National Confederation of Associations of Agricultural Producers (Confederación Nacional de Asociaciones de Productores Agropecuarios)
Fedecámaras	Federación de Cámaras y Asociaciones de Comercio y Producción de Venezuela, The Venezuelan Federation of Chambers of Commerce
FNCSB	Frente Nacional Comunal Simon Bolívar, National Communal Front Simon Bolívar
INCRA	Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária, The National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform)
INTI	Instituto Nacional de Tierras, National Land Institute
MASTER	Movimento dos Agricultores Sem Terra, Landless Farmers' Movement
MIR	Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria, Movement of the Revolutionary Left

MLAR	Market-led agrarian reform
MST	Movimiento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, Landless Workers Movement
MVR	Movimiento por la Quinta República, the Fifth Republic Movement
NDP	Partido Nacional Democratica, National Democratic Party
Orve	Organización Revolucionaria Venezolana, Venezuelan Revolutionary Organization
PSDB	Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira, Brazilian Social Democracy Party
PSOL	Partido Socialismo e Liberdade, Socialism and Liberty Party
PSUV	Partido Unido Socialista de Venezuela, United Socialist Party of Venezuela
PT	Partido Trabalhadores, Worker's Party
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Firma

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Abstract

This thesis situates the emergence of the National Peasant Front Ezequiel Zamora (FNCEZ), the most active of the Venezuelan peasant movements, with respect to modern Venezuelan agrarian history, Venezuelan agrarian class structure, and modern Venezuelan political history. Using a framework derived from a medley of Erik Wolf, Sidney Tarrow, Mark Lichbach, James Scott, Thomas Wickham-Crowley, Deborah Bryceson, Farshad Araghi, and Simon Critchley, I argue that failed peasant revolts, ineffective agrarian reforms, and the concentration of the peasantry into the cities set the stage for a state-reliant capitalist farming industry with an increasing percentage of peasants mired in the morass of semi-proletarianization. In turn, the deepening penetration of neo-liberal capitalism in the countryside made the peasantry squirm and writhe under increasingly intolerable impositions. The political opening of the Chávez government, which arose from and responded to the penetration of neo-liberalism into the Venezuelan political economy, gave them the political opportunity to revolt. Freedom from state repression gave peasants an impetus. The election of Chávez disrupted the miasma of power that had symbolically held the rural people in check. The memory of previous land struggles helped solidify their beliefs, lending them a language marinated in history with which to create a belief-system. Holdovers from previous guerrilla movements and peasant students educated in Venezuelan universities helped harden their ideology. And their relationships with the MST and la Via Campesina tutored them in autonomy.

Likewise, the emergence of the MST is traceable, first, to the initial penetration of capitalism into the countryside in the 1960s. State-led agricultural modernization and mechanization pushed peasants from the countryside, structurally dislocating them and, as in the Venezuelan case, turned peasants into semi-proletarians. The even-more-onerous neo-liberalization of the countryside went hand-in-hand with a political opening, as the repressive power of the military dictatorship waned, giving them political opportunity. Alliances with the Church gave the MST resources. Liberation theology, mistica, and the memory of earlier struggles for land, shape their ideology. The MST's contours of dissent over the subsequent years in large part can be traced to the opportunities available to it. But to understand the movement, again, I needed to unpack this ideology. This unpacking of the interlacing between structure, context, tactics, and ideology comprises the bulk of this thesis.

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Introduction

My research into Venezuela began in January 2006, during a fortuitous language-learning stay in Caracas that coincided with the World Social Forum. It was a time when the left wing of Chavismo was pushing hard, and Venezuelan social mobilization was deepening. The economy was in the midst of an oil-boom. But there was so much poverty. Great swathes of the city were off-limits to me. My host family cautioned me about wandering around their neighborhood, which straddled the middle-class and upper class divide, after dark. But other neighborhoods of the city glittered—shot through with golf courses and *haciendas* adorned with citrus and palm trees. After that trip, I was hooked, paying close attention to political and economic developments in Venezuela, trying to understand social change in a befuddling petro-state, with cities marred by slums, offset by glistening glass-sheathed high-rises. I wanted to understand how oil had distorted economic development in Venezuela, how so much commodity wealth failed to transmute into much human development for Venezuela's people.

When I started graduate school at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences—Ecuador, one of my first lessons was the centrality of land issues to broader development issues, and the direct relationship of both to political and economic power, particularly within the global South. I tried to use this knowledge to analyze Venezuela's ongoing agrarian reform for my first seminar paper. But the analysis was superficial, inadequate—nearly impressionistic. Adducing what was going on there was difficult, far more difficult than interpreting the information encyclopedic Google searches could provide. I needed to know far more in order to understand why Venezuelan society was structured as it was, why it produced so little food, and why its people were clustered in over-cluttered metropolises, while its countryside was fallow and comparatively unsettled. Oil played a part, but I needed to know the intricate dynamics of how oil had pushed and pulled the trajectory of Venezuela history. And I needed to try to put the social dynamics in comparative perspective. I decided to compare Venezuela to Brazil.

So first, I went to Venezuela and identified the key rural movement responsible for quickening agrarian social change: the Frente Nacional Campesino Ezequiel Zamora (National Peasant Front Ezequiel Zamora/FNCEZ). Then I conducted interviews, went to the archives, read every single plausibly relevant secondary source I could locate, went through online self-descriptions of the movement, movement histories, and sifted through every piece of documentation, relying where

possible on primary evidence and interviews, where not on trustable syntheses. There were problems getting interviews—unknown Caucasian graduate students were not precisely trusted in 2008 Venezuela, and campesino organizers don't always get cell-phone reception in rural Venezuela. Still, I thought I basically had my story straight: how a peasant movement arose in response to neo-liberal fragmentation of the countryside, suddenly freed from the fear of incipient repression because they had voted Hugo Chávez, a leftist from Barinas, from rural Venezuela, into the presidential office.

Then I traveled to Brazil, polished my Portuguese, and went to the headquarters of the Movimento Sem Terra, the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), in São Paulo and Porto Alegre, and talked to militants there, to get a better sense of the MST's ideology and its organization. I read about broader Brazilian political economy, its immense agro-industrial complex, and went through as much of the voluminous secondary literature on the MST as I felt I needed to in order to have a coherent account of the MST's emergence. My research more-or-less completed, I realized I needed to tie my accounts of both the MST's emergence in Brazil and the FNCEZ's emergence in Venezuela to broader trends within the global food production system and development in the global South. I also used the canonical works of peasant sociology to better understand what limits the movements faced, and how they might surpass them, always looking to understand: to what extent were their paths, their visions, over-determined by broader structures of power and their ability to repress? To what extent could they move beyond such structures? To what extent are they "revolutionary"? And to what extent was that question—at least, phrased using that evocative-but-not-necessarily-meaningful-term—even helpful in terms of assessing the movements' prospects for contributing to social change and changing the lives of the people that compose them?

The thesis is structured as follows.

Chapter 1 provides a theoretical discussion of rural development and its role in economic development in the underdeveloped world. I also discuss the ongoing centrality of agriculture to the global economic structure, and ongoing trends within world agricultural production. I move on to a discussion of peasant movements—who they are composed of, who rebels, why they rebel, how they become powerful, the limits of such power, and how they interact with states, friendly or otherwise. I also take up the critical issue of repression. Finally, I link that to a

discussion of revolution, and what it means for a movement to be revolutionary, and discuss how this judgment must include both an assessment of the movement itself as well as the broader field of power within which it maneuvers.

Chapter 2 presents a discussion of Venezuelan agrarian history and an analysis of Venezuelan state policies and agrarian structure. I canvass the development of Venezuelan agriculture from the mid-1800s through the present, braiding in episodic peasant revolts, the effects of various top-down agrarian reforms, guerrilla mobilization, clientelism within the Venezuelan peasantry, state policies to support or stymie Venezuelan agricultural development, and the like, extending through an analysis of why and how Venezuela erupted in revolt in 1989. I then situate the FNCEZ with respect to both that 1989 political opening and the 1997 election of Hugo Chávez, discuss its ideology, its economic policies, and its relation to the state, and then sketch out what effects this mobilization has indirectly had on Venezuelan food production.

Chapter 3 offers a similar treatment of the Brazilian countryside, although at considerably less length, focusing more specifically on the confluence of several factors that led directly to the emergence of the MST: the way that the state first helped capitalist productive relations to saturate the countryside, but then abruptly re-jiggered that support, cutting out state subsidies in some industries, reforming them in others, thereby increasing the prevalence of monoculture industrial agriculture throughout the Brazilian countryside. But alongside this transition, there was a controlled democratic opening. The dictatorship fell. Land occupations took place; one of the generals' last major development projects, the Itapúa Dam, displaced thousands of campesinos in southern Brazil, precipitating the emergence of the MST, which I trace through various administrations. I analyze its occupations, its encampments, its educational institutions, its ideology, and its relationships with the state.

Chapter 4 is explicitly comparative. It begins with an outline of the world agricultural crisis, or the crisis of the world's agricultural people, since gross production—of commodities, not healthy people—is not down. It then links that crisis to global neo-liberalism and incorporates some considerations on the climate crisis. I then focus in on how the agrarian crisis manifests itself in Brazil and Venezuela, both through escalating urban population transfer and mounting rural immiseration. In turn, I discuss how the FNCEZ and the MST are fighting back—their economics, their ecological visions, their political tactics and strategies, how they interface with

strategic allies, and how they relate to the state. I also explore counter-factuals: what could the MST have done differently? When? How? What of the FNCEZ and the allied government of Chávez? I also discuss the effects MST and government-FNCEZ policies have had, and analyze these movements' visions for social change. I also try to discuss the extent to which the FNCEZ and the MST break with capitalist productive relations, or at least mediate their exposure to the market—the extent to which they are revolutionary. I move on to how they confirm or negate some of my theoretical propositions, and in turn offer my judgment. It's a warm one.

Finally, a note on the presentation, which will correctly appear asymmetrical. I devote considerably more space to an interpretive history of the Venezuelan countryside and its interaction with Venezuelan accumulation because this history is so unknown. The section on the history of the Brazilian *campo* will appear threadbare by comparison, if of some relief to the reader, asleep at graphs guessing at the relative proportion of minifundia plots in Táchira and Barinas in 1963 and 1993. There are good reasons for this. For one, it seemed worthwhile to offer extensive background on the history of the Venezuelan countryside for its own sake. This history is almost untreated in contemporary American social science. Literature searches in English for histories of the Venezuelan countryside return extremely little information.

There's another reason for the flood of information on Venezuelan agrarian history. Some of the remarks about the origin of the FNCEZ are speculative. I was unable to carry out a proper sampling or to get the kind of interviews necessary to persuasively account for the origins of the FNCEZ, or to trace the social origins in specific regions to the precise conditions—social, political, economic, cultural—that contributed to this efflorescence of peasant mobilization. So threads that seem oddly juxtaposed in the interpretive history of the Venezuelan countryside will make considerably more sense when the reader arrives at the part of the paper treating the FNCEZ. Furthermore, memories of the alliance of the Federación Campesina Venezolana (Venezuelan Peasant Federation/FCV) with AD probably contribute to the FNCEZ's autonomous radicalism, as does the pedagogical example of the MST. So the process by which the FCV became institutionalized, and its inability to exert any real redistributive pressure on the Venezuelan agrarian class structure, also was worthwhile to highlight, as does the history of Venezuelan guerilla movements, the Siamese twin of the FCV's moderation, the dual social forebears of Venezuela's modern rural dynamic.

As for Brazil, I pay a lot less attention to the time pre-dating the emergence of the MST because the factors that led it to emerge and the contours of the Brazilian countryside in the years leading up to the MST's foundation are so clear in the social science literature that extensive attention seemed misguided, if not scholastic. Anyone looking hard for thorough interpretive accounts of Brazilian agrarian history could look to more reputable and more thorough sources than this document. Conversely, considerably more attention is paid to the shape, contours, nuances, and textures of the MST, which has been the target of several worthwhile PhD theses in English, as well as a bevy of journal articles in English, with the hope of looking at it from two angles—one, the best of academic social-science, and two, the revolutionary anarchist imagination. There is also a rich and encyclopedic Portuguese bibliography, so vast that I just glided on its surface, without plumbing far into its depths. There are also rich studies in both French and Spanish. To the best of my knowledge none of these resources exist for the FNCEZ.[1] Consider the following an attempt to at least lay a foundation stone or two for that work.

[1] Although Tiffany Linton Page promises an exhaustive treatment of modern Venezuelan peasant movements in a forthcoming dissertation from University of California—Berkeley's sociology department.

Chapter 1. Peasants and Peasant Movements, Theoretical Issues

1.1. Why Agrarian Reform?

This thesis began with a look into the agrarian reform of the Chávez government in Venezuela. More precisely, the agrarian reform *laws* of Bolivarian Venezuela. I quickly discovered that while someone at the top was talking very clearly and very radically about the need for a wide-ranging agrarian reform, there was something missing: the quantity and quality of grassroots agitation that could turn agrarian reform legislation into land redistribution. That look, those discoveries, and the reasons behind them turned into a thesis—half of one, because I wanted to compare. I turned to Brazil, where a fiercely radical peasant movement, the MST, and a vaguely leftist president, co-existed amidst more talk of agrarian reform. Agrarian reform was not proceeding very well there either. Wheels churned: how to compare the two situations—the Brazilian non-agrarian reform and the Venezuelan maybe-agrarian reform? But first, why?

After all, across the political spectrum, analysts have converged on the position that the peasantry is dying or dead, and they are not overly concerned about this state of affairs—or, at least, not concerned enough to sound the alarm. Eric Hobsbawm has famously argued that "The most dramatic and far-reaching change of the second half of this century, and the one which cuts us off for ever from the world of the past, is the death of the peasantry," despite—slightly oddly—its enduring presence: China, India, Africa, and Latin America were "regions [where] peasant dominance still represented half the human race at the end of our period" (Hobsbawm, 1996: 289, 292). Agrarian sociologists discuss the death of the peasantry in somewhat more sorrowful terms. Deborah Bryceson, in a formulation to which I'll return, writes,

> Whatever the outcome, the social and political legacy of peasant culture is bound to endure long after peasant economies disappear. Today's indifference will inevitably become romanticized nostalgia and regret. There is even the possibility that future global identity crises will be resolved by drawing on the world's peasant legacy. Modernity's victims may become its saviours. Time will tell (Bryceson 2000, 299-324).

Cristóbal Kay, not quite so darkly, and without foretelling the peasantry's passing, adds, "major agrarian reforms, especially of a collectivist kind, are unlikely to recur" (Kay 2000, 123-138). At considerably more length and with a considerably heftier and more burdensome theoretical apparatus, Henry Bernstein decries "agrarian populist ideology" and its dream of reconstituting

the peasantry as commodity producers, calling this "backward-looking and explicitly reactionary"; meanwhile he looks askance at the claims for the "inverse relationship" between farm-size and productivity, asserting that it is an ideological concession to the "dominant neo-liberal paradigm" (Bernstein, 2007: 36). All seem to cede the point that at best the peasantry will withdraw into the interstices of modern agricultural production and late-capitalism, perhaps here holding fast, there slowly waning, over there vanishing altogether.

Neo-liberal analysts, as might be expected, share the motif. Paul Collier writes that "Given the chance, peasants seek local wage jobs, and their offspring head to the cities…reluctant peasants are right: their mode of production is ill suited to modern agricultural production, in which scale is helpful." Collier goes significantly further than analytical diagnoses of the fate of peasant or small-farmer subsistence production, extending his criticism to intellectuals concerned with the peasantry.[2] The gist of his gripe is that metropolitan interest in peasant production is no more than an idle penchant for Arcadia. He scathingly writes of "the middle- and upper-class love affair with peasant agriculture," situating this infatuation structurally: "With the near-total urbanization of these classes in both the United States and Europe, rural simplicity has acquired a strange allure. Peasant life is prized as organic in both its literal and its metaphoric sense" (Collier, 2008).[3] The suggestion that their arguments have merit is apparently too silly for Collier to consider. Still, Collier's points are intriguing, not because they're substantive—they're not—but because they lucidly encapsulate the assumptions underlying both neo-liberal technocratic and some Marxist accounts of world-agricultural production, contemporary population distributions, the world-economic structure, the role of agriculture in human culture and economies, the myopia of technological progressivism, and much else.

Many Marxists and nearly all liberal technocrats worship at various denominational churches espousing the same religion: a promethean, implicitly-stagist understanding of progress and industrialization that puts sophisticated technology and mechanical power at center-stage, and relegates food production and the countryside to obstacles or appurtenances to more important

[2] Tellingly, no names are named nor works cited.

[3] The question of mere ideological romanticism is Collier's hate-romance, and not necessarily that of metropolitan intellectuals, given the efflorescence of urban-farming initiatives across the United States and Europe in recent years. Still, it is worth noting that in an extremely limited sense, Collier is correct. A strain of rural romanticism does pervade left-libertarian thought, from Rousseau to Kropotkin and Morris, and on to Bahro, Bookchin, Sale, Mumford, and onwards. The vision is romantic because it considers or dreams of another world. But it is not the type of romance that's impossible. Rather, those authors would contend, or would have contended, it is one that had better be consummated, as I hope to sketchily outline in conclusion.

processes. At least within reigning orthodoxies, there were good reasons for this. Among Marxists, for example, it was long an article of faith that industrial workers would forge the revolution. One scholar articulates the basic viewpoint:

> In contrast to [Harry] Vanden's romantic attachment to peasant radicalism, according to Marxist theory peasants do not achieve consciousness of the need to overthrow capitalism through their experience in production…[Marxist scholars who look favorable upon the peasantry, such as Peruvian Jose Carlos] Mariátegui and Blanco [have not] seen the peasantry as the leading revolutionary class, since they all recognized the limitations of the peasantry in the struggle for socialism, a struggle which can only arise from the working-class ideology embodied in a leadership basing itself on the working class (Harding, 1982: 99).

Such scholars could not have foreseen the turn towards semi-proletarianization amongst the world's campesino population, which even on orthodox Marxist terms would set it up well for acquiring a "revolutionary" consciousness. But there is no good reason for accepting the argument on its own terms. As James Scott argues, furious struggles over bread-and-butter issues of consumption are precisely at the moral core of revolutionary struggles, among both peasants and industrial workers. It's the province of footloose intellectuals to think of socialism in analytical abstraction. Even for avowedly revolutionary campesinos or industrial serfs, their grievances are grievances over their share in the rewards of the productive process, over defending their consumption, over preventing an extraction of surplus, over how production is structured—autocratically, or democratically. Socialism, alongside various prefixes or suffixes, may be the word describing the productive system that would prevent such an extraction, but it is the system and the ideals it encapsulates that are the point, not the label. Furthermore, to deny the primacy of the material struggle or to demand that it be "selfless" is, as Scott writes, not only utopian, a bizarre dream of how social change should and can come about, and also a "slander on the moral status of fundamental material needs. In fact, it is fundamentally a mis-construction of the basis of class struggle" (Scott, 1985: 296). In pushing for a greater share of their crop, peasants deprive the state or the landlord of that share—a state or a landlord unable to extract a portion of a crop, or its monetary equivalent, can no longer act as a coercive entity, and the steady removal of coercive entities is what we should be talking about when we use the term revolution.

In a quirky inversion, for other classical or orthodox Marxists, the peasantry, at least in its communal or subsistence mode, has been an obstacle to industrial production. Such simple

commodity production within territorially delimited spaces is useless from a point-of-view that looks at social change from a stagist and teleological perspective. In such a scheme, campesinos must be transformed into a rural proletariat, accumulating a surplus, which is thenceforth shipped to the urban core, where it will fuel capital accumulation through industrial production, the other side of the coin of the centrality of the industrial work force in the transition to socialism.[4] As Henry Bernstein writes, "the historic notion of redistributive land reform as a 'gravedigger' of 'feudal' (or 'feudal'-like) landed property was no longer applicable to the countrysides of the South...because of changes in the development of capitalism on a world scale…much agrarian populist ideology...is backward-looking and explicitly reactionary, it can also inform a particular model of agricultural development" (Bernstein, 2007: 35-36).[5]

Once again, this argument is difficult to defend. The core of feudalism was the control of labor through the control of land. Now, it is capitalism that seeks to control labor and land, through different modalities of coercion—veiled rather than direct—but still, with the aim of securing a surplus by wringing maximal short-term production out of land and labor, soil and life. And again, agrarian reform attacks that model head-on. (Bernstein would presumably assail the Via Campesina peasant international for its "reactionary" belief in "agrarian populism ideology." But as I will show, such ideologies are revolutionary in scope.) Amongst less radically inclined analysts, a model of agro-industrial food production has become normalized, with the intent of universalizing it, pushing for the permeation of capitalist social-relations throughout the countryside. There is not a big place for peasants in any of these formulations.

Collier's analysis highlights the deep problems of liberal-technocratic assumptions. One, empirically, if the peasants are a vanishing class, why were there still so many of them in the world? If they're vanishing, why do so so slowly? Two, why would the Chávez government want to carry out a peasant-based agrarian reform if peasants were superfluous? Could this merely be the result of Chávez and his coterie having imbibed far too much of the ideology of the "upper" and "middle" class metropolitan intellectuals? More befuddling still would be the case of Brazil's

[4] For a scathing criticism, see McMichael, (2008) for a treatment of how mainstream and even much Marxist social-science has sidelined the peasantry, sharing a teleological, modernizing view of a world with no place for pure commodity production. It is easy to see how this led early development economists or state-socialists astray, unable to conceive of mutually beneficial links between city and country that relied on an exchange system, freely-engaged-in, thR benefited both, rather than one underlain by a mailed gauntlet, ready to crush agrarian unrest.

[5] In this respect Mitrany, (1951). I speak here of Marxists, and not Marx, whose work evolved and changed, in this respect as in others (Shanin, 1983).

MST, run-through with organic campesino intellectuals, urging a far-reaching agrarian redistribution in the countryside. Could they have deluded themselves, dreaming of a pre-lapsarian Eden? Or could something else be at stake?

1.2. Re-peasantization and Development

Perhaps so. Other analysts demur sharply from Collier's line. Jan van der Ploeg describes what he calls re-peasantization processes in Europe: increased autonomy on farms, a switch to a system of farming based on "craftsmanship," highlighting the economic "multiplier" effect of "rural development activities," a point well-established in the literature analyzing the effects of agrarian reform on development. He characterizes the emerging contours of the new European peasantry as "endogenous and somewhat anarchic," but far from moribund and even further from the fabricated idealization of metropolitan intellectuals (Ploeg, 2008: 151-180). In Cuba, re-peasantization enjoyed measurable success in the 1990s, as the state actively sought to alleviate labor shortages in the countryside (Page, 2010). Re-peasantization can work and has worked. Forward-thinking analyses of the conversion to a post-carbon economy likewise focus on agriculture and the conversion of a populace to peasant-like production, even in urbanized metropolitan countries, wherein "Food growing, harvesting and distribution would again become a collective activity for many people" (Sprat et al 2009: 72-73).

Against such facts and vision, compare Collier's discussion of the economics of peasant production and large-scale production. It is of real interest, because of the way it clearly crystallizes diffuse empirical and interpretive errors that recur repeatedly in many analyses of modern agriculture. His discussion provokes an obvious question, if we accept its premise that the peasantry is dying: who will produce the world's food? The answer of many Marxisant academicians and liberal technocrats alike is that no one will. Or barely anyone. The concerted workings of the Market and Progress will fob the task onto trans-national corporations, which will deploy machines to make food, turning agricultural production from the labor of humans on land into the work—if it can be called that—of mechanical behemoths, transforming fossil fuels and chemicals, through the medium of land, into agricultural products. This is not technophobic polemic. Consider Collier's words, which accurately reflect top-level thinking in development agencies and state ministries alike: "the world needs more commercial agriculture, not less. The

Brazilian model of high-productivity large farms could readily be extended to areas where land is underused…the world needs more science" (Collier, 2008).

While the last clause is formally correct, the proposition is generally incoherent. First, far from Collier's statement that peasants are "ill suited to modern agricultural production," peasants actually out-produce large farms on a per-hectare basis (Altieri, 2009). Even in 1972, according to agricultural economist Emiliano Ortega, 20 percent of Latin American farmland was used for campesino production, yet campesinos produced 30 percent of marketed agricultural products. What they produced for their own subsistence, were it to be added to the tally, would make this disproportion yet more marked (Thiesenhusen, 1995: 26). Furthermore, the Brazilian model is a chimera, grafting ecological un-sustainability onto economic under-development and peripheral slum metastasis. While the gross number of small-farms has been falling in recent years, they have held steady in their production. The notion of a technological Erehwon wherein metropolitan consumers purchase food grown in fantastically productive cyber-farms is a fantasy, unmoored from reality. As Harriet Friedmann astutely notes, this represents pure commodity fetishism, the total alienation of production from consumption, as the goal is the "suppression of particularities of time and place in both agriculture and diets." The goal is for capitalism to totally permeate the food system, through an "integrated productive sector of the world economy" alongside the total marginalization of third-world subsistence farmers (Bello and Baviera 2009: 26). This is capitalism taken-as-Promethean-revolution in utopian form. The physical output of production is valued immensely. The social conditions of production—the producers, their lives, their relation to the work they do, their freedom—is ignored.

Collier's suppression of redistributive agrarian reform and a small-farmer or campesino rural economic structure also sedulously sidesteps the history of development. In almost every significant case of late development, a wide-ranging agrarian reform has been the sine qua non of success. Specifically, the cases of Japan and South Korea—the latter, perhaps the one former colony to make the leap to first-world status—involved massive agrarian reforms. Such reforms enabled the creation of a large internal market, generated jobs for the previously jobless, and increased the rate of capital formation. They also have indirectly raised urban wages—even in cases where labor and unions were violently repressed, as in Taiwan and South Korea—because workers had the option of returning to the countryside if conditions in the cities became too onerous or stultifying, and therefore the threat of labor migration from urban cores induced

employers to maintain higher wages than they otherwise would have.[6] They create backward-and-forward linkages within the economy, increasing social wealth, preventing it from being sucked into the vortex of metropolitan capital formation. Such reforms have allowed development. From that standpoint, it was immediately clear why everyone would want one.

The tragedy of third-world development trajectories puts the problem into still sharper relief. Along with the rocketing increase in the size of urban slums came a concomitant increase in "subfamily" farms, farms incapable of providing subsistence to the families that live on them. Such farms increased in number 92 percent between 1950 and 1980, and the average size of the Latin American farm fell 13 percent during this time. Such farms came to comprise 50 percent of the farms in the region, and 2 percent of the agricultural land of any given country. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, medium- and large-scale capitalist farms, well beyond the ability of a small family farmer to manage, represented 26 percent of all farming units and occupied 90 percent of the total area. Thiesenhusen characterizes this as a "bipolar agrarian structure." So Venezuela and Brazil are alike in this sense, and the norm within the continent, where the "commercial farm-microfarm dyad" is the most common form of rural social structure (Thiesenhusen, 1995: 2, 3, 8).

Thiesenhusen also argues that land redistribution will increase effective demand while also increasing the supply of food, as formerly landless or land-poor campesinos are suddenly able to both produce the requisite quota required for family subsistence and are able to enter the market and purchase goods within it, thereby creating backward-and-forward links within the rural economy. And the Latin American campesino population continues to be seriously under-employed. In 1980, 65 percent of this population was in that category (Thiesenhusen, 1995: 11-12, 20). At the same time, large farms sit fallow, and campesinos languish on hillsides. Thiesenhusen in turn intriguingly suggests that the urban professional middle-class (historically often associated with a lukewarm commitment to democracy), if confronted with an agrarian reform pushed and promoted with proper decorum, might come to support it, especially if counterpoised with the alternative, "ungovernable" cities and an "intolerable strain" on urban infrastructure, as population pressure increases beyond the adjustment capabilities of cash-poor municipal governments (Thiesenhusen, 1995: 180).

[6] I thank Liisa North for this insight.

Both the increase in urban ungovernability and collapsing municipal infrastructure have been the pox of Brazil and Venezuela. In 1997, with the Landless March, the urban-middle classes in Brazil came to support agrarian reform while sectors of the middle-class also support Chavismo, at least in its reformist variant, which includes agrarian reform, albeit usually of a non-confiscatory nature (Ellner, 2008: 127; Ciccariello-Maher, 2007). Confirming the general trend, both Venezuela and Brazil have vast tracts of fallow land. Both Venezuela and Brazil are sterling—if that word isn't offensive—parts of what Mike Davis calls a Planet of Slums (Davis, 2006). Huge segments of their populations live on hillside or mountainside *ranchos* or *favelas*. The rural poor, landless or confined to minifundia, live in socially imposed misery. In many cases, as Kay writes, rural shack-communities are flourishing, "thereby blurring the urban-rural divide" (Kay, 2000: 131). In Venezuela, in 1997 about 60 percent of the rural population occupied 3 percent of the arable land (Tulet, 1999: 15-20). Similar figures obtain in Brazil—in 1985, the top two percent of landowners controlled 57 percent of the land, while the bottom 30 percent of farmers owned just one percent of the land.

Finally, turning countries into a pastiche of metropolitan centers surrounded by slums packed with dispossessed peasants, amidst an under-settled countryside turned into a carbon-belching factory farm, monoculture bio-fuel plantations as the grace note to turn the photosynthetic process into a way of growing ethanol, will destroy the biosphere that supports global civilization (Bringezu et al, 2009; Patel and Holt-Giménez, 2009). Huge percentages of global CO2 emissions come directly from agriculture and global land-use-changes, while most of the rest comes from unsustainable consumption patterns anchored in unsustainable planning patterns (UN, 2006). People must come to live where they work, and grow food pretty close to there too. Slightly beyond the scope of this essay, worldwide re-peasantization—returning humanity to its natural state as farmers—will be a part of the solution to the interwoven problems of development, climate change, and ecology (McMullen and Jabbour, 2009). In any case, as my impulsive, slightly scattershot research into the intersection of climate change, development, and agriculture broadened and deepened, running parallel with an investigation into the types of agrarian reforms that could best effect the types of changes that analysts and at least heterodox and radical economists deemed necessary, I returned to the question: who will carry them out?

The answer: the peasantry. Thus, this thesis. As I delved into the historical and anecdotal evidence and surveys-from-afar of Venezuelan rural mobilization, it became clear that despite

their near-elision from the scholarly literature, that there were some campesinos in Venezuela. Mao wouldn't have been happy with their quantities, and a revolutionary city-storming peasant army is out of the question, but they were still there, after 88 percent of their countrymen had migrated to slums on the Northern coastal strip. They were, increasingly, self-organized. And they were increasingly confrontational and outspokenly radical. In some ways they looked increasingly like the MST. This was no surprise: they had learned how to make a movement in part from MST tutelage, in part through the pedagogical membrane of scholarly or activist information networks, alongside the Via Campesina. And adding one more flourish to an already beguiling—to the metropolitan analyst's affections—notion of Romantic resurgence in the countryside, both the FNCEZ and the MST, in organization, tactics, strategy, language, and ideology, are redolent of 20th century anarchism. This is a facet of Brazilian and Venezuelan social mobilization sorely under-analyzed in the scholarly and popular literature. It is under-analyzed to our loss—something this essay attempts to remedy in whatever partial manner it may.

1.3. Who is a Peasant?

Before proceeding further, some terms and a bit of conceptual clarification. In Spanish and Portuguese, the terms *campesino* and *camponês*, in both languages meaning a person from the countryside, adequately paper over definitional impasses over who is or is not a peasant. In English, things get tougher. Campesino translates indirectly as "peasant," and a long time ago, the terms meant similar things: agricultural people not living under overlords who reaped their own production were peasants, even if they had to remit a portion of that production to feudal lords, for example, or in *corvée* labor.[7] Now there are myriad social relations present in the countryside: commercial farmers, smallholders, subsistence farmers, sharecroppers, day laborers. So I take from Luis Llambí a definition of peasant as a class of people engaged in agricultural production, ranging from the "independent subsistence farmers relished by Chayanovians," to "small entrepreneurs embedded in a capitalist accumulation process," while also encompassing share-croppers, squatters, short- or long-term contract farmers, and other producers (Llambi, 2000: 181).

[7] Slaves were not peasants, nor were swiddeners, relying on slash-and-burn cultivation patterns that enabled them to move rapidly away from the state's grasp, avoiding state oppression, something like pastoral nomads. These sorts of cultivation patterns are no longer relevant, in any case. The reach of the state is not universal but it extends far, into various forms of "escape agriculture" (Scott, 2009: 187-207).

This definition will be problematic to analytical or structural Marxist currents. That's fine. This is not an essay seeking to scientifically locate the precise, invariant conditions that give rise to a given class's revolutionary urge, or even necessarily to anatomize a given class's tendency to resort to confrontational revolt given the presence of certain sorts of structural enablers or changes in constraints. Increasingly, that's the wrong way of looking at the question, in part the encumbering inheritance of orthodox Marxisant thought, which was desperate to understand why where theory had predicted revolution, history hadn't come through. One part of the problem is that classes aren't objectively given, sorted out through materialist machinery neatly demarcating barriers between various classes and assigning each class the appropriate consciousness—the poor, either revolutionary or with their perception befogged by false-consciousness, the rich, totally and self-consciously aware of their privilege and their position in the ongoing class war. That's not how things work. Classes are not economistic phenomena. A worker's place in the productive apparatus is an almost purely economic—or strategic—phenomenon, but workers and peasants experience class culturally, because they perceive it through struggle. As E.P. Thompson writes, "If we watch these men over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions. Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition" (Thompson, 1966: 11).

So, when men and women choose to identify as campesinos, whether they fit without friction into the sociological categories marked peasants, field-workers, dispossessed rural folk, semi-proletarians, refugees from urban peripheries, and they choose to join social movements—the FNCEZ and the MST are not precisely assemblies of press-ganged peasants—we should take them at their word. As Philip McMichael adds, rebutting Bernstein's argument that peasants become "petty commodity producers" when they lose the ability to socially reproduce "outside the relations and processes of capitalist commodity production," and "when the latter become the conditions of existence of peasant farming and are internalized in its organization and activity," being does not determine class-consciousness so automatically. Indeed,

> even the majority to whom it does apply may not subjectively has so much internalized as utilized commodity markets to supplement their material needs and/or sustain a frugal and fragile peasant agriculture… [peasantness is in constant flux and negotiation] typically involving negotiating a politics of solidarity that goes beyond the particular class positions of individuals (McMichael, 2009b: 296).

It would be blithe to ignore the risk accompanying this particular approach: total definitional slippage. If an essay that analyzes campesino mobilization and its role in agrarian change can willy-nilly consider anyone who wishes to be a peasant a peasant, why isn't a factory-worker also a peasant? Or a landlord? Where are we to draw the conceptual line? First, the facile-but-important demurral: there are no hard-and-fast conceptual lines. Ideal-types are social scientists' abstractions. Secondly, structural positions in economic systems that are amenable to objective analysis obviously help determine class-consciousness and class identification. But it is not economic abstractions that compose classes but the men and women who identify with a class struggle that in turn compose a class. So John Womack's characterization of "strategic positions" may be correct, in the sense of specifically locating a given historical actor vis-à-vis his position—possibly strategic—in the productive apparatus (Womack, 2005). However, that logic of analysis, when applied to peasant movements, impels one to a rather different approach, based on the fact that peasant movements aspire to a strategic location from whence they can control their social reproduction and hence their lives. That strategic position begins from a situation of landlessness or near-landlessness, and is one that aspires to a life of agricultural production. The question of turning city-men into peasants is an educational and cultural project, and not one necessarily making sociological analysis problematic or misguided.

So a notion of the peasant or a notion of those partaking in rural mobilization as peasants makes sense when we see the revolutionary subject more as a "frustrated producer," as Marx did, than as a "dissatisfied consumer" (Tucker, 1969). Most of humankind's original productive work was agricultural, and therefore a cultural identification as a frustrated producer gives this point further heft, once one comes around to the position that a radical agenda is an agenda devoted substantially to re-peasantization in both the 1st and 3rd world. Furthermore, when one notes that increasingly huge swathes of the world's population are being made to be peripheral from the point of view of production and consumption too, the point is further strengthened. If one takes the heterodox view that development should itself make a peasant aspiration normative, to anticipate the essay's conclusion, then that slum-dwellers, whether in urban *favelas* or *ranchos* or in rural shanties, wish to join campesino movements ends up seeming relevant and even encouraging. This conception also enables us to avoid slogs through methodological bogs questioning whether a peasant movement can be a peasant movement as it increasingly

incorporates former city dwellers, a burgeoning component of the MST's settlers.[8] As Thompson again points out, too mechanistic, too formal, too scientific, too sociological an understanding of class is sheer effrontery in the face of the facts of history:

> Sociologists who have stopped the time-machine and, with a good deal of conceptual huffing and puffing, have gone down into the engine room to look, tell us that nowhere at all have they been able to locate and identify a class. They can only find a multitude of people with different occupations, incomes, status-hierarchies, and the rest. Of course, they are right, since class is not this or that part of the machine, but *the way the machine works* once it is set in motion—not this interest and that interest, but the *friction* of interests—the movement itself, the heat, the thundering noise…Class itself is not a thing, it is a happening (Thompson, 1965: 357).

And how does it happen? Men and women who used to be peasants, men and women who are children of peasants, men and women who wish to be peasants, make it happen.

1.4. Ideology and Perpetual Resistance

This conceptual point-of-departure meshes cleanly with James Scott's discussion of the quotidian nature of resistance to capitalism—and exploitation more generally. Scott writes of the "typical, 'garden variety' resistance that characterizes much of the peasantry and other subordinate classes through much of their unfortunate history…we are dealing with the un-dramatic but ubiquitous struggle against the effects of state-fostered capitalist development in the countryside" (Scott, 1985: 241). This approach makes sense from the anarchist rather than Marxist intellectual tradition: if a peasant has an "instinct for freedom," in Bakunin's phrasing, we can fruitfully look to see how he manifests it, but we do not dare doubt its presence. Indeed, once we have established that the field-worker, the peasant, the exploited share-cropper, the day-laborer, the cane-cutter, the day-worker residing in a rural shanty-town or traveling to the hacienda from an urban-peripheral slum is in constant symbolic revolt, questions of "false-consciousness" or "mystification," insofar as they are held to apply to subordinate-class-consciousness, should be cast aside as dross. Indeed, such classes not only have an "instinct for freedom," but, chances are, will be "more radical at the level of ideology than at the level of behavior" (Scott, 1985: 331).

Having stipulated and supported that contention, it becomes less important to examine the repressed individual under a microscope, looking here for proto-socialist inclinations, there for

[8] Although neither numerically nor percentage-wise "significant."

knowledge of the subtleties and textual vagaries of the *Grundrisse*. More relevant are the conditions that gave rise to economic dislocation in the countryside, as well as the more mercurial shifts and jostles that enable symbolic and ideological revolt to turn into something more wide-ranging, something more openly confrontational—something more closely resembling collective action.[9]

In sum, my conceptual approach is organic and relational, agreeing fundamentally with Erik Wolf's argument that "The decisive factor in making a peasant rebellion lies in the relation of the peasant to the field of power which surrounds it." Many interpretations of Wolf focus on the "middle peasant," his proclivities, relations to commodity-production, internal resources, metropolitan links, and such. In contrast, I am interested in a different aspect of Wolf's conceptualization. As he continues, "a rebellion cannot start from a situation of complete impotence; the powerless are easy victims…The poor peasant or the landless laborer who depends on a landlord for the largest part of his livelihood, or the totality of it, has no tactical power" (Wolf, 1999: 290). But if the poor peasant can ally with a radical state, or stand behind the bulwark of a pre-existing peasant movement, this need not be the case. One would not want to twist Wolf into saying something that he did not. Wolf writes, "The only component of the peasantry which does have some internal leverage is either landowning 'middle peasantry' or a peasantry located in a peripheral area outside the domains of landlord control" (Wolf, 1999: 291). Indeed, Wolf argues that the middle peasant was central to his six cases of 20th century peasant wars. But I want to take Wolf's thinking not as a set of strictures— *Rule 1, only the middle peasant can foment rebellion*—but as a set of guidelines: look for the networks of power within which peasants live, work, and struggle. The comment on "internal leverage" makes it clear that central to Wolf's thinking is that analyses of peasant movements must be thick: "drenched with causes that inhere in sequence, accumulation, contingency, and proximity" (Tilly, 1994: 270). Leverage and power exist relative to other forces. What is the campesino's relation to state power? To radical political parties? To the productive apparatus? To the landlord? What will the state and the judicial system do if he withholds his labor, if he occupies land? Will they send in the *gendarmes* to crack his skull open? (Yes, generally).

[9] Scott offers an enchanting canvass of the "little tradition" of revolt at the level of ideology and symbol, spanning Haitian voodoo, Burma, Java, Rwanda, the American South, and much else (Scott: 1977).

Being constantly aware of such questions forces one to adopt a thick view of social mobilization. And having done so, one could consequently observe that—as a general trend—that a given structurally situated class of rural dwellers has the tendency to revolt in a given situation. Jeffery Paige does precisely this for rural workers laboring in export-agriculture plantations, due to the zero-sum nature of potential conflicts. But one wouldn't wish to over-generalize, at least, not necessarily in that direction (Paige, 1975). Rather, generalization can take a different route: not only of the economic situations that produce widespread discontent, but also of the political situations that allow that content to transmute to rebellion, and concerning the peasantry's relation to repression. The nature and complexities of such political situations tie directly into the over-abundant Marxist literature on beliefs, ideology, and "false-consciousness," most of which fails to appreciate that the peasant not only isn't befuddled but that he isn't dumb. He doesn't want to die, and in most scenarios—remember, revolutions `a la Iran in 1979 are socially anomalous—will act freely only when he believes the opportunity structure includes freedom from violent repression, or at least some sort of buffer from it.

Such a political situation generally involves two sorts of shifts. One affects internal or external resources in favor of empowering peasant movements. A second affects potentially repressive forces. Both allow for greater freedom-of-movement. In these circumstances, more peasants join movements—which is another way of saying, movements grow and become more powerful—because movements are able to give peasants or workers "leverage." As Mark Lichbach points out, such movements offer "selective incentives," helping organize and channel omnipresent discontent into action. Movements that can form partial alliances with the government, as in the case of *both* the FNCEZ and the MST, contrary to much sloganeering, have more resources available. They're also less likely to be repressed (Lichbach, 1994: 285, 401).

Another clarification: what is a "movement"? Tarrow's definition is good: a "collective challenge, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (Tarrow, 1998: 4). Tarrow defines both the genesis of social-movement mobilization and well as the political-opportunity-structure conceptual framework that congeals Wolf's telling and textured points into a more social-science-y model. As Tarrow writes,

> The most forceful argument of this study will be that people engage in contentious politics when patterns of social opportunities and constraints change and then, by strategically employing a

> repertoire of collective action, create new opportunities, which are then used by others in widening cycles of contention. When their struggles revolve around broad cleavages in society, when they bring people together around inherited cultural symbols, and when they can build on or construct dense social networks and connective structures, then these episodes of contention result in sustained interactions with opponents—specifically, in social movements (Tarrow, 1998: 19).

Political opportunity deals with resources external to the group. It differs from Lichbach's claim in this respect: Lichbach's claim is a function of individual peasant rationality, asking, why would peasant Y join peasant group X. He claims selective incentives motivate a given peasant to join a movement, but a more effective movement is able to braid those incentives with a beguiling belief system—an ideology, whereas Tarrow is discussing why peasant group X would engage in collective action. The two modes of thinking about movements—why would individuals join them vs. why a collection of individuals would take a potentially dangerous tactical step—are not altogether separable. A group that successfully engages in collective action will likely grow, and "trigger social networks and collective identities into action around common themes," thereby galvanizing peasants to join it because it can offer them "selective incentives." One selective incentive is land. Another selective incentive is freedom from repression (Tarrow, 1998: 20).

Freedom from repression is clearly just-as-much a change in "political opportunity." These are very much two ways of looking at the same phenomenon, one, broadly, taking the peasant as its unit of analysis, the other taking the social movement as its unit of analysis. Additionally, we must be very clear about what we mean by repression: repression is both the daily repression that powerful actors effect through their control of the economic system as well as the mailed gauntlet hiding behind the market's veiled coercion. As Scott writes, "the coercive context creates and maintains the setting of relative powerlessness within which the 'dull compulsion of economic relations' can then extract its daily toll" (Scott, 1985: 278). This "coercive context" is the willingness of the state to crash the hammer down on stirrings from below. It varies enormously in time and place. And it makes the question of state power and its relative importance, the glittering fad amongst Latin Americanists, somewhat academic. Having state power on your side is better than not having state power on your side, as obvious as the notion that one would rather be presented with a bouquet than a bullet.

Also, a word on "framing," in Tarrow's vocabulary, or ideology in common Marxisant parlance. Ideology is important for many reasons, the most basic of which is that what people believe matters—it helps determine how they act. In the case of the FNCEZ and the MST, ideology is important because they self-conceive as autonomist movements, and they self-conceive as democratic movements. By believing themselves to be separate from the state, and by acting in a way that is in some measure consonant with that conception, organizing and mobilizing around it, they in some measure make it real. As Tarrow writes, "movements do passionate 'framing work'…framing not only relates to the generalization of a grievance, but defines the 'us' and 'them' in a movement's conflict structure" (Tarrow, 1994: 21). Tarrow adds that the symbolism and ideological base of social movement organizing reflects what he calls a "paradox": that movements must both create "dynamic symbols that will create new identities and bring about change," as well as "offer symbols that are familiar to people who are rooted in their own cultures" (Tarrow, 1994: 106-107). As I will show, the MST and the FNCEZ fluidly finesse this paradox. And because they conceive of themselves as radically democratic movements, they structure their movements as microcosmic radical democracies.

Finally, this essay will touch on one more question—whether or when to characterize a given movement as "revolutionary," and to what extent a movement structured as radically democratic is by definition revolutionary, too. As Scott suggests, the answer is not simple. Take the smallest, not necessarily the correct, analytical unit, the individual. Most peasants, most of those who are repressed, are able to imagine a world with its value structure inverted, and are able to look to a horizon of justice (Scott, 1990: 70-107). They are able to envision "a world turned upside down," as Christopher Hill described the English Revolution. As a general principle, the lower classes are far more radical at the level of ideology than at the level of action. Indeed, they have an incredible capacity to imagine other worlds, to envision a just dispensation of societal goods and societal power. As Scott writes, "In a world with the odds stacked so massively against them, surely the astounding fact about…many of the world's dispossessed is that they should so often believe and act as though their deliverance were at hand" (Scott, 2009: 293). Often this ideology is muted, muffled by the threat of repressive violence against even the faintest susurrations hinting at rebellion. But it is still there. At other times, demands articulated within a reformist discourse turn into revolution. And at still other times, as with the FNCEZ and the MST, reformist and revolutionary demands co-exist, mingling with one another.

Sometimes different levels of the movement have different levels of ideological formation, some of them speaking the superficially reformist language of owning and working their own plot, some of them in steeped in abstractions like capitalism, neo-liberalism, and socialism. One peasant's demand for land in the Brazilian countryside is a demand for reform of land ownership in the countryside. 20 million peasants demanding land is revolution—or, depending on the scale of repressive forces available to the powerful, politicide. The willingness to articulate such a demand in more confrontational terms can be considered more challenging to established power, and so more potentially revolutionary, than quietude about such demands. Belief structure itself can be a product of structural constraints. Still, a revolutionary movement will probably have a large quantity of cadres steeped in not only revolutionary ideology—because repressed peoples generally are able to articulate one form or another of revolutionary ideology—but will specifically be able to interweave general liberatory aspirations with their current circumstances, and will speak of salvation not simply as a return to an imaginary pre-lapsarian Utopia but as something achievable in a series of steps or a series of decades from their current position, analytically diagnosed as one characterized by a set of abstract attributes. Revolutionary movements must have some element of revolutionary ideology, and a potentially powerful revolutionary movement will be able to articulate that ideology in terms that make sense to people not "learned" in tomes on political economy. They will also be acting to make that ideology practice. They will have tactical and strategic visions, as intermediary steps towards their preferred liberatory horizon. Here, ideology shades off into strategy.

So I will now consider two other potential metrics of revolutionary sentiment or trajectory: strategy and tactics, and conjuncture. Tactics are interesting, because of the way they can physicalize ideology in practice, in a way directly threatening to existing systems of power. Some of the MST's tactics are profoundly radical. Occupying land, forcibly changing property relations, and mediating or controlling one's reliance on the state-market nexus is a radical act. And announcing a land occupation *as* a land occupation is itself a potentially revolutionary act. It means the perceived opportunity structure has emboldened the peasant sufficiently that he doesn't fear that one or another agent will throw him off the land or kill him for occupying the land publicly, for so openly flouting the symbolic codes with which power justifies its perpetuation. Moving on to other sorts of actions, answers are more nebulous. What does it even mean to ask if a campesino withdrawing from capitalist society to build a life of subsistence

agriculture in the hills is revolutionary or not? One peasant doing so is a hermit. A million doing so can bring down a small state. So the question is difficult. But that assessing revolutionary strategy is hard doesn't mean it's impossible. As Thompson wrote over 50 years ago,

> British society is warrened with democratic processes—committees, voluntary organisations, councils, electoral procedures—but in recent years fewer and fewer people have felt it worthwhile to work their way through these passages…the immanent community of socialism...is expressed…in a hundred forms of democratic association and control (Thompson, 1959: 6, 11).

Such forms of control were pre-figurative, as FNCEZ and MST cooperatives are. They not only confront the power of capital but also its logic—one of pervasive commoditization of reproduction. Such pockets of counter-logic de-commoditize reproduction. Clearly, subsistence production, or communal subsistence production in its own right is the exemplar of such a counter-logic, provided that the producer controls or mediates their access to the market for inputs and is not made slave to overwhelming structural masters (Friedmann, 1980; Ploeg, 2010). The question, more generally, about such pockets is when they so riddle the economic fabric of society that they reach "the point where the powers of democracy cease to be countervailing and become the active dynamic of society in their own right [because] this is revolution" (Thompson, 1959: 302). That question cannot be predicted out of hand, because it is a question of structure, but also a question of conjuncture.

External forces can place limits on revolutionary movements in ways that they may be able to do nothing to change. As Wolf suggests, once there is an analytical shift to the question of conjuncture, the question of revolution becomes both more relevant and more relational, moving on from a discussion of whether or not a given movement is revolutionary to the question of whether a society is ripe for revolution—a question that can only be asked, and answered, empirically, through carefully grounded, inevitably post hoc studies of revolutionary situations, as Wolf and Wickham-Crowley do magnificently. Absent such ruptures, one can meaningfully ask how radical given actions and tactics are, even to the point of whether or not they compose a revolutionary strategy within a radical conception of the world, a la Simon Critchley's notion of

interstitial space. But ultimately, in most cases, the question of whether a movement is revolutionary is a question that looks in the wrong place for an answer.[10]

1.5. The Argument

In schematic terms, this thesis situates the emergence of the National Peasant Front Ezequiel Zamora (FNCEZ), the most active of the Venezuelan peasant movements, with respect to modern Venezuelan agrarian history, Venezuelan agrarian class structure, and modern Venezuelan political history. Using a framework derived from a medley of Erik Wolf, Sidney Tarrow, Mark Lichbach, James Scott, Thomas Wickham-Crowley, Deborah Bryceson, Farshad Araghi, and Simon Critchley, I argue that failed peasant revolts, milquetoast agrarian reforms, and the concentration of the peasantry into the cities set the stage for a state-reliant capitalist farming industry with an increasing percentage of peasants mired in the morass of semi-proletarianization. In turn, the deepening penetration of neo-liberal capitalism in the countryside made the peasantry squirm and writhe under increasingly intolerable impositions. The political opening of the Chávez government, which arose from and responded to the penetration of neo-liberalism into the Venezuelan political economy, gave them the political opportunity to revolt. Freedom from state repression gave peasants an impetus. The election of Chávez disrupted the miasma of power that had symbolically held the rural people in check. The memory of previous land struggles helped solidify their beliefs, lending them a language marinated in history with which to create a belief-system. Holdovers from previous guerrilla movements and peasant students educated in Venezuelan universities helped harden their ideology. And their relationships with the MST and la Via Campesina tutored them in autonomy.[11]

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[10] Except in one scenario. If a mass of repressed people, suddenly, inexplicably, all come to believe that revolution could work, they could overwhelm insurmountable odds. This is what Marx meant when he wrote, "theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses." Such convulsions have happened before—millenarian reveries gripping huge populations, impelling them to act against impossible odds. Sometimes so many of them are impelled to act that they overcome such odds, and they win. I don't think this likely for the FNCEZ or the MST. But keeping such possibilities in mind—the motive power of religious ideologies—is important to keep in mind too, not least because spiritualism historically has suffused peasant rebellion. Indeed, until recently, nearly all social struggles were articulated within religious discourses. Arguably, the MST and the FNCEZ's *misticas* are religious too. In terms of social change the Enlightenment may represent a philosophical inflection point but at the level of subaltern belief and practice, this is far less clear. Something else to keep in mind, as we look at peasant movements invading land, aware that security forces may murder them and their children in retaliation. It takes belief, embedded in social networks, to inspire and sustain that sort of heroism. We should keep that in mind, too.

[11] I will make a deviation into a short discussion of another peasant movement in the Venezuelan countryside that works in concert with, but is separate from, the FNCEZ.

Likewise, the emergence of the MST is traceable, first, to the initial penetration of capitalism into the countryside in the 1960s. State-led agricultural modernization and mechanization pushed peasants from the countryside, structurally dislocating them and, as in the Venezuelan case, turned peasants into semi-proletarians. The even-more-onerous neo-liberalization of the countryside went hand-in-hand with a political opening, as the repressive power of the military dictatorship waned, giving them political opportunity. Alliances with the Church gave the MST resources. Liberation theology, *mistica*, and the memory of earlier struggles for land, shape their ideology. The MST's contours of dissent over the subsequent years in large part can be traced to the opportunities available to it. But to understand the movement, again, I needed to unpack this ideology.

This unpacking of the interlacing between structure, context, tactics, and ideology comprises the bulk of this thesis. As I conclude, I re-ask the question: are these movements revolutionary? What does it mean to be revolutionary in a context in which a sudden upsurge in rebellion would meet sudden armed repression? The question of the degree of revolutionary sentiment within a movement is important, but just as important is what would happen to a movement moving to extreme confrontation with state and capital, given that movement's place within larger structures that it can change only as it grows or attracts external support. This study tries to move smoothly between analysis of structure and conjuncture, ideology and economics, politics and development, all the while keeping the above questions in mind.

Chapter 2. Venezuela's Peasant Movement, Historical Roots, Contemporary Dimensions

> If the [Latin] Americans would like the political revolution that the weight of events has created, and whose survival the force of circumstance has permitted, to bring genuine benefits, they must make a genuine economic revolution and they must start in the rural areas: from there the revolution should move on to the industrial workshops. In this way, daily improvements will be observed that could never have been obtained if a start had been made in the cities.
>
> —Simón Rodríguez

2.1. Historical Background

Ezequiel Zamora is the messianic figure of Venezuelan rural history. He was born in Cúa in Miranda state in 1817. After a fraudulent election in 1846, he and peasant leader Francisco José Rangel recruited the basis of a peasant army from *cimarroneras*—gathering places for slaves or indentured laborers who had fled their servitude on plantations. Their army was defeated in 1847, and Rangel was murdered by machete blows, but Zamora was pardoned and given a ten-year prison sentence. He escaped en route, and joined José Tadeo Monagas's Liberal Army in 1849. He became military commander of that army in 1851, and was exiled to the Caribbean shortly thereafter. In 1858 guerrilla war broke out in Venezuela. The Federalists, generally liberal, were allied with Zamora, and their forces confronted conservative Centralists. Zamora returned to the mainland in February 1859, and took over the town of Coro, in Falcón state. Zamora orchestrated a succession of victories through December 1859, defeating government armies at Santa Inés, forcing them to retreat to Mérida, leaving the federal insurgents with whom he fought in control of Coro, as well as Barinas and Portuguesa states, until he was assassinated as the year turned (Gott, 2005: 113-114).

The heaviest fighting took place in the modern-day states of Barinas, Portuguesa, Cojedes, Apure, and Guárico, while there were guerrilla struggles in the areas now called Falcón, Lara, Yaracuy, Carabobo, and Aragua. This shudder of peasant rebellion was fleeting both in time and in its impact on society—it produced no redistributive change in political or economic structures, merely briefly interrupting the regime of primary-commodity exports. However, the Federalist War essentially destroyed the *llano* (or plains) cattle-based economy of the south, catalyzing the

concentration of the Venezuela population into its Andean and northern coastal strip components. Rural rebellion was harshly repressed, by "physical torture or death," while land distributions remained profoundly unequal (Dominguez, nd: 82-87).

Indeed, it had been unequal for a very long time. This inequality provided the human fuel for Zamora's rebellion. During the colonial period, slave labor abounded, on the plantations and the *hatos*, the immense ranchos in the Venezuelan *llanos*. The Wars of Independence provoked massive change. Slaves initially abandoned the *haciendas* and *hatos*, but large landholders continued cultivating cocoa, coffee, and sugar-cane plantations—before the advent of mechanical or industrial farming, all involved massive quantities of manual labor. For agricultural operations, sharecropping prevailed. Ranching operations preferred to use salaried workers—a bit of a euphemism. Both groups were often paid in scrip, and the farmers were frequently forced to enter into debt before the harvest, leaving the landowner largely in control of the campesinos and forcing them to remain "rooted to the territory they worked," tethered by a variety of forms of debt peonage (Dominguez, nd: 74-75). This situation occasionally incited rebellions, often including "mass escapes" in which the formerly indebted peasants sheltered themselves in "'cimarroneras,' a type of 'free territory,'" from whence they continued their struggle against their former masters. The Wars of Independence also induced political upheavals in the countryside, slightly changing the mode through which large landholders in the Venezuelan countryside extracted a surplus. Military chiefs replaced the previous proprietors, but peasants remained ensconced in a situation of servitude. Venezuela remained a commodity-exporting country, with an essentially captive labor force: with no industry, and tied to their landlords' land, there was nowhere to go except flight into the *cimarroneras* or fight, outright rebellion (Dominguez, nd: 77-78).

As the demographic shift to the Andes and the northern coastal strip occurred, Venezuela was developing a somewhat more sophisticated and differentiated economic structure. In line with general world trends during the "first food regime," which lasted from 1870 to the 1930s, during which the colonies exported tropical commodities to Europe while settler colonies supplied the continent with basic grains and livestock, feeding the European working classes and "underwriting the British 'workshop of the world,'" Venezuela mostly exported colonial tropical commodities to Europe during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, chiefly coffee and cocoa (McMichael, 2009b: 1,141). However, ramping up exports required improvements in

the country's export infrastructure. Produce had to get to ports and processing centers, and urban centers—in late 19th century Venezuela, larger towns—had to coordinate trading operations and manage currency inflows from the exports. These were the initial steps towards industrial and infrastructural modernization in Venezuela. In addition to increased internal migration into the Andean zone, there was some European immigration to the Andes, particularly from Spain and Italy. Maracaibo, a lake city north of the Andean *cordillera*, became an increasingly important trading center, and new social classes emerged: a "merchant class tied to Maracaibo," mostly of German, British, or Italian descent, and a new peasantry, chiefly Spanish and Italian, "property-holding" and "commodity-producing" (Roseberry, 1983: 75-76).

The Cipriani Castro (1899-1908) and Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935) years were a period of relative quiescence for the campesino population—or, at least, relative absence of open confrontation. Understandably. Their political opportunities were few: the possibilities of active rebellion diminished as Gómez centralized power by displacing local *caudillos*, the traditional leaders around whom campesinos had rallied in the past. Simultaneously, slave *cimarroneras* were increasingly unfeasible when the core state was steadily modernizing and expanding its reach, making "runaways from state-making projects in the valleys" more difficult as modern technologies and population pressure increased the state's reach (Scott, 2009: 127).

The 1929 Gabaldón rebellion was the proverbial exception that proves the rule. Joaquín Gabaldón Márquez was a *caudillo* from Falcón state and led a rebellion in April 1929, in Portuguesa, Lara, and Trujillo: relatively far from the core zone of metropolitan power, Caracas. Roseberry's summation is excellent:

> Gabaldón was simultaneously able to depend on others for protection and to offer protection to those who were defending him. The lack of peasant rebellion from 1913 to 1929 becomes less mysterious, for the disarmament and incapacitation of the *caudillos* had destroyed the mechanism through which peasants could coalesce and create a structural space for organization and rebellion. The nineteenth century had established a heterogeneous peasantry, and the ties that bound them ran through *caudillos*. The forces promoting homogeneity in the nineteenth century had been superseded but not yet replaced by new forces (Roseberry, 1983: 185-186).

The uprising failed. Most uprisings do. But it was someone in a powerful position vis-à-vis other social forces who was able to move to open conflict in the first place. Campesinos, lacking such protection, did not resort to open confrontation. That the rebellion occurred in Falcón and

Portuguesa was not accidental either—memories of earlier struggle, rooted geographically in those two regions, provide their own ideological resources, and gave insurgents added strength, in a catharsis of the daily repression that enables the replication of unequal relations of power.

Meanwhile, alongside slow development in the agrarian sector, during the Gómez years the Venezuelan political economy drastically changed—the country became a petro-state. From 1920-1945, there was "simple growth" in the petroleum sector, without it becoming an overweening component of the national economy. In Roseberry's periodization of Venezuela's political and economic history, the stage of "diversification and development" proceeded apace from 1945-1958, chiefly through the consolidation of a highway and banking infrastructure to facilitate extraction and then the heavy industrialization of the petroleum industry, inseparable from the consolidation of Venezuela as a "national-developmental state." The purposeful focus on developing the petro-economy was pushed along by a policy initiated in 1934, carried out by Gómez-appointed finance ministers, that overvalued the currency in such a way that agricultural producers were devastated, and capital-goods-importers were enriched. Gómez chose not to devalue the *bolívar* after U.S. currency reforms because state receipts from the oil companies would have declined, thereby giving him less to foreign currency to spend from "his" oil.

These exchange-rate policies bolstered the probably inevitable predominance of petroleum-rent in the economy, as petroleum averaged 72 percent of the value of Venezuelan exports from 1926-1930 and well over 90 percent by 1940 (Roseberry, 1983: 120). At the same time, agricultural exports declined from 129.7 million *bolivares* in 1928 to a third of that in 1944, undercut by both the Dutch Disease—an overvalued national currency—and the concentration of the population into petro-boom cities (Karl, 1997: 81). For example, in 1936, 662,000 of 1,084,000 workers in Venezuela were campesinos, 57.38 percent of the total. By 1941 that percentage had already plummeted to 50.36 percent of the total — 625,000 of 1,241,000 total workers were campesinos, reflecting both demographic drift into the cities as well as relative and absolute growth in non-farm employment (Battaglini, 1997: 83). The problem was not necessarily urbanization, at least, in the way normally understood (Duncan, 1996). The problem was rural flight, the result of policies that destroyed the countryside or undermined the ability of campesinos to live decent lives outside the cities, turning them into economic refugees, and forcing them to urban and periurban catchment basins.

Those who remained in the countryside were economically marginalized. Through 1941, sharecropping was still widely practiced. Peonage and rent-in-kind were the dominant relations between landlord and peasant. Furthermore, the agrarian structure was characterized by a "monopolization of cultivable land" by a small minority of landholders, most of which remained fallow, a recurring tendency in Latin American and especially Venezuelan agricultural history. Technical backwardness pre-dominated, and productive capacity was persistently low. Until 1925, agricultural exports—cocoa, coffee—made up 81.2 percent of total exports, but by 1940 they had fallen to just 3.2 percent of the total, due to the overvalued currency's debilitating effects on national production. Agricultural land-ownership was bifurcated into haciendas and subsistence production, what economist Alain de Janvry calls "functional dualism." Meanwhile, there was little agricultural production for the domestic market. The value of food imports jumped over 50 percent merely in the 1936-1939 triennium (Battaglini, 1997: 46-48). In 1945, the year of the civil-military coup d'état, of 59,014 rural agricultural properties, a mere 4.4 percent occupied 78.7 percent of the land used in agricultural production. Of 562,112 agriculturally active Venezuelans, 503,796 were landless campesinos (Battaglini, 1997: 72).

Furthermore, Venezuela had long lacked a paradigmatic family-farm agrarian structure. Instead, the rural population was chiefly divided "between the large-land-holders and the small-holders (*conuqueros*) and the temporary farm-workers," alongside some small holders in the Andean *cordillera* (Birou, 1971: 82, 144, 209). Even there, despite the historical presence of some smallholders, minifundia predominated. In 1961, the Andean region had 7.5 percent of the country's arable land but 25.6 percent of the plots. One-third of the peasantry were day-workers, with no land. Of the other two-thirds, 62 percent were peasants, 30 percent of the total also worked as day laborers, 20 percent participated in the market, and 12 percent were smallholders who also employed day laborers. Five percent were structurally dominant landlords. The Andean region was a bastion for the Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (Political Electoral Independent Organization Committee/COPEI), likely why the later agrarian reform, a move by AD to shush rural murmurings, would affect land distribution there less—there was no incentive to pursue reform while an opposition party held electoral sway there (Bartra, 1971: 661-676).[12] Still, the structural precursors for rural unrest were in place.

[12] COPEI was founded in 1946, the inheritor of earlier political groups such as Nacional Action and the conservative organization National Union of Students. It primarily held sway in Táchira, Mérida and Trujillo.

2.2. Clientelism and Acción Democrática's Agrarian Policies

The Gomecista disregard for national agricultural production produced rural discontent, and so created an opening for organizers. And as Gomez's repression, and social fear of further repression, waned, formal, institutionalized rural organization was able to once again proceed, closely interlinked with one of the two major political formations in post-dictatorship Venezuela, Acción Democrática (AD). This political party had several iterations. First, it was named the Organización Revolucionaria Venezolana (Venezuelan Revolutionary Organization, Orve), then it was renamed the National Democratic Party (NDP) in 1937, eventually naming itself AD in 1941. The political current was able to gather power by consolidating rural support from 1936-1945, amidst gradually worsening rural working conditions. AD organizers in the countryside looked for local "strong men" or "opinion leaders," and they promised infrastructural development and emancipation. Simultaneously, autonomous action emerged, including peasant land occupations, occasionally characterized as "embryonic guerrilla warfare." However, like any effort at isolated guerrilla warfare—and foreshadowing future Venezuelan efforts at guerrilla warfare—these attempts were vulnerable and small-scale. Their denouements were bloody (Powell, 1971: 44-56).

The NDP originally had a democratic-socialist orientation. One of its founders, exiled from 1937-1941, was Romulo Betancourt, a left-wing anti-communist, who wrote frequently and with great élan about the centrality of agrarian reform to national economic development and social justice (Alexander, 1981: 142-144). AD itself formally coalesced around the candidacy of poet Rómulo Gallegos. Nonetheless, the 1941 presidential campaign was largely symbolic. General Isaías Medina Angarita, Lopez Contreras's Minister of Defense, was handpicked to be the successor to the office and won most of the votes in the legislature, which at that time selected the president. Gallegos won thirteen of one hundred and forty-seven votes. AD did not protest. The Communists did. Medina Angarita was president from 1941-1945, during which AD continued its organizational work in rural areas, facilitated by the political opening, during which political parties were allowed to maneuver with considerable freedom and freedom of speech was protected.

Medina's successor was Romulo Gallegos, the beneficiary of AD's assiduous grassroots organizing, which brought about a civilian-military coup d'état in October 1945, and then an

electoral landslide in 1945 and 1947, which allowed the party to rule until 1948. Gallegos took office in 1948 as the first freely and popularly elected president in Venezuelan history. Support from the countryside was the linchpin of AD's power—as Powell observes, "The electoral supremacy of AD during this period was rooted in its organizational efforts in the rural areas" (Powell, 1971: 68). To firmly control those rural areas, it founded the Federación Campesina Venezolana (Peasant Federation of Venezuela, FCV) in 1947. Its vice-president was Ramón Quijada, then an AD leader. Initially, the FCV had a very radical platform, including a call for the nationalization of property in land and the socialization of agro-commodity production—the radical democratization of the means of production. It proposed a land reform: limiting property size to 150 hectares of first-class land, 300 hectares of second-quality land, or if there was sugar, coffee, cocoa, coconut, sisal, or alternatively mills, refineries, or processing plants present on the property, 5,000 hectares (ha) of first-class land or 20,000 ha of second-class land (Domínguez: 92-93). Still, the existence of peasant radicalism, even organized peasant radicalism, did not mean that agrarian reform was conceived as a radically redistributive process. Instead, it was seen as a capitalist modernization of the countryside. Planners envisaged expropriations, thinking them both necessary and inevitable in order to modernize the Venezuelan agricultural system.

There were no large landholders on the executive committee of the National Agrarian Institute. Probably, this was why the law, as initially drafted, was a "radical" statute, one that ostensibly "went to the root of the agrarian problem in Venezuela": the latifundia (Domínguez: 74-75). Landlords immediately sought to weaken it, working in "tight accord with FEDECAMERAS," the umbrella organization of the business class. They aimed to eliminate the component of the agrarian reform that threatened their property. This attempt brought property owners into conflict with the state, eventually contributing to the 1948 coup d'état that brought General Marcos Perez Jimenez (1948-1958) into power. Powerful landed sectors prevented Gallegos from carrying out a proper agrarian reform or properly instituting a developmental state. Thus the power of the landed oligarchy transmuted into political dictatorship, in a well-established pattern, as the interests of that class came into conflict with a national-popular developmental state that sought to transcend the "rentier, parasitic, backwards, and subordinate" nature of the national economy, while deeply restructuring the state apparatus (Domínguez: 123-124; Moore, 1993).

In 1948, as Pérez Jiménez carried out his coup d'état, the left briefly took to arms. Peasants, including the FCV, partook in armed struggle against the dictatorship, alongside the Venezuelan

Communist Party and Acción Democrática (AD). The junta locked up thousands of political prisoners in its penitentiaries. The FCV played an active part in the struggle, with their exile organizations collaborating with those of AD (Powell, 1971: 94-99). But this collaboration had a price: "leaders of the FCV were bureaucratized, took posts in diverse political organisms….gave support to the objectives proclaimed in the Coliseum theater of Caracas in 1944." This debilitated the FCV's organizational independence, shattering its organic links with the rural sector, and breaking faith with many of the wishes of the campesinos in the countryside, and urban ideologues too. In turn, this overly close alliance would permit the development of "dependent capitalism" in the countryside, allowing "multinational capital to submit rural workers" to its diktat (Domínguez: 93-95). But structures internal to Venezuela also vitiated the FCV's independence—chiefly, a smaller demographic base from whence to draw supporters of radical structural change in the countryside.

2.3. Counterrevolution and its Demise in Revolutionary Currents (1948-1962)

From 1948-1958, there was an agrarian counter-revolution, as the government cut off credit to small farmers and reversed the ginger steps towards land-reform undertaken by the Medina and Gallegos governments. Through administrative and legal chicanery and political fiat, peasants were evicted from their land, contributing to the acceleration in the growth of Venezuelan shantytowns and weakening the rural base from whence AD's radical impetus came (Powell, 1971: 90-94). As Salvador de la Plaza commented, this mass relocation was not due to a mirage like the "attractiveness of urban life," nor to misconceptions about receiving a "higher wage in the oilfields." It was due to "the impoverished conditions into "which this population, through exploitation and expulsion from the countryside, was led. The consequences on national agricultural production would be clear. By the 1961-1963 period, agriculture made up just 7.6 percent of GDP (Werlhof et al, 1982: 83). The absence of political confrontation would not last, although revolt did not interrupt the overall structural trend.

In January 1958, amidst increasingly violent uprisings that Pérez Jiménez could no longer quell by military force, he fled the country. For the next 12 months Caracas remained in revolutionary upheaval, under the nominal interim regime of Wolfgang Larrazábal, also an army officer. The 1959 elections brought Betancourt to power, but he received only 12 percent of the vote in the capital, while the Central University of Venezuela, based in Caracas, was a bastion of

revolutionary sentiment. The campesinos were among those quickening the near-revolution, carrying out constant land invasions in the countryside. Somewhere from 33 to 50 percent of peasant unions engaged in jacqueries. As Powell notes, the widest-scale land re-parceling was the direct result of "intense peasant pressures." A newly installed AD government passed the Agrarian Reform Law, and a neutered FCV, now used to operating through governmental channels and not direct action, called for invasions to cease. Any sober evaluation of the agrarian reform—particularly in its more promiscuously redistributive early years—"must recognize that many government decisions have necessarily been in the nature of after-the-fact acceptance or rejection of the actions of local agrarian syndicates," (Powell, 1971: 141, 110, 111) "propelled by mobilization and campesino pressure through their organizations [unions, leagues] and spontaneous land invasions." Those occupations accord with my basic model: peasants revolt in overt ways when they perceive regime weakness. The murmurings of revolution continued in Caracas in 1960 and 1961, leading to state repression by the Betancourt government (Wickham-Crowley, 1992: 195-197).

But these revolts—some suggest riots—were not coeval with formalized mobilization in the countryside. They could never have linked up in a broad front, as Betancourt, and then Raúl Leoni, appeased the countryside with a sham agrarian reform, and doled out a slurry of oil funds in the cities. The 1959-1962 interim was the great radical push, before the *Punto Fijo*—a power-sharing arrangement between COPEI and AD that essentially enabled the two parties to rotate in power, while simultaneously excluding the left-wing of AD from influencing government policy—congealed. In that period, amidst roiling peasant ferment, 40,000 families were settled, on 1,803,977 ha, roughly seven percent of Venezuela's arable land. Meanwhile, the revolutionary sectors only started resorting to guerrilla tactics in 1962.

Peasant unrest never reached revolutionary proportions, or even the sort of proportions that pushed other nations to civil war or explosive revolt, for several reasons. One was a lack of demographic pressure. As Talton Ray notes, Perez Jimenez's overthrow

> ushered in a new and entirely unprecedented phase of [squatter] development. Restrictions on land settlement were immediately lifted, and families poured out of their crowded *ranchos* to grab up vacant land on the outskirts of the cities as quickly as possible. When *campesino* families still in the countryside heard about the new opportunities, the flow of migration speeded up

> tremendously…. So concentrated was the trend that today more *barrios* trace their origin back to those first twenty-four months following the Revolution than to any other period (Ray, 1969).

The sudden de-compression of demographic pressure must have weakened some of the impetus for land redistribution. Still, peasants were relatively well organized: in 1963, for example, there were 2,289 unions and rural leagues, with over 386,000 members. But they were organized by the FCV. As I get to below, this fact is utterly central (Birou, 1971: 209).

By 1963, the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), an AD offshoot, comprising many of the young leftist *adecos* who had risked their lives in the struggle for democracy while Betancourt was in the relative safety of exile, and the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN), backed by the Communist Party of Venezuela, were active in the countryside, hoping to apply Regis Debray's *foco* theory of agrarian mobilization, wherein a small group of radical guerrillas could detonate an explosive rural uprising. The initial revolts were largely composed of students from metropolitan areas. Later, more peasants would join. At the peak of the guerrillas' power, roughly in 1964, between 1,000 and 2,000 guerrillas were active in the countryside, maybe half of them peasants. Some of them were former members of the armed forces, fleeing the failed military revolts that occurred at the port cities of Carupano and Puerto Cabello in May and June 1962 (Wickham-Crowley, 1992: 66). The guerrilla movements reached their zenith in Lara and Falcón States, both with long traditions of peasant revolt; the former, where Gabaldón had led an earlier peasant rebellion during the Gómez dictatorship, the latter a revolutionary "port of entry" since 1807. There, they were briefly able to set up small statelets of guerrilla government. They would not last long. Nor did the guerrillas in the *llanos* states of Barinas, Apure, and Portuguesa long survive, but not for lack of a history of vibrant anti-colonial and anti-government historical movements. Likelier they faded due to a dearth of social support, and the accompanying equipment and supplies such support could have brought (Wickham-Crowley, 1992: 27, 66, 133).

They did not have social support for two reasons—reasons that relate in some measure to social dynamics in the remainder of the Venezuelan countryside. One, they consciously chose not to actively seek or cultivate it. And two, even if, counter-factually, they had chosen to try to embed their struggle in rural society, they would have had trouble doing so. They chose not to seek it in part due to a peculiar blindness—a condition catalyzed by an affliction with high theory, in this case Debrayian *focismo*. The guerillas thought that social support was not necessary in the early

stages of guerrilla struggle, not yet comprehending the Maoist doctrine of the peasantry as the sea in which peasant fighters swim, with its accompanying assumption of the primacy of social support (Wickham-Crowley, 1992: 313-314; Ahmad, 1968). They thought isolated armed struggle could detonate revolt, a whisper of primal rebellion destroying the legitimacy of the state, perhaps force-growing a revolution. For this analytical error they would pay. Nor were they able to find much succor among the upper- or middle-classes. The peasantry and the working class, the intellectuals and professionals, formed the core of AD strength. Though the guerillas fought on, they could never have won, at least, not in the manner in which they went about their struggle. Likely a populace bloodied by a decade of struggle against a dictatorship was chary about again picking up its rifles. The creation of institutional channels for the population to make demands on the state doubtless made that option seem yet more unappealing. Nor could the peasants and *barrio* dwellers alike know how the decision to opt for institutional politics would play out.

Commenting on the resultant sociological composition of the Venezuelan rural sectors, Gutman and her collaborators write that in broad-stroke terms, the peasant had been turned into a proletarian. Among the campesino sectors that had actually been successfully settled, they predicted, some would soon migrate from or flee their land, subject to the pummeling of market-impacts. Others, a much smaller group, would come to compose the "small rural bourgeoisie," the new "businessmen of the countryside," while there was another much larger cohort that owned minifundia plotlets and concealed its true condition as a "day-laborer in a highly paternalistic relation with the state apparatus" (Gutman and van Kesteren, 1978: 20).

Summing up the failures of the FCV-AD-directed agrarian reform process, they note that

> The necessity of ideologically controlling the agrarian reform process brought about the institutionalization of the peasant movement, through the linkage of its leadership with the government apparatus, as a form of impeding or controlling the pressure and independent expression of the peasants to reach [for] their unsatisfied life necessities (Gutman and van Kesteren, 1978: 24).

As Singelmann adds, peasants came to totally rely on such linkages and the attendant clientelistic distribution of selected benefits. By the time the regime stopped giving them, its piecemeal distribution having allayed the crush of popular pressure, the willingness to move to open confrontation with the landlords and the state through land occupations had largely been

dispersed. The state became the new *patron*, effectively locking country-people into an unfortunate position within the agrarian class-structure. As he concludes, "so far, the new intermediaries have promoted, in the long run, new patterns of incorporating peasants into existing structures of domination; but there has been little change in the generic structure of domination itself" (Singelmann, 1981: 197).

A slightly closer look into the FCV's transition to clientelism and accomodationism helps clarify what occurred, and gives intriguing hints as to why modern peasant movements have developed as they have. As Singelmann observes, as campesinos increasingly engaged in patronage-based relationships with AD, "they would exchange political loyalty from the campesinos for the concrete benefits they would obtain from the government; they could bargain with the government, in turn, for the provision of material benefits to their campesino clientele by delivering votes" (Singelmann, 1981: 154-155). This exchange is in line with more general patterns. As Scott observes, radical peasant organization is often subject to a process of "encapsulation," wherein "radical parties and peasant unions" can become "parallel structures of patronage" rather than clear class-based movements—doubly encapsulated via the FCV's clientelistic brokering with AD, the "strong men," local campesino leaders and small farmers, who channeled the benefits of the reform. This structure precisely exemplifies Scott's analytical framework:

> 'Class-based followings' and clienteles are basically distinguishable from one another. Class-based followers tend to share a collective interest in certain policy goals and to evaluate leaders according to how well they represent those goals and how effectively they work to achieve them. Clients, by contrast, have individual and usually short-term goals that they hope to achieve by their personal attachment to an influential leader (Scott, 1976: 222-223).

Indeed, the organizational failures of formal social movements' have been noted before in social-science literature on mobilization and its pitfalls. Piven and Cloward have written of the recidivist tendency amongst organizers to act "in ways that blunted or curbed the disruptive force which lower-class people were able to mobilize." They find that this tendency manifests itself most tellingly in the experience of formal organizations and their historical development of "internal oligarchy and stasis," and their vulnerability to "external integration with elites." Piven and Cloward emphasize that elites do not respond per se to social organization, but to the insurgent force such organizations symbolize or represent, however imperfectly (Piven and

Cloward, 1979: xxii, xv). One part of this recurrent tendency has been the urge to build stodgily formal bureaucratic organizations when lower-class folk were out in the streets, risking harm, directly defying state or corporate power. Instead of urging strikers to march on capitols, organizers collect dues cards. And instead of urging peasants to occupy more and better land, the FCV in Venezuela urged them to let the government rationally, formally, and bureaucratically carry out an agrarian reform. In this case formal organizers urged that the abandonment of jacqueries, the "outriders of rebellion," in Scott's phrase, encourage peasants to look to the state to distribute land as it—or as those pushing directives upon it—wished (Scott, 1976: 225). It shouldn't shock that as the peasantry's purported leadership tranquillized peasant rebellion, state-action, too, quietly froze.

It is not clear that it is necessarily institutionalization or organization themselves that vitiate radicalism, and they need not lead to moderation, clientelism, lesser-evil-ism or any of the other –ions and –isms that bedevil radical organizations. In the case of the FCV, the main cause was the gradual moderation in the peasant movements' leadership. High-level government officials sought out compliant rural leaders who would kowtow to government demands—mainly a lightening of the burden of land reform, a lessening of redistributive land distribution, and its replacement with the disbursement of oil rent, a far less politically explosive proposition. Government officials found men who would do what they wanted. Founding FCV radicals like Ramón Quijada, two-time president of the Federation, who was to later found the MIR, were pushed aside, hard. As Powell writes, "a decision was therefore made in the highest councils of AD to purge the labor movement of its far leftist leadership, within and without the party."

Effectively, there were to be two peasant movements, one locked into a clientelistic relation with the government and AD, the other, shoved out of power. So the cause of clientelism may have been moderate leadership, but the reason the leadership was so moderate was that more radical sectors were repressed. And they were repressed in part because the state apparatus was still tightly tied to landed elites. Such elites were far more willing to concede money than to concede land. So as we have seen, after the initial burst of redistribution in 1959-1962, agrarian reform ceased to really mean land distribution and mutated into governmental monetary support for farmers (Powell, 1971: 152-154, 178, 195-195). Agrarian reform simply transmuted into one more form of patronage (Powell, 1971: 224-228). This was precisely its objective: the sanitization of serious revolutionary sentiments, the channeling of unrest into institutional

currents, where it could be responsibly blotted out. As Luis José Silva Luongo comments, whatever mild measures were carried out were intended to "satisfy…felt hopes" of moving beyond economic exclusion and to "contain an explosive social and political situation in the countryside" (Luongo, 2000: 368). Armando González goes further, contending that even FCV leaders were well aware that the agrarian reform's goals were to stabilize the Venezuelan political economy and stanch the flow of campesinos to over-full Venezuelan cities (González, 1977: 136). Nevertheless, others conceptualized the reform as a way to fully transform Venezuela into a developmental state, tacitly echoing the East Asian model. As Esteves notes,

> Important sectors of the bourgeoisie…assumed a neutral, indeed supportive position toward the idea of the realization of agrarian reform, a program which in various ways could favor industrial development…Important in their eyes was the possibility of a large supply of agrarian products for the provisioning on industry with raw materials. It was hoped that, from an increased use of modern technology in the agrarian sector, new possibilities would be created for the chemical and farm-machinery industries (Esteves, 1977: 16-20).

The plan aligned closely with the tenets of orthodox Marxism: the depreciation of the demands of the peasants themselves and their relegation to a subsidiary role in larger, elite plans for industrial development and economic transformation. The FCV played along—a long way to fall for a peasant confederation that had once counted among its number peasants desperate for their own land, and that had once spoken of socialism (Gutman and van Kesteren, 1978: 25).

2.4. The AD Agrarian Reform Program

Amidst the twilight of the guerrilla rebellion, agrarian reform proceeded through institutional channels, lacking the pressure created by direct civil-society action. Palliative land reform and repression sauntered along together, and the drive for redistributive agrarian reform went quiet. Rural land ownership was not broadly transformed. From 1963-1971, when the furor of revolt turned into quiet murmurings, the government settled 80,400 families, on 3,944,488 ha of land, a slightly more generous average allotment than that doled out in the first push (Gutman and van Kesteren, 1978: 6). By 1977, it seemed that little had changed: capitalist relations prevailed in the Venezuelan countryside, which contributed little to the national economy. In 1977, agricultural GDP was just seven percent of the national sum, while twenty percent of the economically active population was employed in agriculture. Agriculture represented just five percent of total exports, while the economy's overall structural dependency on petroleum rent deepened: the distribution

of oil rent propped up an internationally uncompetitive cattle sector, for example (Gutman and van Kesteren, 1978: 4). This is significant. Livestock production—like petroleum production—is capital-intensive and requires slight labor inputs. So as livestock production increased, there was little absorption of the workforce. Meanwhile fertilizers, pesticides, machines, and an elevation of per-worker productivity rates deepened this trend, also tying Venezuelan agricultural production into a worldwide market, making it yet more capital-intensive and now with a sector vulnerable to a sudden weakening of the Venezuelan currency since agriculture had become dependent on imported inputs. Meanwhile, urban salaries and food commodity prices remained low, further propping up the rentier-state, which was able to ensure subsistence-level incomes without diverting much of its resources to that ad hoc social insurance scheme. At the same time, capitalist sectors oriented production toward specific production lines, mostly monocultures and livestock, while allowing wanton enclosure of public lands (Gutman and van Kesteren, 1978: 5).

Such enclosure and the accelerating penetration of capitalist farms in the wake of an ostensibly redistributive agrarian reform did not pass unnoticed. Centralized in a bureaucratic apparatus, the process was marked by an "absence of a mechanism to secure and obligate" peasant participation in the reform process, essentially creating a condition of state "paternalism." Great sections of the redistributed land were not precisely redistributed, in the normal sense of the word. They were, more precisely, distributed or privatized—land that had theretofore been public was enclosed. As Gutman and van Kesteren comment, "State action, deliberately or not, facilitated the creation of new *fincas* of great extensions of land which was in large part the nation's," through which 73 percent of the state's land was ultimately distributed to private actors, with deleterious effects for future efforts at agrarian reform, since the option to simply funnel off state land to private proprietors, once exercised, would not be so handily available in the future. Likewise, careless grants of land were, it appears in retrospect, scarcely accompanied by real efforts to distribute title as well, further complicating future efforts at agrarian redistribution.

Along with all of that, it is not at all clear that the measures taken led to a great increase in agricultural production on the distributed or re-distributed land: production on land disbursed in the course of the agrarian reform represented ten percent of total production in 1970, and just eight percent of the total in 1974. Many analysts concluded soon after that the "the agrarian reform…has contributed to the formation of a rural proletariat," a fact borne out by subsequent

rural censuses, which don't show a great redistribution of land to the country's campesinos (Gutman and van Kesteren, 1978: 8-10).

A glance at the overall agricultural census data supports the general contention. From 1961 to 1971, plots smaller than 10 hectares changed from being 66.6 percent of the total number of plots to 59.4 percent, but their percentage of the total cultivated surface slipped from 2.9 to 2.2 percent—their average size shrank sharply. Meanwhile, from 1961 to 1971, plots from 10 to 100 hectares came to comprise 30.6 percent of the total number of properties, increasing from 25.5 percent while their total land area went up to 8.9 percent, from 7.9 percent. These are modest changes, which make a bit more sense when aggregated and juxtaposed in a bi-modal model: plots smaller than 100 hectares vs. those larger than 100 hectares. Then it becomes clear that the 1961 agrarian reform did very little—perhaps nothing—in terms of real redistribution of land. In 1961, plots smaller than 100 hectares occupied 10.8 percent of the landmass and came to 92.1 percent of the total number of plots, while those larger than 100 hectares were 91.2 percent of the total landmass and just 7.9 percent of the total number of plots.

Even those aggregate numbers conceal the extent of rural inequity. In 1961, the average size of parcels smaller than 10 hectares was about 3.6 hectares. One can do little more than speculate, but if even 10 percent of this group had between 9 and 10 hectares of land, the average size of the remaining parcels would have been 3 hectares. One can continue playing with the numbers, but the point is clear. Distribution was enormously unequal and it was little changed in 1971: plots smaller than 100 hectares formed 90 percent of the total number of parcels, and 11.1 percent of the total cultivated surface, while those larger than 100 hectares were 10 percent of the total number of parcels and 88.9 percent of the total cultivated surface. Agricultural production statistics undergird the thesis: while production increased over 100 percent between 1957 and 1969, the first flush of the agrarian reform contributing greatly to capitalist agricultural production, but in 1972 domestic production stalled. In 1976 food would be thirteen percent of total imports, while the tally for food imports costs went up by a factor of ten between 1966 and 1977 (Werlhof et al, 1982: 83).

Table 2.1. Land Ownership Changes, 1961-1971

Size of the Plot (Hectares)	1961	1971

	No. Plots	Surface (HA)	No. Plots	Surface (HA)
Less than 10	66.6	2.9	59.4	2.2
10 to less than 100	25.5	7.9	30.6	8.9
100 to less than 1,000	5.1	17.5	7.0	22.2
1,000 to less than 5,000	1.1	26.6	1.4	29.2
5,000 and more	.3	45.1	.3	37.6
Landless	1.4	0	1.3	0
Total percentage	100	100	100	100
Total number	320,094	26,004,860	287,919	26,470,134

Source: Agrarian Census, Given Years (Delahaye, 2003: 19).

2.5. The Political Economy of Venezuelan Agriculture, 1945-1980

The creation of a petty-bourgeois class of Venezuelan farmers proceeded along with the conversion of the Venezuelan agriculture structure into one both dependent on state funds for survival as well as one tied even more tightly into the world market. It also become more capital-intensive and so campesinos, increasingly bereft of opportunities in the countryside, continued to flow into the cities. The Perez Jimenez dictatorship had set in motion demographic trends which would be hard to reverse, and that would continue through the late 1990s. These policies exacerbated the already-predictable consequences of the initial petroleum boom (Araghi, 1995: 347-348, 356). Such a pattern is precisely what we see in Venezuela. Agriculture from 1945 onwards became dependent and clientelistic: first, both peasants and landlords became dependent on state largesse for their survival, and second, peasants came to be locked into clientelistic relations with urban political parties. This dynamic held little space for radical unrest—the state co-opted peasants and helped create market conditions wherein they would flee to the cities, and was itself used by powerful landed interests for their own purposes.

Part of this process involved initial governmental protection of internal markets. From 1945-1983, the government shielded them through the use of tariffs and subsidies, while making agricultural loans through the Venezuelan Development Corporation, which made immense capital investments in both industry and agriculture. In some activities the state took a direct hand: sugar mills, for instance, and the establishment of a National Agrarian Institute to administer the agrarian laws that were passed in the late 1940s (Llambí and Cousins, 1989: 113, 123). Meanwhile the construction of highways continued apace, not merely to enable oil-extraction but also to facilitate exports from the burgeoning capitalist agricultural sector. Additionally, the middle-class demand for foodstuffs assisted the post-1950 development of large capitalist farms, mostly outside the Andes. Andean farms generally remained small, a point to which I will return (Roseberry, 1983: 123-125, 136).

Empirical evidence from Yaracuy supports the general thesis. There, sugarcane and maize were the major crops, overwhelmingly produced as monocultures. By 1978, production for local consumption had dropped off by 50 percent from its peak, while local markets evaporated. Sugar was sent out to regional or national processing centers, whereupon it was returned as refined sugar or processed corn meal, instead of the more-nutritious and capable-of-being-locally-produced brown sugar or hand-milled corn. The processed goods had the merit of being both more expensive and having their value added elsewhere, enabling the further extraction of a surplus from those working or living in Yaracuy, while limiting local backwards-and-forwards linkages within the economy, the prerequisite for sustainable rural development. Furthermore, in 1978, 40 percent of the people in Yaracuy were wage-laborers, and another 40 percent sold their agricultural production directly on the market and were thus effectively wage-laborers—as they directly relied on the market for continued social reproduction, in a structural context in which reliance on the market meant vulnerability to the incipient neo-liberal structural adjustment programs that would soon lacerate campesino livelihoods. In that sense, this was a regression even from colonial slavery, when subsistence production continued on *conuco* plots. Both systems of providing food kept down wage costs, whether indirectly—as slaves could be kept for less, not needing to be fed by their keepers—or directly, as workers could be paid less if they sold their produce (at undervalued rates due to the lack of commercialization opportunities) and used the money to supplement meager wages (Werlhof et al, 1982: 87-91). In 1982, nationally, cane-

workers comprised 600,000 of the total rural work force. Additionally, as von Werlhof and the other researchers observe,

> Given the scarcity of opportunities for remunerated work, some women, together with their children, see no alternative but to 'return' to human history's most primitive stage, hunting (stealing) and gathering (searching for edibles, etc., in rubbish heaps), and this in a region where nobody went hungry ten or twenty years ago.

Such immiseration can not be understood by reference to "proletarians" or "semi-proletarians," structural Marxist categories for which such workers are a rough and poor fit, but as "landless" and "semi-peasants," for they certainly believed themselves to be such and "behave[d] as such: they occupy land and try to become peasants again," reminding us once more of the importance of peasantness, not only as a structural category but as a cultural self-understanding, drawing attention once again to the importance of a notion of class as something that emerges during social struggle (Werlhof et al, 1982: 96).

The enlargement of the rural proletariat went hand-in-hand with the creation of a capitalist-style rural labor market— "the agrarian reform seems essentially to have served to keep cheap labor in the countryside—a labor force that is needed as temporary wage labor by middle-sized and large producers and is everywhere scarce." (Werlhof et al, 1982: 99-100). Inadequate or non-existent price supports for nascent and vulnerable smallholding producers led to the massive abandonment of newly gifted land grants. Analysts estimate that some 27 percent of the distributed land had been abandoned by 1970. In some states, the rate was far higher. In Managas and Zulia, for example, the desertion rate was over 45 percent. A secondary cause of the reform's failure was that much of the distributed land was of extremely poor quality. The phenomenon is not unknown among other historical agrarian reforms—many top-down reforms have distributed the lowest-quality land to poverty-stricken tillers. A reform handled by mid-level technocrats, attentive to the wishes of a landed elite, will perforce be unlikely to be particularly attentive to questions of land-quality and the securing of high-quality arable land for the reform's purported beneficiaries (Delahaye, 2003: 13).

In addition to all the problems discussed above, smaller-scale land-recipients were affected by a lack of opportunities for small-scale commercialization of their crops as well as a lack of technical assistance. Entrepreneurial agricultural sectors were generally the main parties that

gained from the reform as well as from state agricultural promotion efforts; they received disproportionate shares of state-channeled petroleum-rent, funneled to credit and irrigation projects (Gutman and van Kesteren, 1978: 17-18). Ultimately, in this as in other cases, an agrarian reform directed from above and not from below led to the beneficiaries being those who occupied privileged positions above as much as—if not more than—those below. Conscious design in this respect was readily apparent. For example, landlords would frequently provoke invasions to catalyze state expropriation of marginal or sub-optimal land, or dubiously titled land, of which there was much. In 1965, according to the President of the Zulia Agricultural Society, over 5,000 *fincas* were without title; in Portuguesa, only 1/20th had adequate, to the letter-of-the-law, legal title (Gutman and van Kesteren, 1978: 15).

Furthermore, these factors combined with larger structural forces to reverse any slight redistribution that had occurred in the early years of the agrarian reform. Starting in 1973, amidst mounting inflationary pressures, capital, domestic and foreign, moved to its traditional Latin American safe-harbor: land, which does not lose value during bouts of inflation (Gutman and van Kesteren, 1978: 17). Clearly, at least within its first ten years, or during the twelve years in which the state directed the agrarian reform, rather than responding to proto-revolutionary land jacqueries, the agrarian reform did little to remedy rural inequality. Nor did it stabilize or re-balance a rural-urban imbalance that was already continentally unsurpassed. This should not surprise since addressing inequality or restoring the city-country equilibrium was not the point of the reform.

Summing up, Olivier Delahaye notes that the colonization of the existing agricultural frontier—a bit of a euphemism for the distribution of public-lands—went alongside tacit acceptance of large-scale occupations of what public land had not been re-distributed during the reform. The emphasis was on an industrial model, increasingly using heavy petro-chemical inputs and relying on extensive rather than intensive cultivation, planting on large numbers of plots rather than concentrating on improving per-hectare productivity. Food-based agriculture was located increasingly far from the metropolitan centers, further adding to the inability of peasants to find outlets for their produce. Only large-scale capitalists could afford the transportation and storage costs associated with ferrying agricultural goods to the hyper-concentrated conurbations of the Venezuelan coastal strip (Delahaye, 2001: 91).

Such policies and outcomes differed little from those that took place across the continent in much the same time-span, as capitalism penetrated deeper into the Latin American countryside from the late 60s through the 1990s, as the developmental state, moribund, eventually died—Phoenix-like, a phenomenon to which we will return. As Cristóbal Kay notes, these years bore witness to the large-scale neo-liberalization of the countryside, the parcellization and de-collectivization of landed property in those cases where thoroughgoing agrarian reform had taken place, as well as the mass creation of land-markets, leading to the significant strengthening of the capitalist and entrepreneurial sector at the expense of the peasant sector (Kay, 2000: 129-130). Market-led agrarian reconstruction is a rather technical way to describe a process in which stronger parties leverage economic heft into the systemic concentration of land ownership (Borras, 2007).

Kay adds that an increasing percentage of rural workers, continent-wide, lived in urban peripheries. This is a layered irony, because as rural shack-communities and shanty towns proliferated, the urban-rural divide was blurred, all the more reason to expand the narrowly-structural Marxist understanding of the word "peasant" and adopt a more capacious or elastic definition. Meanwhile what was left of the traditional peasantry was caught in a pincer—increasing rural unemployment as capital-intensive agriculture replaced labor-intensive agriculture, and minifundization of their plots on the other, casting them in a purgatory of "permanent semi-proletarianization" (Kay, 2000: 131-134).

Such shifts were part of a global pattern, what Farshad Araghi calls a process of "global de-peasantization." In 1950, 29 percent of the world's population and 16 percent in the third world were city dwellers. But amidst an efflorescence of minifundia from 1950-1980, small-commodity-producers' living standards were globally pummeled, inducing waves of rural-urban migration. In Latin America, the percentage of families living in the countryside declined from 50.6 to 35.3 between 1960 and 1980. From 1950 to 1961, there was a relative decline in rural population, but from 1961 onward, that decline became absolute. More broadly, from 1925-1950, just 10 percent of the peasantry migrated into the cities, 100 million peasants, while from 1950-1975, 230 million swelled the city centers and peripheries, a movement accelerated by the widespread removal of price supports, farm subsidies, and the devaluation of national currencies, especially beginning in 1973 (Araghi, 1995: 356).

This was characteristic of what McMichael calls the second "food regime," lasting from the early 1950s to the 1970s, during which developmental states tried to institute national agricultural systems, attempting to replicate those dominant in the metropolitan centers. These efforts restructured the social systems of third-world states in relatively predictable patterns. Surplus food flooded out from subsidized US agricultural production, making peasants migrate into cities. The developmental states "internalised the model of national agro-industrialisation, adopting Green Revolution technologies, and instituting land reform designed only to dampen peasant unrest and extend market relations into the countryside," not to make small scale production viable (McMichael, 2009b: 1,141). The profound penetration of capitalist market relations into the countryside—on the level of land-markets, commodity-production, and wages—would have negative effects on the most exposed sectors of the rural population.

2.6. The Impacts of Reliance on the Market

Delahaye compellingly suggests that the market had been the motor of agrarian change in Venezuela for decades, along with its handmaiden: state intervention or strategic non-intervention, up through the late 1990s, as property turned over and concentrated at a torrid clip. The land market hosted a brisk trade: four percent of Venezuela's land changed hands annually, roughly 1,260,000 ha per year. Through this process, the market effectively carried out an agrarian-reform-in-reverse, precisely on the lines laid out by Kay. Delahaye breaks up this post-1973 period into two parts, surveying the situation in the countryside up nearly to the Chávez years. From 1961 to 1985—while a juridical agrarian reform was purportedly ongoing—plots smaller than 50 hectares went from 8.7 percent of the total productive land-mass to 7.8 percent, while those from 50-1000 hectares went from 24.3 to 34.3 percent, and those over 1000 hectares dropped from 67.9 percent to 57.9 percent of the total amount of arable land.

All this happened along with a transition from a mildly redistributionist agrarian reform to one with rather different objectives: from 1958-1973, an average of 353,333 ha were redistributed annually, while an average of 0 hectares were regularized—legally registered. From 1974-1982, 161,111 hectares were distributed annually, and 277,777 regularized, while from 1983-1990, just 80,375 hectares were distributed annually—.25 percent of the total cultivable land—while 262,500 hectares were regularized. As Delahaye notes, first, from 1982 to 1990 the market "regularized" agrarian property, whereupon "regularization validate[d] a posteriori the action of

the market" (Delahaye, 1993: 120). True in its way, but a market fostered either through inadvertence or design by the state—markets can also produce fairer, more egalitarian outcomes.

Other evidence, too, points to market capitalism's deep impact on rural tenancy and rural land distribution. The numbers of mortgages and rentals shot up in relation to the number of outright sales, quadrupling and quintupling, when we compare the 1958-1974 interval to 1982-1990. Other information also suggests large scale privatization of formerly public land—for example, according to survey information, increasing percentages of land shifted from the category of "very precise" to "imprecise," in reference to its borders, while similar shifts were evident from "imprecise" to "precise," according to land-sale records in the Zamora district, suggesting it has been *de facto* and then *de jure* privatized. This did not elicit very harsh rebukes from the state when its coffers were swollen with oil-rent, or even as that treasure disappeared. Rent seeking dies hard, as does a mentality viewing the land merely as an obstacle or vault, sitting atop or storing safe the country's real patrimony: oil (Karl, 1997: 71-185). So it was of little surprise when the Director of the Central Office of the Agricultural Land Registry announced in 1991 that the state had no idea where its land was. It didn't care (Karl, 1997: 126).

The social identity of the owners of the land also changed over this period —land became a safe house for metropolitan wealth, secure from inflation, a recurring theme in Venezuelan and Latin American agricultural history. In almost every district surveyed—Zamora, Zaraza, Turen, Colon, and Paez—the average size of land purchased by people living in Caracas was far above the average size of land parcels purchased in a given district. In most districts, the same pattern prevailed for land purchased by owners residing in state capitals, and in all cases, the data showed the same pattern for foreign purchasers. The majority of areas surveyed also showed that owners of plots smaller than 50 hectares received between 1/3rd and 1/20th of the average price-per-hectare in the region. Market based land redistribution was plainly taking away land from the direct control of those who farmed it, and vesting it in private hands, hands belonging to capitalists or capitalist firms based in regional, national, or international centers (Karl, 1997: 123-124).

Again, statistics comparing land ownership in 1971 to that in 1985 bear the point out. In the face of ostensibly active redistributive efforts, 90 percent of parcels on 11.1 percent of the land, for plots smaller than 100 hectares, became 89.1 percent of the total number of plots, on 12.1 percent

of the total cultivable land. Meanwhile a slight diminution in the total land concentrated in plots larger than 5,000 hectares had its counterpoint in both an increase—from 22.2 percent to 30 percent—of the land being held in plots between 100 and 1000 hectares, as well as a far more telling statistic: an increase in both the total number of agricultural plots, from 287,919 to 381,276, and in the total amount of land calculated to be potentially cultivable, from 26,470,134 hectares to 31,278,155 hectares.

Nearly all of the increase in potentially cultivable land was probably due to the continued regularization of previously tenuous land-holdings, because of Decree 236, promulgated in 1979, whereby between then and 1993, 5,630,303 hectares of land were regularized. What this "regularization" meant in terms of elucidating the on-the-ground agrarian structure is clear when we look to the evidence: while there were about 180,000 parcels smaller than 10 hectares in 1971, and while that number remained in relative terms constant, in absolute terms there were 240,000 plots smaller than 10 hectares by 1985, an increase of one-third. Clearly, the latifundia-minifundia dyad prevailed, a pattern well established in the social science literature on Latin American agrarian structure, *pace* Delahaye's claims that the statistics evince "a clear de-concentration of ownership" (Delahaye, 2003: 23). Minifundia throughout the Venezuelan countryside paralleled the pattern in Yaracuy, wherein campesinos split their time between itinerant or seasonal fieldwork on local estates and twilight labor on their personal *conucos*, letting the landlord offload the burden of ensuring social reproduction to the campesino. Other campesinos were almost landless, and would then have to work yet harder on rural estates, or subsist on informal urban labor, pooling familial resources in an ongoing struggle for subsistence—for survival.

The increasing concentration in land ownership, the separation between those who owned the land and those who farmed it, and the growth of commercial farming led to an ever-increasing reliance on the state and its oil-revenues to prop up the capitalist farming sector, and a fortiori the petty-capitalist farming sector, and, most of all, the landless laborers working on large-capitalist farms, with no savings or other employment should

Table 2.2. Land Ownership Changes, 1971-1985

Size of the Plot (Hectares)	1971		1985	
	No. Plots	Surface (HA)	No. Plots	Surface (HA)
Less than 10	59.4	2.2	60.2	2.3
10 to less than 100	30.6	8.9	28.9	9.8
100 to less than 1,000	7.0	22.2	8.8	30.0
1,000 to less than 5,000	1.4	29.2	1.3	28.9
5,000 and more	0.3	37.6	0.2	29.0
Landless	1.3	0	0.6	0
Total percentage	100	100	100	100
Total number	287,919	26,470,134	381.276	31.278.155

Source: Agricultural Census, Given years (Delahaye, 2003).

Their bosses suddenly run out of funds with which to pay them. When one is leaning heavily on a crutch, its removal tends to make you fall hard, and the weak or those leaning hardest on a crutch will fall all the harder. This was precisely the plight of Venezuelan agriculture during the period of structural adjustment that began at the end of 1983. Even before then, the Venezuelan agricultural system was in "profound crisis": production was collapsing; the over-all cultivated area was being pared down while para-state enterprises, like physical state-owned infrastructure for food processing or food storage was being shuttered. Simultaneously, state agricultural spending was disappearing, and amidst the ascending debt-crisis, there was a liquidity crunch: farmers had nowhere to turn for credit (Gutiérrez, 1995: 55).

2.6. The Impacts of Neo-liberal Policies

With the onset of the global debt crisis, the state first put in place a heterodox adjustment package from 1984-1988, suddenly opening the funding spigot. Production went up throughout that time period, but at the same time, reliance on state-support increased, too. So when the government imposed neo-liberal austerity measures upon the populace in 1988, the agricultural sector was hammered hard. From 1988-1993, per-capita agricultural production plummeted. Gross production decreased by 3 percent a year. From 1988-1992, measured in calories-per-person, food production decreased 5.9 percent year-on-end (Gutiérrez et al, 1995: 7-8). Subsidies were reduced or eliminated, the exchange rate was allowed to float, and markets were privatized or forced open (Gutiérrez et al, 1995: 46-47). Tariff walls tumbled down, and the prices of agricultural commodities concomitantly decreased (Gutiérrez et al, 1995: 58-59). As Gutierrez observes, "the reduction in public agricultural expenditures in both absolute and relative terms, in a moment that demanded strong state support, accelerated the process of re-conversion and structural change in agricultural production." In some cases government support dropped over 80 percent (Gutiérrez et al, 1995: 62-63).

Meanwhile inflation shot up, and the spigot of public agricultural credit was shut off. Costs of production rose—fertilizer prices increased as the subsidy nearly disappeared—and aggregate investment plummeted (Natera, 1995: 133). As Gutiérrez concludes, "'Orthodox' adjustment, put in place from 1989…set off an important fall in agricultural production and in the levels of employment, given the new macroeconomic context…one of the most important conclusions…[is] the necessity of intensifying a process of re-conversion of Venezuelan agriculture with a greater state presence" (Gutiérrez, 1993: 71, 14). A conclusion, we shall see, that did not escape the framers of the country's new constitution. So through the late 80s and early 90s, capitalism continued its penetration of the Venezuelan countryside, again in line with the general pattern Bryceson identifies: in the wake of the Uruguay Round of the World Trade Organizations (WTO) negotiations, peasants and smallholders were forced to compete against global, subsidized agri-business, as major commodities experienced deteriorating terms-of-trade (Bryceson, 2000: 307). As she continues, "in this post neo-liberal era, the national governments" of the 3rd world "are largely powerless to implement policies to ensure peasants' survival as agrarian producers. Thus as the processes of de-agrarianization and de-peasantization combine,

the vulnerability of peasants deepens" (Bryceson, 2000: 323). Or they're simply pushed off the land.

Bryceson's argument, written at the turn of the millennium, shows its age. Post-neoliberalism—a strange locution—always is and was filtered through the prism of state policies and state power. The state has a certain control over that prism. It can and could refract and refocus neo-liberalism, reproduce it cleanly, or occlude it. China, for example, throughout this interim, suggested one path. In Venezuela in the mid-1990s, the government chose another, encouraging the further hollowing-out of its nearly non-existent domestic agricultural base. Transnational agricultural corporations steadily and increasingly collaborated with local businesses, locking them into international food production chains and encouraging commodity specialization.

Despite the common—and correct—conception that Venezuela has a denuded agricultural base, in 1992-1993 thirty-four of the top 100 companies in Venezuela, measured by gross sales, were in the agro-industrial sectors, while ten of the twenty companies with the most employees were engaged in food-production or affiliated enterprises, squeezing out small and medium-sized producers (Barbosa, 1996: 3-4, 8). In the corn, cocoa, and dairy markets, for example, one firm controlled 60 percent of the national market share—two firms, over 80 percent. In local markets, often one firm literally controlled 100 percent of the "purchases of a given commodity in a particular geographic region." A lack of access to storage facilities further vitiated farmers' power, as did the privatization of previously publicly held storage facilities. Forced to immediately sell their crops to processors, and with no place to store them in order to wait out or time their sales to the vicissitudes of price fluctuations, they had little bargaining power to extract higher payments from processors. Furthermore, in tropical conditions, their harvest was eminently perishable (Barbosa, 1996: 12-13, 15).

Small producers were actually caught in a double-squeeze: the evisceration of the state-support network for agriculture on one side, and on the other, forced competition with subsidized metropolitan industrial farming. Cruz Hernandez Quijada, president of FEDEAGRO (La Confederación Nacional de Asociaciones de Productores Agropecuarios, the National Confederation of Associations of Agricultural Producers), said as much, noting that "while there could be several causes for the crisis afflicting our agricultural sector, fundamentally, the major one" was that Venezuelan agriculture was now forced to compete with a "highly subsidized one

like that of Europe or the United States" (Natera, 1995: 136). Far more telling was another statement, from FEDENAGA (Federación Nacional de Ganaderos de Venezuela, the Rancher's Association of Venezuela): "facing this food crisis and social injustice, we must avoid what is occurring in the south of Mexico where *campesinos* moved to action by non-conformity [seriously] and the lack of social justice have rebelled against the government" (Natera, 1995: 183). He could not have been unaware of the degree of campesino discontent, nor the degree of structural marginalization afflicting poorer sectors of the rural population. What likely went unforeseen was that four decades of systematic institutional sidelining of the poor would soon reverse, as soon enough, some born from those social sectors would arrive in the presidency. The 1997 agrarian census puts the changes from 1985 into extremely vivid perspective.

Table 2.3. Land Ownership Changes, 1985 to 1997

Size of the Plot (Hectares)	1985		1997	
	No. Plots	Surface (HA)	No. Plots	Surface (HA)
Less than 10	60.2	2.3	63.4	3.2
10 to less than 100	28.9	9.8	27.6	13.6
100 to less than 1,000	8.8	30.0	8.0	36.8
1,000 to less than 5,000	1.3	28.9	0.8	27.1
5,000 and more	0.2	29.0	0.1	19.3
Landless	0.6	0		
Total percentage	100	100	100	100
Total number	381,276	31,278,155	500,979	30,071,192

Source: Agrarian Censuses, Given Years (Delahaye, 1993: 19).

From 1985 through 1997, there was, in a sense, a de-concentration of land ownership: the number of great landed latifundia shrunk sharply, moving from occupying 29 percent of Venezuela's

landed surface to a bit less than 20 percent. Meanwhile farms between 0 and 1000 hectares showed great growth, moving from occupying 42 to 53 percent of the land. But re-jiggering the statistics a bit, it's not at all clear if the redistribution was really a move towards equality in much more than a literal sense. The average size of farms smaller than 10 hectares slipped from 3.13 hectares to 3.03 hectares, while once again, if we stipulate that 10 percent of such smaller farms were at the high end of the distribution, the numbers look bleaker, especially as the number of census-recognized farms had increased from some 380,000 to over 500,000 in the twelve-year interim. It seems likely, as we've seen, that most of these farms were smaller units that were in turn regularized, tiny plots, far less than enough to satisfy the corn, bean, and milk needs of a Venezuelan family, given the antiquated technological state of small rural production.[13]

2.7. The Rise of Chávez

FEDENAGA's augury would prove correct, as town and country alike erupted. In order to properly analyze the reasons underlying that eruption, one must look back a bit further than the political victory of Chávez and his ascendance to Miraflores. And it is necessary to look back further, too, than the failed coup d'état of February 4 1992, though this was a major hinge-point. I've already looked back to the social currents that erupted during Venezuela's fleeting flirtation with revolution in 1958-1960. But the critical moment is 1989, and the processes that both led to Chávez's electoral victory as well as the simultaneous coalescing of social movements that created him and put him into office. Political opportunity theory suggests that movements emerge out of perceived changes in the vulnerability or repressive power of a government, or the creation of a more propitious environment for initiatives from below. At a broad-stroke, this explanation is pretty good. But sudden state onslaughts can perversely create political openings, too, when the state over-reaches. In the case of the Caracazo, the Venezuelan government went too far. By killing hundreds of its poor citizens, it peeled off what was left of the Punto Fijo regime's veneer of legitimacy, which had theretofore institutionalized the structural violence embedded in Venezuelan class relations.

[13] The question of how much land a given family actually needs to support itself is far from settled. Intensive agriculture, using the most sophisticated agro-ecological models, presuming maximal soil fertility, could produce enough food for a family on a hectare or less—an academic point, since Venezuelan farmers did not have access to such technologies in 1997.

That violence, captured in the euphemism "neo-liberal restructuring," which rumbled through the Venezuelan countryside starting in the late 1980s, had an urban counter-point: the Caracazo and the subsequent political maneuvering that led to Chávez's 1997 victory. This event is particularly important because, as George Ciccariello-Maher argues, the Caracazo was the foundational moment of the MVR (Movimiento por la Quinta Republica, the Fifth Republic Movement), the political vehicle that would enable the Venezuela lower classes to move decisively beyond Punto Fijo. As Ciccariello-Maher writes,

> Politically, the Caracazo represented the death knell of the old regime. Former Chavista vice president José Vicente Rangel put it clearly: "Venezuelan history split into two." Juan Contreras, head of the revolutionary Simón Bolívar Coordinator, argues that it was the Caracazo in 1989 rather than the pair of coup attempts in 1992 (the first led by Chávez) that definitively destroyed the corrupt "partyocracy." And the proof of this is the fact that those coups were the direct result of the 1989 rebellion, or as Contreras puts it, "Chávez didn't create the movements, we created him" (Ciccariello-Maher, 2007).

Ciccariello-Maher characterizes the Caracazo as the "first shot across the bow of neo-liberalism," before Seattle, before Chiapas. Despite its potentially misleading name, the Caracazo only *began* in Caracas. In 1989, departing President Jaime Lusinchi of AD passed the presidency to Carlos Andres Perez, who promptly put in place a structural adjustment package at IMF behest. The package contained the usual assortment of measures: reductions in state employment, state loans, subsidies, tariffs and price controls. One part of the package was the raising of fuel prices, theretofore extremely subsidized, to bring them closer to the world-market price. Such a measure was "rational" according to the precepts of the international financial institutions. In Venezuela, the measure was heretical—rending the "bond that united the body politic" as the owner of the "nation's natural body," in Fernando Coronil's words, it broke faith with the "moral bond of protection between state and people." Higher gas prices meant higher fares on the *por puestos*, the buses upon which *caraqueños* move about the city. And the city exploded. The fury soon spread to 19 urban centers—essentially every major city in Venezuela. The government called in the army to squelch the rebellion. It did so, gunning down hundreds, perhaps as many as 1,500 or more, of the lower-class Venezuelans spilling into Caracas's posh valleys from their peripheral shanties. Similar dynamics were afoot in other regions. The Caracazo was national in scope, reflecting broad, class-based discontent with the eroding economic underpinnings of the *Punto*

Fijo regime. As Coronil concludes, “Lasting five days, this was the largest and most violently repressed revolt against austerity measures in Latin American history.” It was the foundational moment of the un-born Bolivarian Republic (Coronil, 1997: 375-376).

The ideological effects of the Caracazo ricocheted around the Venezuelan political landscape, here inspiring fury, there reflection, and in 1992, revolt in the form of two failed military coups d’état. The Caracazo profoundly traumatized the country, clarifying that there was no political path, at least along the routes trod for the previous 30-plus years, marked “AD” and “COPEI.” The suppression set off ferment in the countryside. Peasant leaders held a series of mobilizations and informal congresses, focusing on the necessity of creating a “space for common struggle” (Uzcategui, 2008). Students from the fields, radicalized by the Caracazo, were subject to an organizing campaign in the early 1980s by radicals, who remained active in rural regions, and were particularly successful in organizing high-school students. The expansion of public education enabled by the Venezuelan oil-boom, with its attendant construction of a large-middle class—now decimated—meant that “some of the students are sons and daughters of a proletarianizing peasantry” (Roseberry, 1983: 190). Some of these students were then part of a “campesino mass” attending metropolitan universities, students of agrarian sciences, of sociology and political science, enriched through educational opportunities at the University of the Andes, or at institutions in Táchira, and the Experimental School, in the *llanos*.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, such student came to serve as links between the city and the countryside, an organic intelligentsia in the Gramscian sense. These groups merged with other currents: leaders associated with the guerrilla movements of the 1960s, former members of the PCV, still radicalized, but chastened by the failure of vanguardism in the 60s and 70s, and also chafing for political influence, due to their having been excluded from clientelistic incorporation in the *rentista* political system. This exclusion was in large measure their choice—self-exclusion. These sectors had deliberately stayed outside of the FCV, as the most radical peasants and peasant leaders certainly did through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, not wishing to be part of its accomodationist politics (Gutman and van Kesteren, 1978: 25-26). Other lineages of the FNCEZ—the National Peasant Front Ezequiel Zamora—included groups successfully co-opted by the state during the extended process of redistribution and regularization that wended its way through rural Venezuela through the 1980s. They were alienated by the destruction of Venezuelan agriculture in the 1980s, as BANDAGRO (Banco Desarrollo Agropecuario SA, the

Bank for Agricultural Development) was eliminated, marginalizing small and medium producers, squeezing the peasantry onto increasingly smaller parcels of minifundia land. The lack of credit had palpable impacts. The impression in the FNCEZ leadership was that the countryside was the "most abandoned sector," and that the mid-90s agrarian crisis simply "broke" the peasantry, "returning them to misery" (Uzcategui, 2008).

The structural conditions of the time also affected a third group of leaders in the ongoing process of rural mobilization and dissent, a "frontier group, strugglers for human rights," who were tied closely to their *campesino* roots. Some members of this last group almost certainly would have been exposed to the radical Marxist ideologies of the Colombian FARC rebels, whether through indirect ideological diffusion or through direct contact. The Venezuelan-Colombian frontier is a wild, over-grown, poorly monitored border. There's little question that both before and during the Chávez administration, FARC rebels have strayed over the border. Such ideological diffusion need not have clear or clearly discernible effects, and its traces may indeed be next-to-impossible to reconstruct, in the absence of detailed ethnographic work. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to suggest that it was there, and it could have hardened or sharpened campesino radicalism in border regions. The lack of evidence of guerrilla agitation is, likewise, not the slightest proof-of-absence of such ideological inter-penetration. The memory of the failed guerrilla insurgencies in Venezuela—as well as their increasingly palpable failures in Colombia at this time—would have made peasants, even fiercely leftist sectors, hesitant about insurrection, particularly after the dousing of the MVR national-popular 1992 coup d'état. Hesitant about insurrection, but by no means wary of organization—throughout this time, a "process of permanent construction" (Uzcategui, 2008) was ongoing in the Venezuelan countryside, especially after the FCV "splintered" in the wake of Chávez's 1997 electoral victory and failed attempts to restructure the Federation along lines more congenial to radical social transformation (Martinez et al, 2009: 49).[14]

In 1998, peasants began to come together in slightly more formal ways, forming the Revolutionary Campesino Front Simon Bolívar (FCRSB), in more-or-less direct reaction to Chávez's election. As their political opportunities opened up, their relation to the surrounding field of power suddenly shifted jarringly, as a man from the countryside, his talk tinted with

[14] Some of the above is clearly speculative. I should add here that the authors are also *editors*, since this is a collection of interviews, extremely carefully collated and introduced.

leftism and nationalism, recalling Bolívar and a history of struggle, was suddenly Venezuela's president. At that early date the newborn group was fairly feeble, and clearly not capable of reaching more than a minute percentage of the country's campesinos.[15] But then, in 1999, Venezuela voted for a new constitution, through a popular referendum in which 71% of the population voted yes. The articles relating to land-ownership and agricultural production suggested the possibility of abrupt change:

> The predominance of large idle estates (latifundios) is contrary to the interests of society. Appropriate tax law provisions shall be enacted to tax fallow lands and establish the necessary measures to transform them into productive economic units, likewise recovering arable land. Farmers and other agricultural producers are entitled to own land in the cases and forms specified under the pertinent law. The State shall protect and promote associative and private forms of property in such manner as to guarantee agricultural production. The State shall see to the sustainable ordering of arable land to guarantee its food-producing potential.

It noted elsewhere that

> The state will promote conditions for holistic rural development, with the purpose of generating employment and guaranteeing the peasant population an adequate level of well-being, as well as their incorporation into national development. Similarly, it will support agricultural activity and the optimal use of land, by means of the provision of infrastructure works, credit, training services, and technical assistance.

As we will see below, following the installation of the new constitution, campesinos revolted against the status quo, carrying out successive waves of land invasions, pressuring the Chávez government from below, impelling it to move further and faster to implement legislation enabling further changes in Venezuelan agrarian structure. Some provisions in the law itself are worth noting: the clause on recovery of "arable land" could be interpreted as a license to re-distribute, as would the taxing of fallow land or the carrying-out of "necessary measures" to work theretofore un-worked or unplanted land. The clause concerning the state promotion of "associative" forms of property could suggest state-provided scaffolding for cooperatives and

[15] One interviewee, Uzcategui, says that the Front emerged in 1998, while official FNCEZ documentation gives the date 2000. Pace the historians' preference for documentary evidence, I give the nod to Uzcategui, both because he seemed an immensely credible source and because the notion that peasants only started organizing more formally in 2000 makes little sense—political opportunities started opening in 1998, broadened in 1999, while land invasions started at least in 1999, in force, perhaps the previous year, as Olivier Delahaye, perhaps the country's leading researcher of agrarian studies, suggested to me in e-mail correspondence several years ago.

other joint or communal ventures in petty-production, and the principle of strong state support for agricultural production suggested that the state would not sit idle, that it would not let the countryside languish, unprotected from market forces. The experience of the 1980s and 1990s suggested the folly of that approach.

2.8. The Renewal of Agrarian Reform and Peasant Mobilization

The laws enshrined just principles. And they were, perhaps, a call to action. and hinted at governmental support for deep changes in Venezuelan food production and land ownership. But it was not clear how they would be implemented until the 2001 promulgation of the Land Law, which was among Chávez's package of 49 decrees, and probably stemmed from and in turn encouraged campesino revolt. The law allowed any Venezuelan citizen between the ages of 18 and 25, or any head of family, to apply for a parcel of land. After three years of cultivation, the applicant could come into trusteeship of the land. It forbade selling of the land. It also set limits on the size of landholdings: 100 hectares of high-quality land and 5,000 hectares of low-quality land—quite generous allotments. Previous Latin American land reforms had allowed for far less generous limits. The limits probably reflected both the hybridity of the MVR—radical Chavismo, with a revolutionary bent, co-habiting inside a movement with moderate reformers, interested in change and justice but within circumscribed limits, marked "state" and "capital"—as well as the absence of overbearing demographic pressure on the land.[16] Beyond the 100 and 5,000-hectare limits, land could be (A) taxed and (B) expropriated. Additionally, the law permitted taxes on fallow land, a provision that enjoyed a moratorium for at least the first five years after the law was passed, another generous concession to owners of large tracts of land.

The law also called for the creation of three institutions to help along the agrarian reform process. One is the National Land Institute (INTI), tasked with establishing criteria for what land can be expropriated and assigning land trusteeships, as well as determining the legal status of disputed and private land. The second institution is the National Institute for Rural Development (INDER), which is tasked with developing infrastructure for farms and farmers. The third institution is the Venezuelan Agrarian Corporation (CVA), which is to assist in the marketing of farm products.

[16] Compare for example with the situation in El Salvador, where land was simply insufficient (Seligson, 1996: 140-157).

However, the opposition-controlled Supreme Court immediately struck down two of the key provisions of the law: Article 89, which allowed for *ocupación previa*—allowing preemptive occupations of expropriated land while the landowners appeal. Essentially, Article 89 had given the benefit of the doubt to landless peasants while landowners' complaints worked their way through the legal system. Article 90, which was also revoked, barred compensation for investments on what the land commission deemed stolen land.

Suddenly, the legal and political opportunity structure for organizing and mobilizing was far more welcoming. In 2001 the work of agrarian mobilization and organization intensified. In some newly emergent zones of activism, the front took on the name Revolutionary Peasant Front Ezequiel Zamora (Frente Campesino Revolucionario Ezequiel Zamora, FCREZ), which was founded in 2001, presaging its current incarnation, and in the Sur del Lago area, south of Lake Maracaibo in Zulia state, taking on the name of the Revolutionary Peasant Front (Frente Campesino Revolucionario, FRC). It was clear that organization was needed in order to propel the 2001 land reform forward through a recalcitrant bureaucracy. Already, the state and peasants were working together: a 2001 convocation brought together some 3,000 peasants from 60 settlements, as well as representatives of the INTI and MAT agencies. Such close interlacing of governmental and civil-society movements was not incidental—as we shall see, it's very much a recurring theme in this process, and indeed throughout the Bolivarian process, although without the degree of co-optation to which other ad hoc or "dual" institutions have borne witness (Uzcategui, 2008).

The 2001 Land Law deepened peasant mobilization. Language alluding to a "total war on the latifundia" was becoming common parlance. Ideological class warfare in the countryside—and make no mistake, class-warfare takes place at political, economic, and ideological-symbolic levels—was accelerating, proceeding to material emergence. In 2001, with the "law in hand" there was suddenly a "legal space for emergent mobilization." The "legal framework" in this sense can best be viewed as scaffolding, supporting and legitimizing necessary changes in the economic structure. Echoing the redistributive-but-not-yet-rhetorically revolutionary legislative framework, the multiple fronts of peasant agitation sought goals such as "land to the tiller," and "food security" (Uzcategui, 2008). And on December 8 2001 roughly 20,000 campesinos boarded buses or clambered onto open-backed trucks and congregated in Caracas, to celebrate the land law's passage. One, Claudio Ditulio, of Curito-Mapurital in Barinas, added that "We moved of

our accord, not like before, when you'd have to offer campesinos money or food to get them to move" (Lemoine, 2003). Detractors of the government frequently claim that Chavistas mobilize in mass numbers only when the government bribes them.

In Jacoa and Curito-Mapurital, the Ezequiel Zamora Peasant Front forced the government to turn over 161,000 hectares of land, personally signed over by Chávez, who gave the land to various newly emergent cooperatives (some of which have been subsequently abandoned). They had to fight hard. The state government brought in police to attempt to forcibly evict the campesinos from the land they had occupied, while the campesinos armed themselves with hammers and machetes. Through direct action, they prevailed and got their land. The Jacoa cooperative counted 300 families amongst its membership, while the various other cooperatives contained about 500 families (Martinez et al, 2009: 49).

In 2003, the Simon Bolívar Revolutionary Peasant Front (Frente Campesino Revolucionario Simon Bolívar/FCRSB) informally joined with the FCREZ and organized campesinos from the Uribante Caparo Reserve, from both Táchira and Barinas states. There was a qualitative advance in the sophistication and unity of agrarian mobilization in 2003, as over 100 delegates from the various fronts, movements, mobilizations, and settlements issued the Sur del Lago Resolution, discussing the "agrarian revolution," and conceptualizing it as a "unified revolutionary" effort. In this same resolution, the product of a democratic debate, they resolved to stop working in "isolated fronts." In March and April of that year, they started to debate unification, strategy, vision, and the name of their emergent forces. There was another congress in Los Cocos, in Alto Apure in April 2003. By this point the rhetoric was sharpening, taking on a more determinedly radical edge, as they spoke of "socialist popular power and the agrarian revolution." It was there that the peasant organizations unofficially took the name National Peasant Front Ezequiel Zamora (FNCEZ), using a yellow-and-red color scheme. The yellow stood for fecundity, the richness of the fields, the "richness of our homeland," as Uzcategui described it. The red stood for the means to gather control over that richness, and what the campesinos were willing to pay. In this case, "blood," the memory of their "historic struggles." The crosshatched machetes, the FNCEZ's legend, were a tool used by the campesinos, and they were also a weapon in the Federal War.

Simultaneously, in 2003, the government created a parallel political vehicle, the Ezequiel Zamora National Agrarian Coordinator (Coordinadora Agraria Nacional Ezequiel Zamora, CANEZ) to bring together the various movements in a broad front. The FNCEZ leadership made a conscious decision to remain autonomous from this grouping, as they thought it was umbilically connected to the government. CANEZ, meanwhile, upbraided FNCEZ for its confrontational tactics, including land occupations, believing them to be an inappropriate tactic while a purportedly revolutionary government was in power (Martinez et al, 2009: 49).

Nineteen of Venezuela's 24 states were represented at the 2003 congress. Yaracuy, Nueva Esparta, Delta Macuro, and Bolivar were amongst those lacking representation. In Delta Macuro, an overwhelmingly indigenous agrarian population prevented its incorporation into the united front. Bolivar is a mining state, with few agrarian folk. Nueva Esparta is an opposition citadel. Yaracuy was mobilizing independently—as we've seen, the agrarian structure there was as desperate as anywhere else, perhaps more so—but the leaders of the FNCEZ were not about forcing unity, self-consciously imagining themselves as a "self-managing organization," partaking in a "slower process." As they put it, "we are from below" (Uzcategui, 2008). In July 2004 the FCRSB and FCREZ took several joint actions, taking control of at least seven agricultural (MAT) extension offices throughout the country, a show of power in the face of the 2004 recall referendum called by the opposition. Throughout this time, the groups had maintained a policy around an axis of "permanent mobilization" (Frente, n.d.). They also formally founded the FNCEZ in that year, melding together their organizations.

In 2005, agrarian mobilization pushed wider and deeper: On February 5 and 6, in the Sur del Lago area (the area directly South of Lake Maracaibo), the FNCEZ held a national conference, the First National Peasant Congress. The name organizers chose for the conference was important: "The Peasant Conference in Defense of Sovereignty: The Agrarian Revolution's Jump Forward." Through this National Congress regional conclaves were jump-started: for example, in the southwest, one entitled "In Defense of Sovereignty, against imperialism and for the agrarian revolution" (a theme that pops up with some frequency) was held on February 18 and 19 of that same year. By then, the front was able to add Yaracuy to its regional roster (Frente, n.d.).

Figure 2.1. Map of Venezuela

And again, we can at least generally locate this widening circle of campesino agitation within a structure of opportunities that seemed more open to such activity. In April 2005 several important changes occurred, under the rubric of Misión Zamora.[17] One, Article 90 was reinstated with mild modifications. Two, Article 89 was reformatted to allow a kind of *ocupación previa* through the mechanism of *cartas agrarias*—temporary occupation certificates that are currently being challenged in lower courts. Three, the INTI was given more discretionary powers, and it revised the land ownership laws to allow up to 50 hectares of high quality land, 3000 hectares of low quality land, and four intermediary categories with respectively intermediary quantities. And

[17] Ezequiel Zamora was a 19th century radical who fought for land redistribution.

four, Chávez established a commission, the National Agricultural Commission (CAN), to determine the legality of the titles of estates.

2.9. The Social Composition and Regional Origins of the Peasant Movement

Having reviewed the general sorts of movement that were taking place at both the level of legislation and political action, I now move on to the social composition of the movement—that is, what kind of people join the movement. I will also suggest some reasons why it has been stronger in some regions than it has been in others.

The FNCEZ draws its membership from many different social strata: landless peasants, cooperative units, renters, land-settlements, small capitalist farmers, fishermen, coffee producers, indigenous peasant communities, and individuals from the cities who have taken up the political struggle for land and agrarian reform, notwithstanding their urban origins. This last point brings us back to the sociology of peasant movements. Class matters, but class is not determinative. Structural location in the economic landscape matters, but it is not the only thing that matters. Class is experienced culturally, and class is interpreted through men's and women's minds. In Venezuela and Brazil, more so in Venezuela, at least on a per-capita basis, urban refugees are deciding to re-peasantize themselves. This is an important phenomenon, although initial surveys suggest that through 2007, the *Vuelta Campo* program, the governmental effort to spur re-peasantization, had largely foundered (Page, 2010). Still, many city-dwellers in Venezuela lay claim to an origin in the countryside. They or their parents are from the *llanos*, or Andean Venezuela, and remember those origins well, and remember that they were originally peasants, too. One of the leaders of the peasant struggle, Braulio Alvarez of the CANEZ, claimed that as of 2005, 180,000 families had returned to the land (Dragnic García, 2005: 205-206).[18]

Let us now turn to the question: why has peasant mobilization reached a higher degree of organizational intensity in some areas, remaining quiescent in others? What conditions—economic, political, symbolic—have made peasant grumblings manifest in tepid organization, and where did this organization boil furiously? One indirect barometer of the freedom of campesinos to act is the number of land-invasions. As Scott comments, land-invasions are the "outriders" of rebellion, or revolution. Peasants invade land when the symbolic power of the landed-class is shattered, when peasants have reason to suspect that invasions will not be met

[18] Those numbers do not seem credible.

with slaughter. Peasants aren't idiots—they respond to perceived political opportunities. A 2003 survey of the land-situation in Venezuela found that between August 1999 and November 2001—that is, ahead of Chávez's land-redistribution decree, and likely a series of provocations for it, but after the passage of the constitution with its provisions for agrarian redistribution—there were 570 land invasions: 104 in Portuguesa state, 100 in Barinas, 91 in Zulia, 64 in Anzoátegui, and the rest scattered about the country (Duque M., 2003: 102).

The relative concentrations are noteworthy. Zulia is on the frontier with Colombia, and as I've noted above, ideological inter-penetration from the formally socialist FARC guerrillas could have had an impact on the level of consciousness here.[19] Zulia is also quite close to Barinas, an epicenter of peasant agitation, and Táchira, too, the latter two being the core states for peasant mobilization, at least as measured by membership within formal organizations. The FNCEZ is headquartered in Barinas, and the movement identifies Apure, Barinas, Táchira, and Merida states as the "axes of historical construction" of the movement (Uzcategui, 2008).

Without going into political or economic considerations, it's noteworthy that Chávez is from a rural family in Barinas state. Peasant mobilization has a strong component of symbolic determination. Peasants revolt when land-lord or over-lord power is ideologically weakened, that is, when they *perceive* the political opportunity—we see here how political opportunity theories must be adulterated by a bit of ideology, of analyses of symbolic structure, because ultimately such opportunities don't "objectively" present themselves, they're filtered through individual consciousnesses and understandings of the world, which is what we mean by ideology. In this sense Chávez's December 2001 statement, referring to a request to delay the land-law, that "the oligarchs want six months to bring [the law] into force…I have decided not to wait one day more, we've been waiting 200 years!" which he delivered in Barinas, likely rang out like a clarion (Dragnic García, 2005: 17).

[19] Commentary on this point is necessarily speculative but not misguided. Formal mapping or documentation of ideological diffusion is possible, but absence of documentary or even oral-history evidence of such penetration is not even remotely close to evidence of its absence., for reasons that David Graeber lays out compellingly in discussing American Indian and pirate-ship origins of democracy (Graeber, 2007: 350-355). Documenting influence from socialist guerrillas, when their hunters, too, regularly slipped over the border, along with Colombian paramilitaries openly contracted to slaughter radical peasant organizers, another important and darkly fascinating facet of contemporary Venezuelan agrarian politics, seems to be of a kind with the level of difficulty in documenting the influences of savages and thieves—that is to say, Indians and pirates—on American democracy.

As Wickham-Crowley adds, the most successful guerrilla movements, in Venezuela or elsewhere, have been led by men from the countryside. Their social distance from the campesinos is far less than that of their urban counterparts. It was no coincidence that Gabaldón and Zamora were from the countryside, or that they were thus able to muster up the appearance of "legitimate authority" amidst followers terrified of confronting the bayonets and bullets of their oppressors. In that sense the "community" is paramount, and Chávez does not let the Venezuelan people forget that he is from a mud-hut in Barinas (Wickham-Crowley, 1992: 152).

Furthermore, as Scott writes, when analyzing peasant mobilization, a fundamental consideration is the "deadly risks that the state and rural elites represent." Those risks are both real and perceived. They are made real when the state or rural landholders assassinate and repress rural activists, as they did and continue to do in rural Venezuela—between 2001 and 2002, in a seven-month time span, 75 rural activists were killed, one every three days (Martinez et al, 2009: 57). Such repression contributes to a climate of opinion wherein a rational—or just reasonable, given the surfeit of ideological baggage that prevents us from calmly deploying the word "rationality" in the social sciences—peasant would be far less likely to invade land, organize a rural union, announce pro-Chávez sentiments, join a collective, or adorn herself with the red-and-yellow blaze of the FNCEZ. As Scott continues, "the memory of repression is one of the principal explanations for the absence of resistance and revolt." The trauma of repressions resides in memory for some time after the physical occurrence of repression. This makes sense, and it explains why rural mobilization doesn't turn into revolution instantly, or at the slightest susurration of socialist talk emerging from governmental leaders. Scott continues, adding that if repression, or the threat of repression, and not the Marxist chimera, "mystification," is the barrier to revolt in rural society, then we "would expect logically that significant reduction in the coercive pressure of the state might by itself stimulate resistance." The corollary is that successful resistance compounds. If the memory of repression is a symbolic structure, it's a symbolic structure that can be changed by the experience of resistance. Widespread successful resistance makes for wider-spread successful resistance. That, in part, is what makes for a social revolution (Scott, 1976: 226-229).

Empirical evidence from Venezuela strengthens this suggestion. From the point of view of the rural movements, Chávez's origins are immensely important. In the words of the FNCEZ leadership, he is the "child of campesinos, from Sabaneta, [Venezuela's] cattle axis." In a sharp

departure from the genteel-liberal rhetoric of *Punto Fijo* and the upper-middle to upper-class backgrounds of previous Venezuelan presidents, Chávez speaks with "words the people understand," while the bureaucracy deliberately "seeks out words that the people can't understand" (Uzcategui, 2008). The FNCEZ views the bureaucracy as a real enemy in this process, nearly equivalent to the landlords they struggle to expropriate. It is in the hardened skeleton of the bureaucracy that obstacles to the revolutionary process reside, and it is there that they hold fast, difficult to excise. Hidden, or at the core of the state, masquerading often enough as Chavistas, these segments of the state apparatus are the remainder of the *ancien regime,* and are forthrightly identified as such by the hard-left Chavistas.

2.10. The Landlord Reaction

This brings me directly to the problem of repression, because the notion of "political opportunity" is inseparable from a discussion of repression. In this respect, a caveat. Contrary to endless monographs from all sorts of printing presses and prestigious publications touting tales of Venezuelan repression and mounting autocracy, the Venezuelan state is weak. Particularly as distance increases from major metropolitan centers, especially Caracas, the Weberian ability to exercise a monopoly on violence withers. The difficult-to-access Western plains and Andean regions exemplify this weakness, perhaps related to the "friction of distance" marking those regions, made rougher by their weakened arterial infrastructure (Scott, 2009: 48). In some areas, landlord opposition to the reform manifests itself violently. In others, regional governors—components of the state itself—participate in repression, or turn a blind eye to it, or to the penetration of Colombian paramilitaries. Such mercenaries riddle campesino organizers with bullets, whereupon they can retreat over the border to Colombia, freed from any consequences. The easy entrance and egress of Colombian paramilitaries is directly tied to the weakness of the core state, and what had often been its delegation of control over Venezuela's borders to governorships. Those borders, even at their official crossing points, are extremely lax, easy to cross without papers or permits. And there are over a thousand kilometers of them. When opposition governors control border-state gubernatorial houses, such movement is even easier. Those governors tend not to the like the reform, and they are frequently tied to rural elites.

And such elites and business interests generally were hysterically opposed to the reform from the outset. From the beginning, they correctly perceived it as an attack on the foundation of the

capitalist order. For example, as Greg Wilpert observes, FEDECAMARAS "highlighted the *Ley de Tierras* as the single most important reason for launching the first employer led lockout" in 2001 (Wilpert, 2003: 110).[20] The Táchira section of FEDECAMARAS rhetorically exploded, claiming, "The law is interventionist. It imposes state control and ignores the right to property, which is a fundamental human right…taxation of uncultivated lands is unconstitutional. This law is based on communist ideas, as collective policies usually are, rather than a political philosophy. What is emerging is a totalitarian attitude" (Lemoine, 2003). The proposed reaction was equally strident: as Jorge Luis Betancourt, president of the ranch-owner's association put it, "if they wish to eliminate private property and institutions, then with them they will lose the peace" (Masiosare, 2005). The government did not wholly eliminate private property, and it still hasn't, but the peace has been lost.

By 2005, according to internal FNCEZ statistics, over 130 peasants had been assassinated, mostly campesino organizers or members of peasant organizations (Dragnic García, 2005: 11). Activists have accused the Venezuelan National Guard General and the Technical Police of turning over to the Colombian Secret Police peasant militants they deem "subversive." Such tight links between Venezuelan state security forces and the Colombian government are clear harbingers of danger. As Petras concludes, the "ties between on the one hand the military police and the landlord class in Venezuela, and the police and paramilitaries in Colombia on the other… [are] an obstacle to the implementation of the agrarian reform programme" (Petras, 2006: 298). Journalist Jorge Martin offers a similar appraisal, buttressing Petras's: "in some areas along the border with Colombia ranch owners have for some time armed white guards modeling themselves on, and sometimes getting advice from, the infamous paramilitary gangs from neighboring Colombia" (Martin, 2005). Interpenetration goes both ways. Meanwhile, other sources add that "there are extermination groups, organized gangs in the landowners' pay, especially in the states of Zulia, Barinas, Táchira, and Apure" (Lemoine, 2003). In Apure, Táchira, and even Barinas, the National Armed Forces have attacked and jailed peasants, while the state allows this as well as the assassinations to occur unimpeded, unreported, and un-prosecuted. A PROVEA lawyer calls the situation "structural impunity" (Dragnic García, 2005: 216, 220, 224, 232, 234, 299). It's understandable that landlords should have wished to move rapidly to the gun in lieu of the pen. They don't have very reliable documentation proving that they own the land they control. There

[20] A statement made 10 December 2001.

is considerable evidence of falsification of ownership-deeds in Portuguesa state, for example, indicating that land there has been illegally obtained.

The FNCEZ analysis delves deeper into this phenomenon. Uzcategui, in a cutting formulation, refers to some government sectors as the "disguised opposition," noting that by 2008 the assassination total was over 190 (by now, over 250). The state's corruptions are structural, in this view, and the Bolivarian state is still being reconstructed. Chávez, in this reading, is far from the all-powerful Hitlerian figure of the opposition caricature. There is considerable "autonomy of powers"—Chávez and *el pueblo* on one side, the "great landed interests" on the other. Within this context of "structural impunity" it is not at all clear that assassination is even considered a crime. Peasant movements are aware that some sectors of the state apparatus are working for them; others, against them. Thus they're more than-willing to occupy state agricultural offices, to give those who are languidly occupying the middle ground some incentive to do the tasks that official legislation enjoins them to do.

The peasant movement hopes for change, but it also acts to make real that hope. The "autonomy of power" is not just economic or political—in the sense of *state-centric* politics—but also social. The oddness of this phenomenon mounts when one considers that the FNCEZ has consciously de-escalated some of its direct-action techniques. In 2008, according to Uzcategui, occupations were no longer considered the chief "mechanism" for pressuring the government to redistribute land. Slightly odd, because in the past, occupation led to expropriation. Investigations have shown that INTI gave out *cartas agrarias* in direct response to the pressure land-occupiers exerted (Dragnic García, 2005: 198). The central government wishes for the FNCEZ to avoid "confrontations," and in 2004 began to act as an intermediary between campesinos and landholders. Campesinos complain of unproductive land at the INTI, whereupon INTI carries out an inspection and declares land to be officially unproductive—or less frequently, because it is less frequently the case, productive. At that point the state negotiates a compromise with landowners or simply expropriates the land and hands over titles to the campesinos, along with loans to undergird their efforts to cultivate the land. All the while, the campesinos can set up camps close to the land to monitor the investigation's progress, but frontal confrontation occurs less frequently than it used to. A FNCEZ organizer comments that she doesn't know if this was a "conscious decision" taken to solve the problem of assassinations—which it hasn't, anyway—or

an agreement reached through mediation with landlords. Either way, it has slightly tamped down direct action, or at least land occupations (Martinez et al, 2009: 58).

2.11. FNCEZ Organization and Ideology

Now I take up the FNCEZ's organizational structure and its ideology—the formal doctrines the organization professes, as well as the way those beliefs play out in on-the-ground interactions with the state. Ideology also partially dictates organizational structure, tactics, and strategy. Their belief in a transition to socialism as a cultural problem, for example, lends itself to an organizational emphasis on building socialist individuals and a socialist culture, while at the same time structuring their movement itself along democratic lines.

The FNCEZ's organization is increasingly sophisticated and formalized—a potentially dangerous pairing, as we've seen that formal organizations have not been what have brought about stirring change in the Venezuelan countryside in the past. Their most militant organizers are grouped together as the Coronela Barbarita de la Torre. They also have set up what they call formation brigades, essentially educational brigades, with the assistance of the Brazilian MST, who they met at the 2006 World Social Forum in Caracas (Martinez et al, 2009: 50). This is important, according to them, because the revolution's needs are deepening. Such groups are involved in the transmission of their "own science," their "own technology," their "own reality." The Formational Brigade (Brigada de Formación) is also involved in the organization of settlements, and the organization and teaching of specific courses salient to the struggle—agronomy, ideological formation. Another brace has been the government-funded Campo Adentro program: literally, within the countryside, wherein 700 Cuban agricultural advisors stayed in Venezuela, teaching and training.[21]

Despite highly educated leadership, and the presence of skilled agronomists and educators within the organization, the legacy of university access for campesinos in the 80s and probably, some radical organizational work in the high schools in that same decade, there is a dearth of highly skilled cadres within FNCEZ, just one instance of the more general lack of highly skilled workers

[21] The Cuban experiment with agro-ecology, at time of writing in a bit of trouble, is still nonetheless an exemplar—the successful conversion of an input-intensive model of industrial farming to a system relying on ecologically-sound and organic inputs, biological as opposed to chemical pesticides, deploying tools of crop rotation, holistic nitrogen fixing, and generally the panoply of measures needed to transform agriculture from a complex way of turning petroleum and its derivatives into food to a photosynthetic process using the sun's energy to mimic natural processes while still growing as much, or more, food (Patel and Holt-Giménez, 2009).

in the country. A generation of rentier clientelism denuded the Venezuelan skill-base. Large sectors of the Venezuelan lower class are still engaged in informal work, laboring as *buhoneros*—unlicensed street merchants—dealing drugs, or otherwise occupied on the margins of the formal and skilled economic system. Without going too far afield, this makes the recreation of an economic system based on "endogenous development"—as juxtaposed with dependent development—all the harder. The FNCEZ's emphasis on libraries, education, on the assumption that socialist hegemony is a "cultural problem," makes a great deal more sense within this framework. This is an odd but not unprecedented way of looking at radical change—FNCEZ views it as the problem of creating socialists, not socialism. It aligns with the view that agrees that perhaps the state can help, here and there, with food and funds, to make these socialists, or better to support them, but that it's not capable of being the catalytic agent in this transition.

Again, very coherent with the radical Chavista framework, the FNCEZ does not see power as equivalent to the storming of the state: "for us," they instruct, power "is constructed from below." They add that this vision of power as a "a relation of domination instituted by the bourgeoisie must be substituted for a vision of power as a social relation between equals who very partially delegate this power at times but always in its essence will be under the control of popular majorities." This vision is diffuse but not to the point of incoherence. The importance of a libertarian or autonomous sensibility—or in the leftist vernacular, an anarchist vision—is so clear in their thought that simply quoting it again brings it right to the fore: "the socialist hegemony that will supersede the capitalist and oligarchic hegemony does not imply a concentration nor a monopoly of the new libertarian hegemony in the State or in the party." As they add, it is necessary not to kowtow to elites or bureaucrats in this germinating vision.

Already, by 2005, the FNCEZ was identifying saboteur elements within the bureaucracy as an overt class enemy. Right and leftwing commentary on Bolivarian Venezuela often misses this fact. And others, for example, that many of the grass-roots organizers within the Chavista hard-left are anarchists. This should not be surprising. For forty years a rentier state and a clientelistic and corrupt political apparatus governed them. In a very direct way, that state was the enemy. Consequently, a process of radicalization wherein the executive of that state is perceived as a class ally but the satrapies seeded throughout the state structure are seen as occupied by scoundrels makes sense. Already in January 2005 the FNCEZ was calling for an end to "bureaucracy, corruption," the assassinations, MAT "sabotage," problematic decisions made by

the managers of the FONDAFA agricultural development fund, and perhaps more directly injurious to their aspirations, Agroisleña, which gave farmers damaged or transgenic seeds. As they put it, "On the 145th anniversary of the murder of the General of the sovereign people" Ezequiel Zamora, FNCEZ calls for "the construction of a program of struggle that permits nation-wide coordination," alongside the "Deepening of the Law of Land and Agrarian Development." They demanded that the state make good on its rhetoric and its laws, asking "governors, mayors, and the presidential commission [to fight] against latifundia [and] for concrete participation of the peasant movement in policy implementation" (Frente, 2005).

FNCEZ leaders are acutely aware that local judiciaries have repeatedly stopped their efforts at land reform, while local political officials huddle with regional or local capitalists and landlords, corrupting them despite the fact that they were either appointed or elected as Chavistas (Bruce, 2008: 90). It is precisely this strand of Chavistas that support Chávez *por ahora*, for now. The Front's leaders and members are understandably hesitant about relying on the state, a state which they can only remember as murderous and repressive. This hesitance vis-à-vis the state has led them to "construct brigades of peasant defense." Especially in western Venezuela, the state has little ability, or has evinced little willingness, to stanch the bleeding induced by landlord-purchased assassins. So the campesinos take matters in their own hands.

With all of this always in mind, it makes sense that their understanding of the Bolivarian process is that "The historical Bolivarian bloc that Chavez proposes can not be understood as a corporation directed by the state or by the PSUV, even if those merit a preponderant role" (FNCEZ, n.d.). They are not in denial. The role of the state or a revolutionary party cannot be ignored, all the more so in a rentier state par excellence like Venezuela. But they think the movement should be constructed as much as possible from below, accreting, piece by piece, like coral.

And that is part of the reason why the movement is cultivating solidarity with others who may be able to help them. Organizationally, they are tightly linked with Latin American social movements. They are part of the Via Campesina, and work particularly closely with the MST, a match helped along by the government, which has self-consciously courted the MST, viewing it as a sister organization in the path to radical social change (Bruce, 2008: 4). In fact, looking at the FNCEZ's ideology, its structure, its organization, it's hard to avoid seeing a sort of simulacrum

of the MST. (This is actually a rather good model to copy, as well. Although the MST has made tactical and arguably strategic mis-steps under the Lula administration, it's more than strong enough to survive them, and seriously: how many movements can say that?) They are also tightly linked to a libertarian-autonomous urban grouping, the National Communal Front Simon Bolívar (Frente Nacional Comunal Simon Bolívar, FNCSB), an attempt to link the struggles of the field with the struggles of the cities.[22]

The tight intermeshing with urban conclaves and neighboring countries' peasant movements is related to their rhetoric, echoing Chávez, of Latin American unification, and the construction of a newfangled, still-inchoate, already-contentious, system of Bolivarian socialism. Lower-level activists agree with the ideologues' formulations, but as might be expected, don't delineate what they mean by socialism—by no means an uncommon situation in socialist movements, or in peasant movements. Another important notion for the FNCEZ is *la Mistica*—an element of how to reflect, day to day, on revolutionary principles, a way of braiding ideological principle with practical movement formation. *La mistica* includes symbols of the motherland, appropriating nationalism, fusing it with radicalism. Such symbols include the resurrection of underground, or forcefully interred, memories of figures and fighters for land in the Venezuelan past. Through *la mistica* and the whorl of reflection it occasions and contains, the values and principles of the FNCEZ are inlaid more deeply into the thinking of its most committed militants. *La mistica* also means ideological introspection. One of those goals of this is that the movement transcends, as much as it can, the structural misogyny it inherited from the past, and creates greater gender equity. Furthermore "the *potenciación* and socialization of the practices of a liberatory Christianity expressed in the Theology of Liberation, progressive evangelicals, and other confessional currents," and zones of interchange where money is replaced by social credit—e.g. a variety of a gift economy (FNCEZ, n.d.).

The inter-relation of the construction of the FNCEZ's militant socialist ideology is not analytically separable from the sharpened rhetoric Chávez and the radical wing of Chavista ministers and urban movements have emitted, especially since 2005, and the shift from talk of Bolivarianism to more radically tinged talk of 21st century socialism. But especially since the FNCEZ is generating urban off-shoots or sister organizations, it's important to note that those

[22] I have no information on the growth or organizational density of this grouping.

urban organizations have an extensive history of self-organization and autonomy, a tradition of rapid response to openings that emerge in the political opportunity structure, and a streak of complaining, rapidly, quickly, effectively, to local or higher-level government officials when their demands are not met. In country and city, this is not the canard of traditional Venezuelan clientelism. Such groups are also, in both country and city, constituted geographically, in many ways, rather than at the point of production, as in orthodox Marxist theorizing. In the case of peasant production, the point of production and the place of residence are in fact the same, turning the orthodox Marxist conception of the peasantry on its head—so, right side up? (Bruce, 2008: 22, 27).

The FNCEZ is a very idealistic organization in terms of vision, but in practice is very pragmatic, too. In terms of economic structure and its relations to the FNCEZ's tactical and strategic notions and planning, the organization recognizes the need to acquire capital, but demands that money be seen as it should be seen—for the FNCEZ, "money is a means," never an end.[23] The FNCEZ's goals in the long-run—as opposed to the short-run or the next day, the next harvest or the next planting season—are to bring about new relations of production, although in the current interim they accept that a mixed-system will endure, and in the foreseeable future as well. It will comprise agro-industry, co-management between the state and communities, communal businesses, and areas of communal production.

Returning to politics, FNCEZ makes frequent reference to a 5th motor, organizing the rural communal councils—the 5th motor is the Bolivarian vision of "endogenous development." They seek to codify and harden their economic activity into more directly socialist units of production, claiming that "more advanced cooperatives must convert themselves into businesses of social property," in some ways prefigured in the *Fondos Zamoranos*, Zamoran Funds, integrated production and living units, girded in some cases by state capital (Bruce, 2008: 64-65). And they demand "the conversion of *cartas agrarias* into collective-property titles," getting state sanction-and-succor for their project and the transmutation of property relations. It would be surprising if they were unaware of how much the land-market contributed to the marginalization of small-scale agriculture thorough-out the late 1980s and early 1990s. Most importantly and relevantly for elucidating the regime dynamic in contemporary Venezuela, they call for "direct dialogue

[23] Perhaps a disingenuous point. Is money even truly an end? Or is it just the way a desire or passion for power manifests in capitalist society?

with the president." One does not dialogue with someone one views as a messiah. One pleads or prays (Frente, 2005).

Ideologically speaking, the FNCEZ leadership is, at least, of a strikingly radical vintage.[24] They speak of their attempts to resist "from below," their overt and striking "resistance to capitalism," and in one telling formulation braiding anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, and a national-popular project, they speak of "The crisis and confrontation between imperial policies and the forces of anti-capitalist popular camp, that agitate to make real the historical project of national liberation and social justice. For us, it can be nothing but socialism" (Frente, 2005).

Their ideology is rooted in names and places and struggles that may have seemed an idly scholastic historiographical review when presented pages earlier: "Guacaipuro, El Negro Miguel, Josefa Camejo, Ana Cáceres de Arismendi, Bolívar; Zamora, Argimiro Gabaldón." Gabaldón, Zamora, and Bolivar should merit particular attention here—this represents the recovery of national memory and tradition and its re-writing within an overtly liberatory ideological framework. This tapestry presents a beguiling answer to the question: how to make leftism a nationalist project?[25] This recollection of historical memory is inseparable from Wickham-Crowley's examination—perhaps that should be exhumation?—of the role of local cultures of resistance in determining who rebels, who organizes, and where. In the case of the FNCEZ this involved some measure of invented traditions. There is self-conscious awareness of this: they speak of "a process of taking conscious of the historical, political, theoretical, and cultural roots that have incited/catalyzed the different ruptures in our history." But there's also another thread. They highlight the resistance efforts as far back as 1532 in Coro, invoking the Jirajara resistance movement, itself the moniker for a peasant movement in Yaracuy. Coro is one place the FNCEZ goes to sell goods and connect with urban supporters. Coro is also where Ezequiel Zamora won a major battle during the Federalist Wars.

[24] Without proper anthropological or surveying techniques, it is extremely hard to tell just how deeply the formalized ideological formation has proceeded. This both matters and doesn't matter. It matters because ideology matters. Men think, act, reflect, think, and then act again. Leftist ideological formation is a process of advancing and sharpening, hewing and shaping, such thoughts through a didactic process of consciousness-raising. But for reasons that James Scott notes, Leninist "trade-union" consciousness not only isn't an obstacle to revolution, it's the only type of "consciousness" that most revolutionaries have ever had.

[25] Out of place perhaps even in a footnote, but the mélange merits analysis by leftist analysts troubled by formulations like "anti-American" in their own society.

Generally speaking, they invoke a rich, wide-ranging history and heritage of indigenous, subaltern, and peasant resistance to external interference, colonialism, and imperialism, including Francisco de Miranda and the Battle of Carabobo in the pre-independence period. This process of ideological construction entails re-writing or re-visiting history so the current Bolivarian process of nationalist struggle becomes a link in a historical chain of past rebellions and revolts. Thus they speak of how the

> Federation was the result of the accumulation of discontent against the tyrannical oligarchic regime and it was there for the first time that a class struggle was spoken of in our country, inspired by the demagogy of Antonio Leocadio Guzmán, but it was the General of the Sovereign People Ezequiel Zamora, the illustrious citizens, who took over the struggle and began a pre-socialist project of dignity inspired by Bolivarian ideals. These struggles were erased by those who have tried to hegemonize bourgeois history (FNCEZ, 2005).

Their vision is Gramscian. They don't speak of strategy as merely an economic plan, here nationalizing a factory, there, controlling finance. They speak of a "project of accumulation of forces that allows the construction of a *new historical subject* which suggests converting the emancipatory movement into a political subject." This involves a six-fold transition: to:(a) an economy governed by direct democracy, community control/community councils, (b) a cooperative economy, wherein financial capital is controlled, commodity exports are no longer the driving force, Venezuela is no longer a "dependent" country, and the creation of "strategic" industries; (c) a social justice agenda, involving cultural projects and the promotion of the popular economy; (d) socialization of the media (e) a multipolar international system (f) the recovery of liberating version of Venezuelan history. FNCEZ documents also speak of the creation of ideological, political, and cultural literacy (FNCEZ, 2005).

Where their ideology becomes more radical yet—and where this radical rhetoric has begun to be converted into radical action—is in their notion of land-ownership. The FNCEZ sees such ownership as a communal right and getting there as the result of a "dynamic process." Their libertarian socialism is the furthest thing from a Marxist-Leninist model of social construction, and it's distant from what many Western analysts have taken to be the signal achievement of Chavismo: a reincarnation of the theory of the storming of the state to secure its power. For the FNCEZ, "socialism isn't decreed, it's constructed." Part of this process of construction involves linking production directly to cooperatives. The FNCEZ calls this consignment—direct

transmission from producers to consumers. As they put it, organized peasants are "contributing to the process of socialist construction," viewing themselves as "cooperatives with production-in-common" (FNCEZ, 2005).

The FNCEZ aspires to create, or help create, a production system different from the one that prevails in the Venezuelan countryside: semi-proletarianization on input-intensive plantations, with *conucos* enabling a margin of subsistence for underpaid rural workers. That such workers require additional cash income from their mini-plots suggests that there was—probably, still is—extensive downward pressure on wages. There doubtless is, as a massive labor force waits in the peripheries of the Venezuelan cities, in many cases willing to commute to the countryside for work. The organic contiguity of labor market, demography, and food dependence highlights the importance of recognizing that the FNCEZ is also a social movement gathering social power for a project of political and social change. To accomplish that in a capitalist system, capital is helpful. The FNCEZ finances itself by selling goods, taking contributions, collecting food products, and, for example, using those products to feed students at agro-ecology or militant-training seminars. Agreements with settlements are another method of effectively procuring material support: some settlements, for example, cede two of their twenty hectares to be cultivated for products to be sold to fund the FNCEZ.

As for external sources of finance, the FNCEZ relies on government credit to support its operations, which include returning city-folk to the countryside—re-peasantization. So a good number of applications for government credit have provisions for paying FNCEZ settlers a monthly income, an "advance" until crops flow in and can be sold. Other sectors have to rely on organized solidarity efforts until crops come in (Bruce, 2008: 96). The FNCEZ also accepts some grants, from NGOs and the like, but only for specific projects, such as courses in agro-ecology. It shies away from making such donations "direct" to the organization, or "permanent" sources of funding. The fact that money is both empowering and a potential straightjacket has not escaped FENCEZ leaders and members (Uzcategui, 2008).

Other projects, in concert with the MST and Via Campesina, include the creation of the Latin American Institute of Agro-Ecology—Paulo Freire, now in operation. The emphasis on agro-ecology is also extremely important. As we've noted, the two-step death dance in which agricultural production was forced into reliance on state-largesse for the subsidized purchase of

capital-intensive inputs, and therefore its acute vulnerability, was revealed when the state suddenly took its support out from under the rural sectors' feet. That was a learning moment. Agro-ecological production reduces reliance on capital, both literal and political, and promotes self-reliance and endogenous development—food sovereignty, as Via Campesina calls it. Food sovereignty, in this vision, is related to an end, that of securing a stable food-supply. To be able to buy food in the country that was produced in the country is a form of security. FNCEZ insists on considering production a strategic element so that it can also support other "*hermano pueblos*", brother-peoples.

The discussion of agro-ecology deserves to be qualified, before the reader becomes too lulled by Elysian reverie. Venezuelan peasants are not Whole Foods shoppers. The notion of organic production is enjoying increasing purchase, but as we will see from comparative evidence of the Brazilian experience, peasants used to growing food with petro-chemical or herbicidal inputs have trouble switching, for a simple reason: switching is hard. The conversion from industrial to agro-ecological farming is not straightforward, and it requires a great deal of intellectual energy. Worse, seeds are even harder to control, and the presence in-country of genetically engineered seeds practically ensures that there'll be some introgression of such seeds into native seed-stock. Agro-ecology is not just about cutting off artificial inputs. It's also about choosing crops that fit well into native ecologies. Wheat, for example, does not. Much wheat is grown in Venezuela, and even more is consumed, due in part to American and European dumping of their surplus wheat on the world market, and also the penetration of American consumption patterns along with American culture—wheat bread and the like—into the Venezuelan market. Even on FNCEZ cooperatives, wheat is still being planted but slowly, the organized peasants are advancing. As Uzcategui comments, the FNCEZ does not envision a radical re-conversion, speaking once again to their vision of the step-by-step construction rather than decree of socialism.

The FNCEZ is aware of just how much work remains to be done to make the transition to an agro-ecological model. Leaders emphasize that there is an over-use of agro-toxins in Venezuela, and that they operate under the (correct) assumption that such agro-toxins contribute to morbidity in the countryside. Economically, agro-ecology can reduce the costs of production and improve the overall quality of life. However, they emphasize, the soil is sick with the toxic residue of decades of industrial farming, and their removal is part of a "political proposal" for the countryside. Without belaboring the point or inciting any, or too many, fantasies, the

sophistication of these ideas is quite telling—fusing ecology, economics, and politics into an organic whole.

Some of these ideas are imports from metropolitan or university-based tutoring in advanced agronomic techniques, especially from Norway, which FNCEZ leaders regard as a model for agro-ecological systems. In the case of Bolivian, or Honduran, or Mexican campesinos, such a return to natural agriculture would involve the recovery of traditional knowledge. Doubtless there's some element of that in Venezuela, and many peasants claim this simply involves a return to the sort of agriculture their parents practiced. That may be true for peasants, but Venezuelan agrarian change will involve not just re-educating peasants but creating them. And the Venezuelan agrarian structure, as I've noted, differentiated early and fast, moving to commodity exports, with an unusually high percentage of its people, even by Latin American standards, migrating to urban shantytowns. The corollary is that the process of re-learning—or of re-peasantization—is that much harder.

2.12. Concluding Thoughts

The FNCEZ clearly does not accept liberal or Marxisant doctrines that declare that the peasantry is dead or dying. Indeed, it actively seeks to reconstitute the Venezuelan peasant as the backbone of rural development in Venezuela, and to stanch the flow of economic refugees from country to city, against prevailing opinion on the left that suggests that the latter are to be humanity's "arks" (Davis, 2010). Intellectual Prometheanism runs deep, but not so deep as to be able to dispel empirical facts like that life is better for secure small farmers or cooperative members in the Latin American countryside than in cities that no Latin American government can afford to transform. Meanwhile, the FNCEZ's project recalls the post-World War 2 developmental states that actually developed—by focusing on agriculture. Clearly, their existence refutes the orthodox claim that peasants do not acquire radical or revolutionary consciousness and fits neatly into a framework that gives primacy to the struggle for agrarian reform as a struggle for development in the global South.

They also confute claims that re-peasantization is impossible, or that third-world peasantries are simply waiting to die, and have their lands and livelihoods absorbed through the maw of a global industrial-agricultural system. They may not succeed, but they are making their own history.

Theoretically, the FNCEZ confirms a series of claims. The most obvious but most relevant one is the issue of the relation of the peasant to the surrounding field of power, both in assessing his political opportunities and his revolutionary tendencies. In those terms, I have shown that the election of Hugo Chávez, the culmination of a process of cultural radicalization that I traced back to the guerrilla movements in 1960s Venezuela, opened a great deal of space within which radicals and dissidents could organize and mobilize to move beyond existing structures of inequity and reconstruct their society on more egalitarian lines. Certainly, this process of change crystallized with Chávez's election, as the miasma and memory of repression lifted, but it was set in motion well before Chávez ascended to Miraflores, and he was not the one who set it in motion. The Venezuelan people did.

I have also provided powerful evidence supporting the notion that political opportunities don't present themselves objectively. They are filtered through perception, and that filtering process takes place during, and is constituted by, a process of struggle. As the 250 murders since Chávez's elections tragically attest, the Venezuelan peasant is not free from repression. His political opportunities have broadened, and he now certainly has a "selective incentive," as Lichbach puts it, to join a peasant movement, but there are also great dis-incentives. Chávez's election in that sense was symbolic of a change in the political opportunity structure. It symbolized a change in the field of power surrounding a peasant in the Venezuelan countryside. Suddenly—seemingly—the state was on his side. But not all of it. There is still immense risk of repression, which makes it all the more stirring that the Venezuelan rural people organize so vibrantly. Stirring, but also rational, because it is only within a movement that peasants have any organized power.

This raises the question of how they organize, and why, and brings to the fore the question of ideology. Obviously, many peasants or former or current semi-proletarians simply wish to be to be the owners of their own plots of land, what Lenin dismissed as "trade-union consciousness." But this goal runs up against the self-interests of rural and urban Venezuelan capitalists. Urban capitalists often have their money stored in land, as I've shown, a hedge against currency devaluation. Rural capitalists are interlinked with global commodity chains that rely on extracting maximum surplus from rural and urban consumers, while at the same time, forcing total reliance on market-relations for subsistence. They rely on the proletarianization of the peasant, and their productive processes rely on extensive state-support, which still existed even after the disastrous

neo-liberal adjustments of the early 1990s. Even a desire for land-distribution and the desire to be a small family farmer, tarrable as reformist objectives, have a radical content as they run up against core capitalist imperatives.

But still other campesinos, coalescing in cooperatives and taking part in ideological formation, are realizing that such "trade-union" goals may not be achievable within the context of a neo-liberal regime of accumulation. They furthermore are trying to move beyond industrial and individual agriculture, in many cases, creating the seeds of a new society within the shell of the old, pre-figuring the sorts of institutions that might exist in the society for which they strive. They are creating organizations to propagate their revolutionary strategy and ideologies more broadly and deeply, and this, too, represents a great threat to landed and urban capital—explaining why mercenaries and assassins have killed so many of the FNCEZ's militants.

The possibilities of transcending this state of affairs, and where and how the FNCEZ has mis-stepped, I leave for the concluding chapter.

Chapter 3. Brazil's Landless Movement

3.1. Agrarian structures in Historical Perspective

I now look south, to Brazil, and to the historical conditions that gave rise to the MST (Movimiento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, Landless Workers Movement). In Brazil, as in Venezuela, land distribution has been very, very unequal for a very, very long time. But this was so for slightly different reasons.[26] At the onset of colonization, Portuguese settlers established massive sugar-cane plantations, initially in the northeast, but soon spreading to other regions of the country, employing massive quantities of African slave labor. Until the 1888 abolition of slavery, most Brazilian laborers were slaves. Capitalist wage-labor only began to penetrate the countryside beginning in roughly 1850, with the passage of the Land Law. The law made purchase the sole legal way to acquire land, and privatized what had been theretofore communal possession of land. It also prevented déclassé groups, such as destitute peasants, non-Catholic immigrants, and former Black slaves from owning land, thereby exerting an upward pressure on labor supply. With that law in place, the 1888 abolition of slavery did nothing to change the wildly unequal rural social structure. When slaves become *camponeses*, they don't instantly receive land as rural manna-from-on-high.

The Brazilian countryside displayed a wide range of forms of production, from effective serfdom to sharecropping to capitalist relations of production. Even the Brazilian *fazenda* produced not only commodities for sale on the market but also crops for subsistence, for the sustenance of the manorial family and the workers living upon the manor-lands.[27]

The gradual colonization of the ostensibly unpopulated—but actually populated by indigenous Brazilians—agricultural frontier further pushed along the creation of capitalist social relations in the Brazilian countryside.[28] One key consequence of these institutional changes was the rapid concentration of land in the hands of the oligarchy and the "nascent agrarian bourgeoisie." By the late 19th century, coffee became the paramount export crop, and it was produced in areas to which immigrants were attracted under various types of production relations. This coffee production for commodity export was central in terms of assisting the accrual of bullion. Through coffee bean

[26] My discussion over the next five pages tracks Vergara-Camus,(2007: 45-55, 61-63, 67) and sources cited, except where explicitly indicated that a line of argument is coming from elsewhere.
[27] Portuguese for *hacienda.*
[28] Capitalism is a global system that can co-exist even on a local level with slavery. But that doesn't invalidate the point.

production and then its sale on international commodity markets, the coffee oligarchy accumulated the capital to start the industrialization process in São Paulo, which began in 1850 and started thenceforth to rapidly accelerate. At the same time, a constant flow of immigrants into Brazil assured that labor remained a relatively abundant factor in the production process, contributing to the creation of a modern sector alongside an extremely large subsistence sector, which endured in the interstices of the developing capitalist agrarian system, at least until the initial decades of the twentieth century (Leff, 1973: 687-688).

In the early to mid 20th century, as capitalist relations came to predominate in the Brazilian countryside, tremendous swathes of large commercial plantations or large *fazendas*, producing for the market and using both wage-labor and tenant farmers—sharecroppers—became the primary productive units. But not to the exclusion of other forms of labor, such as family farmers, "*boias frias* [day-laborers], *posseiros* [squatters]," and others. In the sugar-lands of northeast Brazil, in the late nineteenth century production based on slavery changed over to a system based on tenant farming, wherein ex-slaves remained as *moradores* (permanent workers) within the larger plantation system.[29] In the coffee estates of São Paulo, overlords introduced the *colonato* system, a stylized combination of wage-labor, payment of rents-in-kind or rents-through-labor, and arrangements enabling *colonos* to plant food crops between the rows of coffee trees. In Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, and Paraná, state-fostered immigration of white, southern European immigrants enabled the propagation of a small and self-sufficient peasant niche, alongside large latifundia, the exception to the countrywide pattern of extreme inequality in land ownership. (It is from this social sector that MST activists stem.)

The coffee barons exercised an effective monopoly over the state until economic crisis wracked the world, upsetting a domestic political and social dynamic that was becoming increasingly untenable. The political system was oriented towards serving the interests of the "agrarian-commercial bourgeoisie," who were unwilling to relinquish their power and could not re-orient their social vision to account for the new segments of social power that were emerging as Brazil began to industrialize and commercialize, with the attendant growth in physical infrastructure.

[29] Such structural contiguity points up the relevance of Graeber's observation that the over-labored notion that slavery is retrograde capitalism ought be reversed to the terser and snappier comment that capitalism is modern-day slavery.

Class-based discontent grew, "on the part of those classes which were engaged in industry, finance, commerce and services" (Ianni, 1964a: 44-45).

The Great Depression, combined with the structural over-production that was braided into the Brazilian coffee production system, set off a coffee crisis. Prices plummeted, and the losses were socialized through a reactive currency devaluation, injuring the interests of those not directly involved in coffee production. In the Revolution of 1930, the São Paulo-based agrarian power-holders lost some of their social power to army officers and elites from other regions, accelerating urbanization, centralization, and industrialization. From the 1930s to the 1960s, there was intensive state-intervention in the agricultural system. With the exception of the dictatorial 1937-1945 interregnum, the Getulio Vargas governments were composed of coalitions, here working in concert with the remnants of the São Paulo coffee aristocracy, there, advocating strongly for the interests of commercial and industrial capital (Ianni, 1964a: 47). Some of this was a necessary adjustment to the recurrent crises in coffee-production. Labor itself migrated to the cities, offering a constituency for a government intent on creating coalitions to partially overcome the interests of landed capital. To that end, the government also emplaced systematic policies in order to be able to offer something for the emergent urban working-class to purchase and consume, thereby creating backwards and forward linkages within the thickening Brazilian economic structure.[30] Those policies included price-controls in order to keep food prices below international levels, enabling wages likewise to remain low, depressing the costs of social reproduction. Such measures came to include export-licenses on food crops—distributed only as domestic production targets were reached. Meanwhile, commodity exports financed the capital goods imports that Brazil was not yet capable of producing given its relatively un-advanced technological infrastructure.

[30] Recall here that especially in southern Brazil, and amidst the South and Southeastern industrial belt, Brazil was in some ways starting to develop in the 30s and 40s, on a trajectory that would have closed the gap between it and the core metropolitan states. This did not last.

Figure 3.1. Maps of Brazil

However, conjunctural attention to the interests of the urban working-class did not mean that all poor sectors were thus favored. Particularly, the rural poor remained under the over-lordship of rural property owners, a concession granted to large landholders reliant on cheap labor. Rural-dwellers continued to live in penury, their lives rife with "hunger, malnutrition, and chronic pauperism." There was a pattern of rigid control over their lives, either through economic coercion or the threat of direct violence. It was these *camponeses* who formed the nucleus of the Peasant Leagues that advocated for a radical agrarian reform, which would have broken the power of landed capital in the countryside. Merchant capital supported this aspiration, aware that

for whatever reasons, “rural conditions generate a fiercer combativity in a section of the emergent agricultural proletariat” (Ianni, 1964b: 54). Conversely, landed capital, still powerful, was the key actor behind the coup d’état that overthrew João Goulart in 1964.

In southern Brazil, where the MST emerged, wheat was the dominant crop, notably in the 1940s and 1950s in Rio Grande do Sul. From the end of the 1930s through the end of the 1950s, the federal state set up programs to aid wheat production, through the Ministry of Agriculture, including a familiar triad: price floors, credit, and a public marketing corporation. The resulting increase in wheat cultivation formed the basis for the rise of a class of *granjeiros* (small capitalist farmers) who were quickly incorporated into the dominant agro-industrial system through their cooperatives. Many peasants and sharecroppers turned their efforts to wheat through the end of the 1950s, when wheat prices declined precipitously. During the 1960s, agricultural modernization advanced hand-in-thresher with the South’s transformation into the epicenter of Brazilian soybean production. Soy production substituted or complemented wheat production—wheat farmers switched over to soy-farming or added it to their crop mix, boosted by a burst of government credit. Comparatively, soy is an extremely capital-intensive crop: cultivation and harvesting are almost always mechanized, and the plant needs many chemical inputs to flourish. Capitalist farmers were and are more likely to receive credit, and they are more likely to own the necessary combines and tractors. They were thus structurally situated to benefit from the boom in soy production.

Family-production units, integrated in but not dominating the rural economy, also produced soy, but they increasingly rented the machines needed to grow it. Perforce, the owners of such machines were able to extract a surplus from increasingly marginalized petty-capitalist farmers. Furthermore, as the Brazilian government promoted the penetration of European, Japanese, and American capital into Brazilian domestic agricultural production, abetting the switch-over from subsistence or non-input-intensive commercial agriculture to mechanical- and chemical-dependent wheat, corn, and soybean production, such corporations bought up land and soaked up domestic agricultural credit, producing surpluses while depressing prices (Wright and Wolford, 2003: 3).

In the South, this created massive discontent and a push for agrarian reform through the MASTER movement. Meanwhile, in the North, labor relations and rural economic architecture

had been stagnant for decades. It was this discontent that fed the Peasant Leagues that in part pushed the Goulart government in the direction of radical land redistribution, while *camponeses* lived in conditions akin to slavery. In 1961, conservative president Jânio Quadros resigned. Goulart, a left-leaning populist, came to the presidency. Popular mobilization was also waxing, a global phenomenon, while ideological polarization led to a political stall in the parliament. Economic crisis, too, was mounting, and Goulart pursued a series of radical reforms, including granting the right to unionize to rural workers. But Congress, still with a powerful bloc of political power representing landed interests, blocked his subsequent push for agrarian reform, and as Goulart attempted to circumvent this legislative roadblock, the landlords struck back in the form of coup d'état on March 31, 1964 (Ondetti, 2008: 10-12).

In Brazil, the military junta that came to power with the 1964 coup d'état created a new relationship between Brazilian agriculture and the larger economic architecture. With Brazil's vast tracts of land, the generals saw an opportunity for the country to press a comparative advantage, a massive export-agricultural sector, alongside such a system's core components: the encouragement of exports from monoculture plantations, the homogenization of production systems, the incubation of agri-business, and further concentration of production. Their project was meant to encourage advanced capitalist production over the hidebound latifundia. After 1968, the project expanded greatly, with the diversion of subsidized credit, alongside "fiscal incentives" to enterprises investing in land. Between 1969 and 1979, rural credit sextupled.

Predictably, as small-farmers had to spend scarce capital to rent machines, they lost social power. Some of them lost their land, while semi-subsistence farmers who were even more marginalized and squeezed out from access to government credit, caught in the other pincer of reduced rural employment, also lost their land. Meanwhile land values increased, and domestic and foreign agribusiness "raced" to purchase land, only to let it sit "fallow to facilitate a quick resale," further preventing land-access amongst Brazil's neediest campesino families. The result was land concentration and the increased penetration of capitalism into the countryside, as many "posseiros, sharecroppers, and rural workers" were forced to migrate to the cities, although some stayed on in the fields, intermittently contracted as day laborers. Such tendencies were visible throughout the country. Agricultural modernization, the acceleration of mechanization, and the spread of cattle-ranches combined to reduce labor needs enormously: between 1960 and 1980, 28

million peasants or members of the rural working-class fled—economic refugees—to Brazil's mega-cities, mostly to peripheries that quickly deteriorated into slums.

They were the results of a development model based on expanding cash-crop agriculture to pay for the imports needed for middle-class consumption and to try to facilitate the transition to a more industrialized development model. Initially this worked. From 1968 to 1974, under the generals, Brazilian economic growth exceeded 11 percent a year. Industrial GDP grew faster than agricultural GDP, although both grew robustly. Industry moved from comprising 32.5 percent of GDP in 1964 to 39.5 percent in 1978. The corresponding figures for agriculture were 16.3 and 1.3 percent (Ondetti, 2008: 58-59). But agriculture grew though conservative authoritarian modernization: exports to boost foreign exchange earnings, domestic production for raw material supply. Tractor use and chemical fertilizer use exploded, as did agricultural credit. Alongside these developments, soybean and sugar production grew sharply.

Campesinos fled en masse from the countryside—no blithe trot to the cities, as Collier would have it—as the world's rural population decreased by 25 percent between 1950 and 1997, while 63 percent of the world's urban population lived—lives—in and on the blurry borders of the "sprawling cities of the global South" (McMichael, 2009c: 38). Meanwhile, at the same time, the number of tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and squatters declined precipitously, nowhere more so than in the Southern Brazil, while the rural wage labor force grew rapidly, and larger farmers came to control more and more land. The Gini coefficient for landownership went from .838 in 1970 to .852 in 1980 (Ondetti, 2008: 60). The South was also the only region in Brazil, which witnessed a net decline in the total number of independent farms. It wasn't until the early 1980s that the number of small plots started to increase, but their average size did not: the average size of small and very-small land-plots declined too, especially in the South, perhaps because agriculture served as a kind of desperate lifeboat, one less efficacious as more and more people crammed into it (Ondetti, 2008: 64). During the 1980s, the heavily subsidized credit that had under-girded the previous two decades of modernization nearly disappeared, falling by 80 percent. Other forms of state intervention remained more stable. Food purchasing and stockpiling programs and price floors were maintained through the early 1990s as the state struggled to restore food production.

These figures made sense in the context of larger, external forces. As Friedmann notes, the world economic system within which Brazil was by then firmly embedded exerted tremendous pressures. In particular, the global South became increasingly dependent on American wheat exports, a dependency forced by the generous subsidies provided by the American government to its input intensive commercial wheat producers (Friedmann, 1993: 37). As Friedmann continues, by the "early 1970s, then, the food regime had caught the third world in a scissors. One blade was food import dependency. The other blade was declining revenues from traditional exports of tropical crops." Amidst the 1973-1974 food crisis, food import bills increased sharply, and American over-production simultaneously satisfied, benefited from, and was enhanced by this crisis: between 1970 and 1980 US grain exports octupled (Friedmann, 1993: 39). As Friedmann notes, amidst these shifts,

> Brazil *replicated and modernized* the US model of state organized agrofood production. It *shifted* the focus of domestic policy from agricultural subsidies to agroindustry, which increased the value of commodities and did not create surpluses. Brazilian export policy replaced the US focus on stabilization of domestic farm programs, with an emphasis on high value added exports (Friedmann, 1993: 39).

In conclusion, one might say that in a partial echo of the Venezuelan experience of agricultural modernization, Brazil's agricultural economy was subjected to a state-led two-step. First, the state ushered the agricultural sector onto dependence on state-support, and then it pulled away or restructured support programs, forcing the existing agrarian structure to re-adjust, to a system based on accommodation to capital as opposed to one structured so as to make rural development a component of a national development strategy. Rural people did not react well to this process.

3.2. The Impact of the Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church

Alongside wide-ranging changes in the structural dynamics of the Brazilian countryside, social and symbolic change was also taking place. The Catholic Church, beginning in the 1960s, started to radicalize, opening itself up to the ideas and ideologies of liberation theology. At the same time priests and lay pastors wove themselves into the warp of the Brazilian countryside, creating crucial connections between previously atomized or repressed peasants, and articulating peasant

demands for land in the rhetoric of religious expectations for social justice and redemption. These changes were to provide a crucial impetus to the founding of the MST.

While neo-liberalism wrenchingly dislocated the Brazilian campesino sectors, liberation theologians were hard at work. The Catholic Church changed its social outlook, adopting the "preferential option" for the poor in the aftermath of decisions made in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and later in Medellin at the Second Conference of Latin American Bishops. There, a radical leftist theology came into the open, and theologians strengthened it further at the Third Bishops Conference in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979 (Laureano, 2007: 42). These meetings produced a schism in the theretofore deeply conservative, if not reactionary, Latin American Catholic Church. Senior pastors, harassed by Brazil's military regime, increasingly embraced what some might consider a primitive Christianity, Utopian in its social vision. Lower-level lay pastors already had a history of dissidence, and dialogue with Marxism. Liberation theologians, working in places shot through with social injustice, were able to make their teachings radical and concrete: if God created the land for all, why should one *fazendeiro* own it, and why should the government shoot radical priests or peasants for saying so? A strong Christian left appeared in the soy and grain fields of Brazil (Cava, 1989: 150-151). One facet of this resurgence, in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America, was the organization of ecclesiastical base communities—CBEs—where radical Catholicism was braided with the desire for land, suddenly very much an issue for a dispossessed peasantry. Institutionally, this braiding resulted in the foundation of a substantial and enduring institution: the Pastoral Land Commission (Comité Pastoral do Terra, CPT), closely linked with the MST and the crucible of rural radicalism in 1970s and 1980s Brazil.

The CPT was founded in 1975 in Goiânia, an ingathering or institutionalization of the various currents of liberation theology. It was a Brazilian response not only to the various conferences, but also to a process of self-criticism of the role of the Church in the coup of 1964. Its role was immensely important. As João Pedro Stedile comments, "The CPT carried out the extremely important work of consciousness-raising amongst the campesinos" (Stedile, 1999: 7). Indeed, through such actions as bible readings, or better-put, bible re-readings, organized by CBEs, activists asked: "Does God want it to be this way? If not, what can we do about it?" and used the didactic comparison to Moses's time in the desert. They called for a return to a land of milk and honey; in more starkly radical terms they called for a "new society." The CPT incorporated

Marxist ideological currents into its ideology and its action, and encouraged campesinos to see themselves as a class for itself: the *sem terra*, the landless (Ondetti, 2008: 76). Other accounts confirm the importance of the CPT's emphasis on land-redistribution, as well as its communitarian social-vision, which saw a village of smallholders as a utopia for the inculcation of Christian liberation theology (Ondetti, 2008: 54-57). Indigenous dispossession fused with these currents, adding yet another aggrieved social group to an already heady mix, abetted by the organizational work of Stedile, one of the MST's founders (Wright and Wolford, 2003: 8-12, 14-19).

The MST's historian, Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, adds that the CBEs served as spaces for "political socialization" that permitted the recreation of the campesino organization and shielded members from the jackboot of the generals' dictatorship. The Catholic Church was a bridge between poor people's working lives and their religiosity. The CBEs became "spaces of reflection and learning, of how to transform reality" through the struggle for land, a brazen refusal of the structural conditions imposed by the "policies of conservative modernization" (Laureano, 2007: 42). Peasants did not merely join the CBEs and the theretofore-reactionary church, iron filings reacting to cultural or ideological as opposed to economic determinism. The Catholic Church "sought out fragmented groups of landless peasants," as Wendy Sinek observes, aiding them to coalesce. This network was the ideal "training ground" for social movement militants and helped craft organic linkages between dispersed campesinos with similar grievances, assisting them to universalize their specific claims, to help them see that they weren't merely parochial but the result of larger processes, and thus inciting a more universal and shared response. As Sinek concludes, through such processes as well as the distribution of resources, chiefly "financial and organizational support…the Church was crucial in fostering the emergence of coordinated collective action among the landless in Brazil" (Sinek, 2007: 14).

This fits in with an analytical perspective that identifies resources as one of the primary determinants of social-movement growth and success in any context. As Lichbach notes, movements provide resources to peasants. Institutions can provide resources to movements, granting leeway to act in repressive environments where they might normally be chary about collective action that would challenge the interests or perceived directives of an authoritarian state, with great resources of violence to bring to bear on those who defy its diktat.

Also, the language, the discourse, in formal terms the ideology that the Church was able to offer did not necessarily change the peasants' thinking, or make them unaware of the injustice of the world they inhabited. But this ideology may have sharpened their outrage, giving them a convincing, coherent, articulate discourse with which to challenge authority. Perhaps, in this way, the raised campesino consciousness, rupturing the "miasma" of power, in Scott's phrase, and doing so in part by reconstructing an ideology of resistance, highlighting, for example, the Peasant Leagues as direct pre-cursors to the MST. Perhaps more importantly, this ideology made peasants aware that they were not alone, that their dreams of over-turning the established order were supported by a core social institution, the Church, and reminding them that others had tried to change things in the past, too.[31]

Such a carefully nurtured ideology is helpful when confronting the state. It reminds those who have much to lose in resistance that resistance has taken place before. What is also crucial here is that those with a relative surfeit of resources changed their own mindsets and their own institutions, making them far more amenable to offering such aid to those without. Such an interpretation adds thick flesh to Scott's contention that the question of whether campesinos need middle-class external agitators to orchestrate revolt is mostly a question of interpretation—campesinos need the resources of the intellectuals and institutions, but intellectuals can't make "revolution" or socialism without common people—a useful point that the intellectuals who jot down history often forget.

3.3. Historical Precursors and the Specific Origins of the MST in Southern Brazil

The ideology of the MST is inseparable from communal memory, in part re-created through both the MST's educational and propaganda work as well as through the consciousness-raising of the CPT. At the same time, these ideologies and traditions—partially invented—were taken up in the Brazilian South due to several factors, some having to do with regional allies, others having to do with the region's specific economic development trajectory.

MST militants are aware that the movement is the inheritor of an earlier tradition of rural revolt, which the dictatorship quashed: the Peasant Leagues that flourished from 1945-1964, with a

[31] The knowledge of repression seems unlikely to deter revolt or organization in this specific context. Campesinos and workers and dissidents generally had been repressed for years in the Brazilian countryside. They didn't need a refreshed memory of repression to be-still them. They lived with repression, and so more likely the memory or revolt would inspire or buttress their own revolt or organization.

robust presence in thirteen Brazilian states, and a continuous stream of congresses and meetings. Alongside the Peasant Leagues was the Ultab, the Union of Farmers and Farm Workers, an initiative partly born out of the Brazilian Communist Party, present in every state except Pernambuco and Rio Grade do Sul. The Landless Farmers Movement (Movimento dos Agricultores Sem Terra, MASTER) was another precursor, functioning from the late 1950s to 1964. It focused on direct action—land invasions, for example (Harnecker, 2002: 13-22). Stedile suggests that MASTER functioned as an "enduring historical memory," but a memory only, due to its inability to function as an "autonomous social movement" (Stedile, 2003: 3).

Stedile particularly emphasizes the MST's conception of itself as the "inheritor and follower of the Peasant Leagues" (Stedile, 2003: 3-5). As could be expected, the 1964 coup resulted in total demobilization of the Ultab, the Peasant Leagues, and MASTER. Agrarian unrest could result in imprisonment, torture, death. So these were quiet times in the countryside, as economic grievances mounted and the numbers of economic refugees grew, bloating the cities (Harnecker, 2002: 13-22). Simultaneously, the generals passed land legislation, the 1964 Land Statute, which gave the federal government the right to expropriate *fazendas* and settle the landless. However, this power was used to settle the Amazon, not to change land ownership patterns in Brazil's core regions. The Amazon colonization program was never a significant effort, never enough to do more than slightly slow down the Brazilian people's emigration to the cities. And as economic distress worsened, even that process would become more and more problematic, as during the 1970s and 1980s, cities became increasingly economically insecure. According to neo-liberal lore, campesinos should have been able to yo-yo back to the countryside. But their plots had been taken over and agriculture modernized. There was no place for them (Ondetti, 2008: 92), contrary to dominant theories postulating otherwise (Breman, 2009: 29-36).

Focusing tightly on the chain of events that led to the MST's birth in Brazil's South, Wright and Wolford write that small land-holders frequently would improve land, only to be later dispossessed by larger land-holders, through control of the state machinery or administrative artifice or simply through the leverage accruing to those with power in the free-market. And behind that market was and is the state—it was Brazilian state-led development that led to the construction of the titanic Itaipu dam in the triple-border-region of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina, displacing a critical mass of farmers. They were the relatively well-educated descendants of European immigrants, with an active tradition of radicalism, inflected by the

ideologies ascendant in southern Europe at the time they left to come to Brazil—anarchism and Marxism among them. They also had a relatively strong tradition of smallholder agriculture, and so, as Wright and Wolford write, "In contrast to most other regions of Brazil, the southern rural radicalism was not simply born of deprivation; it was fueled by disappointed expectations."[32]

Wright and Wolford are right in arguing that deprivation contributed to agitation, as did disappointed expectations—how could they not? In southern Brazil, as in most of the country, poverty in the agricultural sector was increasing throughout the 1970s, while the average size of land-holdings shrunk in all of them. The tradition of small-holder agriculture perhaps had a bit more to do with the reason the MST emerged in southern Brazil, as does one facet of the economic structure that particularly pre-disposed the southern Brazilian campesino to mobilize, or symbolically shatter the memory of repression. The initial dispossessions of small producers, pre-dating the Itaipu Dam, had been alleviated by the use of the Amazon frontier as a steam-valve to let off campesino pressure. The initial introduction of mechanized soy production induced masses of peasants to migrate to Rondônia, or Para, or Mato Grasso. By the early 1980s, however, those doors had slammed shut (Stedile, 2003: 1).

But deprivation or economic determinism don't adequately explain the MST's southern origins. Accompanying the closure of the economic valve was a different type of opening, the opening up of the political system itself. This was a critical development. Attempting to control dissent by jailing then-trade-union-leader Luis Inácio "Lula" da Silva, the 40-day-jail term the military government handed down merely encouraged rebelliousness. Repression can backfire in the right circumstances—or, perhaps, the wrong ones. Soon afterwards, the ABC strikes in São Paulo state contributed greatly to symbolically rupturing the regime's repressive power, as organized labor moved from accommodation or quiescence to resistance, forming the Worker's Party (Partido Trabalhadores, PT) alongside rebellious students and leftist elements within the Church (Keck, 1989: 252-296). Simultaneously, the state threat of repression was evaporating, the cycle of fear and repression broken (Stedile, 2003: 62).

Then, in May 1978 the Indians themselves pushed out more than 1,100 squatters occupying indigenous Kaigang land—the Nonoai reserve. The state sent half to the Amazon. But 400

[32] Wright and Wolford, *To Inherit the Earth*, pp. 25-26, 31-48. Deprivation does not "explain" radicalism any more than any other structure does. Radicalism connotes change, and static structures by definition can't explain changing circumstances.

families stayed, refusing to go off to an unsecured Utopia of open land in a place they had never seen. Between June and July 1978, a group of them, 300 campesinos, took over two government-owned farms, Macali and Brilhante—the first occupation of state-land during the dictatorship. This was a frontal, physical challenge to a state that had until then responded to rural dissent with batons and bullets. Not this time. Government officials coaxed the peasants to leave the land, promising them land elsewhere. They didn't get it. A parish priest and several activists—one of them Stedile—helped them to re-organize, and 110 families went back to Macali, on Brazilian Independence Day, September 7. They got their land. Brilhante was likewise soon re-occupied. Its occupiers got their land, too (Carter, 2002: 116-119).

Subsequently the dispossession of some 12,000 smallholders by the Itaipu dam created a huge wellspring of campesino unrest (Stedile, 2003: 8-9). Some, emboldened by the victories at Brilhante and Macali, congregated, after careful planning, at Encruzilhada Natalino, where other landless families were encamped, bolstered by bearing witness to state power being "irrevocably broken," helped along by organizers like Stedile and other pastoral agents who hastened things along (Alavi, 1965: 275; Carter, 2002: 127-129). Then things really took off: 600 families had gathered at Natalino by June 1981, and then Don Pedro Casaldáliga, the head of the Amazonian prelacy of São Felix do Araguaia visited and gave a riveting sermon on June 21, with 6,000 people in attendance, discussing the travails of Amazon peasant life and urging campesinos to struggle for land, in words drawing from Brazilian law and a Christianity infused with moral exhortations—a recurring pattern in MST and CPT agitation. As he put it, "If you remained united and organized, in the name of God, I promise you the land!" (Carter, 2002: 151-152). The government attempted to buy them off, with the offer of Amazonian territory, in accord with the military government's long-standing policy of attempting to colonize the Amazon.[33] But after Don Pedro's sermon, this did not work. Amidst mounting pressure from both the encamped campesinos, various civil society groups, and, crucially, metropolitan allies, in September 1983 the government authorized the purchase of 1,870 hectares for the encamped families (Harnecker, 2003: 23). The relevance of the victory can scarcely be over-stated. The symbolic codes that established that collective action would be repressed changed radically. Campesinos knew that

[33] This too is a fascinating way that the government would enable a two-step act of primitive accumulation, first sending settlers in to deforest a patch of Amazon forest and turn it into "arable" land, feeling trees, clearing stumps, and then winking as large land-holders dispossessed the small-holders who had expended so much of their energy in clearing the land and making it fit for farming.

not only could they organize without necessarily incurring repression, but that their organization might bear fruit in the form of redistribution.

Ondetti suggests that the most important factor underlying these actions was that amidst rapid modernization there was also widespread and ongoing organization. The Left was historically extremely strong in southern Brazil. It is not irrelevant that the *orçamiento participativo*, the participatory budget, was established first in the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, nor that that capital city emerged as a PT stronghold in later years, repeatedly hosting the World Social Forum (Ondetti, 2008: 64-65, 80-82; Sintomer and Gret, 2002; Abers, 2000). It's also important, as Mançano Fernandes writes, to recall that when, as at Macali, campesinos invade land and occupy it and demand its redistribution, that itself *is* the movement. This perspective prevents a wrongheaded conceptualization of the movement as merely the congresses, the songs, the website, the headquarters, the books, the intellectuals, the spokespersons. What's truly important is what goes on in between the conferences and congresses, which is why Mançano Fernandes suggests taking the entire period from 1979 to 1984 as one long extended birth, as land-struggles and occupations occurred in five central and southern Brazilian states, while the CPT brought stragglers and strugglers together, hosting the first discussions about creating a national movement as early as July 1982 (Fernandes, 2006: 285-286).

Indeed, the CPT immediately proposed a movement of national reach. And it was in part due to the CPT's ecumenical influence that the movement was organized along national as opposed to regional lines, helping the settlers to transcend their limiting regionalisms and ensuring that the MST knew that it had to organize in the Northeast, where much of the country's rural poverty was concentrated (Stedile, 2003: 10; Wight and Wolford, 2003: 106-130). In January 1984, there were 100 representatives at the first MST conference, alongside representatives from 13 states. These representatives conceived of themselves as an "autonomous movement of the masses," intent to avoid direct dependence on either unions or churches, regarding them as institutions that, they feared, might blunt the keen edge of their radicalism. The MST soon adopted the slogan, "the land to the tiller" along with an egalitarian and structurally radical political program, fighting not merely for land redistribution but for an end to capitalism. The MST was composed mostly of small landholders, renting families, or campesinos expelled from latifundia by mechanization or merely the conversion of productive land to fallow land.

3.4. The Growth and Consolidation of the MST

The MST was aware of the role the countryside played in the nation, both economically and demographically, and from the start it attempted to create rural-urban links. Its first official Congress was in early January 1985, from the 29th to the 31st, with 1500 delegates from 23 states, meeting in Parana. They garnered support from the Brazilian Communist Party and the Communist Party of Brazil, which, in distinction to other leftist groups, didn't trust the Sarney government at all. The MST likewise took an openly oppositional stance, declaring, "Ocupacão é a unica solucão," occupation is the only solution (Stedile, 2003: 33).

Shortly afterwards, the movement held its First National Meeting of the Settlements in Cascaval, Parana, with representatives from 76 settlements in 11 states. There, some of the settlers suggested that those who were actually settled should form a new movement. Others in turn argued that simple land ownership was hardly the point. Rather, it was necessary to enable the peasantry to live off the land. To that end, those eager to settle and those already established on the land were merely two segments of a unified movement, both parts of which were demanding that the state redistribute resources, whether land or money or credit or knowledge, technical assistance or seed stock or infrastructure, down the "steep gradient of inequality" (Kidder, 2004: 101). As one analyst puts it,

> It is not enough that the campesino conquers the land. He must also be able to count on the conditions that permit him to work it: without machines, without seeds, without credit, without the technical knowledge that it possible to take advantage of the advances of the technological revolution, without commercial channels for their products, the land instead of becoming a space of liberation, becomes a nightmare, and ends up being sold for incredible low prices or simply abandoned (Stedile, 2003: 39-40).

By 1987, there were widespread moves within the settlements to establish a system based on cooperative production or associative production. While the original ideological vision embraced by the MST had been cooperative, seeing co-ops as the primitive pre-cursors to socialism, or socialist production units, that vision had initially run into resistance on the ground, within settlements. Ideological radicalism had run ahead of the movement—or ideologues had moved too fast, too far ahead of the movement. But cooperatives are not only auspicious from the standpoint of socialist ideologues dreamily envisaging a different future, but also from the perspective of economic efficiency. This latter consideration had quite a bit to do with their more

widespread embrace, demonstrating the MST's economic strength in the face of opposition from large-landholders, and simultaneously freeing up additional cadres for movement labor—for movement building, since cooperative labor allows for some to devote themselves to specialized tasks, including political work, while the community as whole is able to compensate for their absence from farm-production, and make sure their families get enough food (Stedile, 2003: 43). By 1989, 89,350 families had been settled.

In 1990, amidst the 2nd MST Congress, there was a period of slowdown, as President Collor de Mello's government cracked down on the MST. His government tossed political and juridical monkey-wrenches into MST organization, scarcely handing out more than a few scraps of land (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 282). Such repression included the selective imprisonment of MST leaders. Federal police also invaded MST offices in several state, destroying equipment and documents and arresting MST militants (Fernandes, n.d.)

During the Congress there was also a multi-tiered debate about cooperative-ism. The movement finally decided that credit procurement and sales could be centralized. Abjuring state assistance was also held to be impossible: to do so, they felt, would essentially prevent development. But MST leaders and members similarly decided that cooperatives could not be a route to "primitive accumulation," preparing large, integrated farms and a trained workforce to be quickly or covertly expropriated, as had happened in the south in the 50s and 60s. This was a time when the MST was moving slowly, building strength, "territorializing" itself in the Brazilian countryside. In July 1995, at the 3rd MST conference, the movement came to the conclusion that they had to better explain and disseminate their conception of the role of rural development within a broader plan of endogenous national development (Stedile, 2003: 50-56). Thus the movement sought to create a "meeting space," a space for "fraternization, the strengthening of the protagonists of the land struggle," for developing and training people alongside the deepening of the process of land reform.

At the same time, it confronted a government deeply hostile to agrarian reform, regarding it as a sort of crude, Romantic, Marxist demand, rooted in a belief that ownership over the means of production mattered in terms of producing and reproducing disparities in social power. Cardoso and his technocrats regarded the MST's program as anachronistic, fighting furiously against a historical process leading to capital intensive agriculture that was to take place on massive

plantations—juxtaposed with the MST's supposed simplistic vision, the government was bound to a Promethean vision. Cardoso derided advocates of land reform as making a "nineteenth-century demand" (Pereira, 2003: 49).

In August 1995, the massacre at Corumbiara and the April 1996 massacre at El Dorado dos Carajás, Pará, would precipitate a wave of occupations (Stedile, 2003: 57). The latter, during which 19 MST militants died, caused a nation-wide scandal. Furthermore, a popular television soap opera, *O Rei do Gado* (The Cattle King), which benignly portrayed the MST and initially aired two months after the massacre, also helped to turn public opinion in favor of the MST (Carter, 2009: 16). Indeed, the movement's growth from 1995 to 1999 merits special attention, especially because throughout this essay I have identified repression and the memory of repression as one of the variables that explains peasant hesitation to mobilize. Repression is the answer given to the usually tacit question: "Why Won't They Make a Revolution?" In this case, the two massacres, rather than leading to repression and hesitation, due to a realistic reevaluation of the movement's strength, led to expansion. A wide and sympathetic focus on the massacres led to wide public attention, and in turn, a decreased willingness to deploy state violence against the MST (Ondetti, 2008: 140-178). Changes in the political opportunity structure don't only signify changes in the state's capacity or perceived capacity to repress. They can also signify changes in civil society, which in its partial way the state must respond to, or of which it must take account.

The priorities and wishes of public opinion are a structure, too, or in Wolf's terminology, part of the field of power, or field of forces to use E.P. Thompson's term, within which the MST must maneuver. And the movement's actions can themselves change the opinions of the civil society. The public furor in response to the massacres provoked an attempt at political damage control. In particular, the killings at El Dorado dos Carajás became a "potent symbol of social injustice in the countryside" (Ondetti, 2008: 175). Meanwhile, quickening neo-liberalization contributed to the pool of peasants who could have theoretically joined the MST. These economic changes manifested in a growing unemployment crisis in the agricultural sector, alongside its inability to absorb a swelling labor force and slow job growth in the cities, heightened the

demographic/socio-economic pressure that was a necessary condition for movement expansion, alongside an influx of resources from the federal government and foreign NGOs.[34]

The MST was able to capitalize and undergird civil-society support for its mostly-peaceful attempts at agrarian redistribution by pressing its advantage through a march through Brazil. Scores of thousands of MST militants participated, as they walked through huge stretches of the Brazilian national territory in March 1997, talking with folk from all walks of civil society on a wending path to Brasilia. The March was a response to the Cardoso government's efforts to socially isolate the MST. Those efforts sought to break then-strengthening connections between the movement and civil society. Lasting over two months, it itself was a "process," as everything is, in the view of Stedile, aiming to deepen MST ties to the people of Brazil, its potential or passive supporters (Ondetti, 2008: 151-154).

The government gravely miscalculated the degree of resonance the MST had with civil society, attempting to "marginalize" the March before it had even begun. But it proved to be a stupendous success. With over 100,000 marchers, it was the largest demonstration in years, since the calls to impeach Collor over his corruption scandals in 1992. According to a National Confederation of Industry opinion poll carried out as the March began, 94 percent of Brazilians considered the struggle for land reform legitimate, 77 percent thought that the MST was a legitimate movement, and 88 percent felt that fallow land should be confiscated and passed onto to landless families (Meszaros, 2000: 2-3). Some analysts compared the MST March to Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 March on Washington. Others called it the "first victory of the lower classes over the neoliberal policies implemented by the Brazilian state" (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 287). Meszaros does not dwell on it, but the symbolic importance of an overwhelming call for supporting the confiscation—not paid expropriation—of private property suggests that civil society, the Brazilian people, were prepared to move far faster, further, harder, on agrarian reform than the state.

The MST was unable to press this advantage, and soon lost it, but the symbolic rupture is worth noting. The Brazilian people probably have little idea of just how much of their land is fallow, but the widespread cultural support for the right of use overriding an absolute right to property is

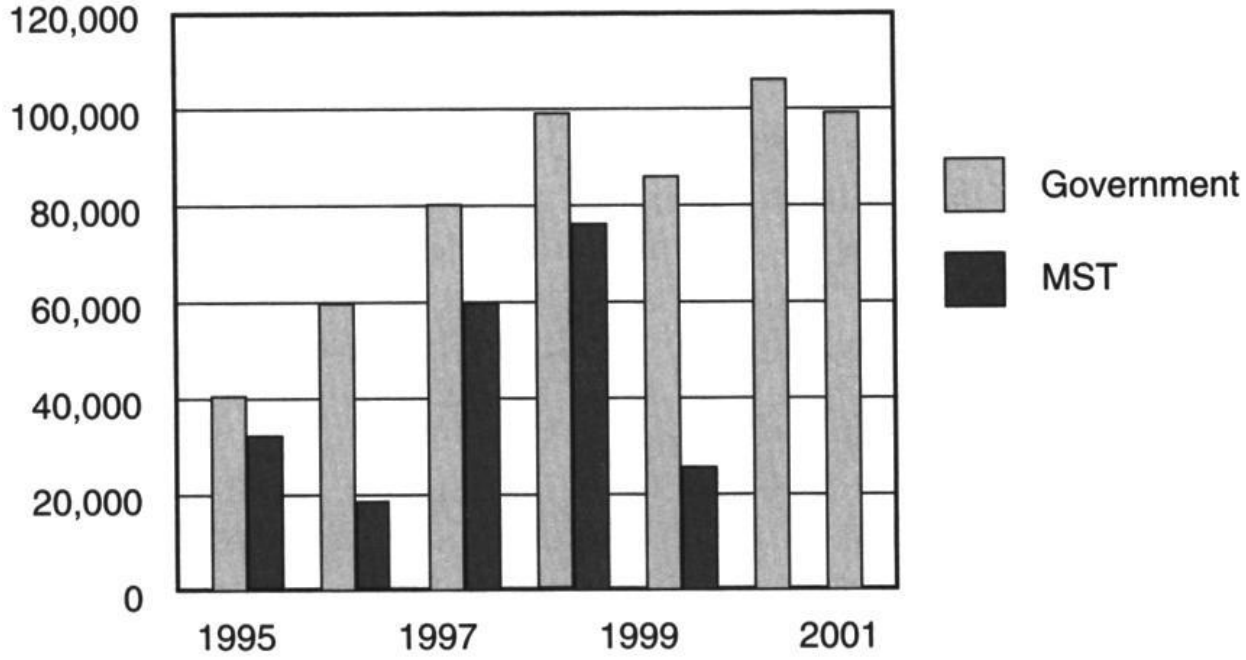
[34] A group of American businessmen send the MST a large donation of unknown size every year, and they also get money from OxFam and several Canadian NGOs. International pecuniary solidarity, too, can make a difference in a constant war of position, where resource-bases can make or break a movement (Stedile, 2002: 76-104, 87-89).

suggestive of great sympathy towards radical change. In this respect, it's worth recalling that Brazil is a disordered society. If the lower and lower-middle classes started bubbling, their anger would soon boil (Stedile, 2007: 193-216). This is the danger, that the Brazilian state and Brazilian capitalists are well aware of, and why, when possible, they orchestrate campaigns to de-legitimize and destroy the MST. They know a threat when they see one: in a 1998 study, analyzing peasant settlements in 13 states, 83 percent were found to be the result of land-occupations, strongly buttressing the idea that agrarian-reform was a reactive rather than pro-active process, one that could hasten with societal support, stall without it (Fernandes, 2006: 291).

Rather than building on societal sentiment, the MST moved aggressively—too aggressively. Or perhaps more to the point, the atavistically hostile media, out-of-step with civil society but in lock step with the government and the urges of major Brazilian capital, strongly invested in land, would portray the MST as violent. The increase in societal support stalled, and in turn the state moved more harshly to repress the MST, seeking to hamstring it by weakening its main tool of struggle: occupations.[35] The MST waned slightly during 2000-2002 as the number off occupations declined. Because of a decree issued by President Cardoso, if the MST occupied a plot of land, that land would be ineligible for expropriation for two years. If the MST were to again illicitly occupy the land, it would be off-limits for expropriation for four years. Those involved in invasions would be punished by being cut-off from state resources. Lands already distributed could be taken back (Ondetti, 2008: 179-197). As the MST's ability to influence the state began to dissipate, the state's turn towards administrative denial of reform was accompanied by an economic program that was sure to aggravate agrarian discontent.

[35] Surveys showing 77 percent support for the MST's operations in 1997 were returning somewhat lower numbers, 63 percent, in 2000 (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 302).

Figure 3.2. Beneficiaries of Land Redistribution, Brazil 1995-2001 (number of families settled)



Source: Pereira (2003: 51).

Cardoso's adoption of a floating exchange rate allowed the *real* to weaken sharply. Brazilian food-products were suddenly an alluring bargain. Soy and beef production shot up. Soy and beef are capital-intensive commodities. Meanwhile, Brazil's integration into international commodity chains grew tighter, more articulated: multinational capital flowed in, and Brazilian farming passed into a stage of yet-further reliance on artificial inputs, many of them locally produced—dependent agrarian development, but this time dependent on market-supplied commodities rather than foreign capital or foreign markets (USG, 2006; Rocha, 2002: 5-33). Technical assistance and credit shrunk sharply, and 180,000 *sem terra* languished in encampments. The diversion of political support from land redistribution and rural credit to pro-capital macroeconomic policies and dithering on land reform was more proof-in-the-pudding of the MST thesis that the struggles for land reform and the struggles for support for settlements were inseparable (Fernandes, 2006: 298-299). The government may have settled some peasants on land [See figure 3] but from 1995-2000, between 400,000 and 900,000 smallholders lost access to their land, and 1.2 million rural workers lost their jobs. One-fourth of those settled were forced to flee their land because of

inadequate support from the government (Pereira, 2003: 52). The government was not interested in real rural redistribution.

The MST-Via Campesina joint invasion of a Monsanto plantation that cultivated genetically modified maize would be one the first conflicts demarcating the lines of the global class war: the MST and its international allies against trans-national capital, genetic tampering, and the Brazilian state allowing such cancers to fester in the Brazilian countryside. It marked clearly the class lines, but did little to slow the MST's wane (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 289).

3.5. The MST and the Lula Government

But things changed rapidly with the election of Lula, as the number of occupations rose quickly, from 2003 to 2004 and onwards. Again political opportunity explains the resurgence in movement action: a Lula reliant on support from the MST to defeat an even-more-conservative opponent could not repress the movement so obviously and openly, as previous governments had done, particularly the neo-liberal Cardoso administration. Repression required subterfuge. But first, it required a showed of good faith. Social expectations and a pro forma show of reciprocity forced Lula to convene an agrarian reform team, including Plinio de Arruda Sampaio and Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, due to pressure from movements linked to the Via Campesina. Arruda and Mançano Fernandes's team came up with a series of radical proposals, which the Lula government ignored: the PT hardly wanted a group of radical researchers to direct an inquiry into, and propose a resolution to, the agrarian question, because such a resolution, almost by definition, would have suggested wide-ranging redistribution.

The Lula administration deemed the agrarian question as something that could be addressed through the provision of credit, not through land-distribution—a social problem resolvable within the confines of Brazilian agro-industrial capitalism, not one that required its transcendence. The agenda of the Lula administration and its technocrats was to consolidate social control over the countryside, not to let revolution bloom there (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 304-306). To palliate his right, Lula appointed Roberto Rodrigues, former president of the Brazilian Association of Agribusiness, to head the Ministry of Agriculture, and the government then followed his policy proposals. This led MST newspapers to assail Lula's "manipulations," and to berate the government for choosing to "continue the neoliberal economic policy adopted by the previous government instead of daring to make the changes endorsed by the 53 million votes it received"

(Vergara-Camus, 2007: 214). Worse, Lula appointed Henrique Meirelles, the former president of BankBoston, to be the director of the Central Bank. Policy results were predictable. Lula's letter of understanding, in reaction to massive capital flight and the speculative attack on the *real*, ensured that his macroeconomic policies would accord with IMF requirements, neatly following the Cardoso policies. In fact, they were worse. Lula ended up keeping a budget surplus in excess of that required by the IMF, among other policies. And he has exacerbated Brazil's external vulnerability to structural shocks, deepening its dependence commodities and the accompanying vicissitudes in commodity markets (Oliveira, 2003: 40-57; Filgueiras and Gonçalves, 2007).

Meanwhile, during this time-span, from 2003-2006, fewer than 220,000 families received land, less than one-fifth of the number promised in the MST-PT electoral pact. The Lula administration settled half of those families in the Amazon, and distributed nearly three-fourths of the total acreage there, in effect reverting to an old Brazilian strategy of using the Amazon as a pressure valve (Carter, 2009: 12). Settling peasants in the Amazon had the added bonus of placing MST families far from where they had been organized, in effect dispersing social power among far-flung territories, distant from the MST's core power centers, and distant from the media. All of these maneuvers composed a devastating betrayal. A social movement agitating for land distribution in exchange for political support must get the land it is promised. But when land is merely promised and waited for, or given out in distant territories where newly settled families just prepare the land for eventual multinational takeover, people are not sated.

James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer suggest that the MST ceased to pressure directly the Brazilian state via land occupations, abandoning, for a time, its ethos of direct action—an incorrect suggestion (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2007: 395). But the MST did stop its strong criticisms of the PT and the government. Pressure was felt at the level of occupations, but not electorally. Sticking to the politesse of politics neutered the MST. Along with some token efforts at redistribution, a few leaders were appointed to meaningless posts within the national government. Society-wide mobilization generally lapsed, despite meager economic performance, reverting to levels last seen during the military dictatorship, as the malaise of demobilization spread to trade-unionists, theretofore closely affiliated with the PT (Petras, 2008: 492). Gilmar Mauro, a member of the MST National Directorate, said that MST support for the PT would be weakened in 2006 compared to 2002, due to the government's milquetoast implementation of the policies the MST wanted (Stedile, 2003: 229). Meanwhile in 2004 the MST carried out a wave of occupations

intended directly to pressure the government. In 2005, an official MST communiqué ripped into the government (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 315).

In evaluating these twists and turns of the movement, and the welter of competing explanations for each move—economic structure, organizational capacity, ideology ("ideal-interest mobilization")—Ondetti rightly privileges political structure, viewing the others as usually-necessary-but-insufficient conditions. Necessary, because of course peasants could never mobilize without economic grievances. They would have no reason to do so. Organizational capacity explains some of the turns of the movement, and helps—just helps—to explain its emergence in southern Brazil, but is less helpful in explaining why it has emerged in Northeast Brazil, where pre-existing social structures actually worked against MST attempts at organization. Ideology again is helpful for a movement and its growth, but as I've suggested, all peasants, and all repressed people, have within themselves the grains of an ideology with which to resist power. Even if strategically articulated, in a way that melds together traditions of fighting for social justice with a more radical discourse centered on opposing neo-liberalism, ideology itself is not, in this case, an explanatory variable—although there are situations in which it could be.

Privileging political opportunity structures helps explain why the MST's saga is one of growth even amidst a more general decline of social mobilization, even as Collor de Mello, a conservative, took office. But Ondetti also privileges the occupation, which gave the MST a different fighting tool than that available to the rest of the Brazilian left or proletariat.[36] Social mobilization in a time of propitious political opportunity structures is able to rely on ideal-interest mobilization, mobilization centered around a commitment to values as opposed to success,

> *a fusion of striving and attaining* (instead of optimizing), *strong feelings* (propelling and resulting from social action), *collective interaction* (powerfully altering individual calculus), *dense symbolic repertoires* (that stir courage and vitality), *elective affinities* (as opposed to strategic and instrumental alliances), and *observes people acting as though they cannot be bought* (Carter, 2002: 225).

[36] The closest analog is an industrial worker's strike, but amidst growing unemployment in the Brazilian working class, an accelerating trend, a surplus army of labor and a political environment unfriendly to labor prevented strikes from having the same sort of efficacy as land-occupations. The land occupation merits special attention, which it'll get below.

When political opportunities are favorable, it makes sense that the dispossessed will dare to try to make real their dreams. But at times when possibilities are shrinking, or closing entirely, ideal-interests may not be enough. In such times, the occupation is able to create a "selective incentive," giving those who join the movement something very specific for which to struggle. Organizational networks, again invaluable for explaining the MST's social origins, and explaining how social discontent was channeled into a social movement, namely, through the CBEs and Churches seeded throughout southern Brazil, doesn't explain why the movement was able to grow from 1985-1994, expanding into communities without CBEs, where the CPT was weaker, generally with weaker social ties. Indeed, in some of the communities into which the MST has expanded, according to them churches and unions have blockaded their organizational efforts, viewing the movement as competition, not as an opportunity for collaboration. As we will see later, the occupations themselves helped the movement grow. They offered a "selective incentive," in Lichbach's terminology. They also helped promote what Ondetti frankly calls "political indoctrination" (Ondetti, 2008: 98-139). As Mançano Fernandes adds, "the occupation is a form of confrontation, resistance, and re-creation of the campesino" (Fernandes, 2006: 287). A new slogan emerged out of the 5th National Congress: "occupy, resist, produce," better-braiding the central elements of the MST's pragmatically radical ideology, thereby strengthening "the idea that the settlements had to generate a new society, had to organize production in a different manner."

In this section, I believe that I have provided a fairly good notion of where the MST came from, and how it fared throughout the 1979-2006 period. In sum, the MST emerged due to structural dislocation and economic grievance—neo-liberalism and escalating dispossession in the Brazilian countryside. It emerged initially among certain populations, especially those that were relatively highly educated, with more resources available to them. It emerged with the CPT acting as a mid-wife, helping the nascent movement to organize, and serving as an ideological seminary. And crucially, the MST emerged, shrunk, and grew again in response to political openings. But thus far I haven't written much about the movement itself. I will discuss in turn its organization, both political and economic, and touch briefly on its changing social composition. Then I will discuss its ideology, and its mode-of-actions: principally, the land occupation. Then I will briefly discuss how it interacts with the state, and how violence affects the movement.

3.6. Occupations and Settlements

The movement, as its core, is tens of thousands encampments and settlements. This might seem a banal observation, but it isn't. There is a movement, but the movement is also to some extent the brand name given to these occupations and settlements, occurring in a dispersed, decentralized, even anarchist way. The general framework is that each settlement must "construct its own trajectory," while settlements are considered the "rearguard" of the struggle for agrarian reform (Harnecker, 2002: 108). But before settlements come occupations, or encampments. Occupations are basic to the movement, the physical embodiment of its direct-action ethos. There are three types: (1) provisional encampments, intended to call positive attention from the authorities; (2) permanent encampments, until a solution is found to the problem of landlessness in the countryside—these encampments can last for years, rotating campesinos in and through them, to more land, and they can serve as training grounds for additional occupations and settlements; (3) open encampments, which might temporarily swell up, but are temporarily or permanently open to those who might wish to join (Harnecker, 2002: 91).

Encampments tend to be organized around a core of 30-40 families, called the *grupo de base*. They in turn organize several committees for managing day-to-day life within the encampment, a general assembly to keep the encamped apprised of the state of negotiations with the government, and a system of general coordination. Organizing principles include democracy, collective participation, division of tasks, and collective leadership. Encampments can scarcely plant or reap, or hardly enough to fulfill their needs, and consequently receive funding from external committees or institutions, off-settlement local labor groups, labor unions in the cities, and some from produce they are able to start growing immediately, or from crops leftover on marginal land that they had abandoned (Harnecker, 2002: 91). Eventually, these encampments become settlements or the encamped become settlers, sometimes on another invaded area of land. Living arrangements in settlements vary. Often, they are arranged in a sun-radial pattern, with houses in the middle.

The social base of the MST has varied over the years, as the MST has changed, responding to changes within the Brazilian economy and the rural social structure. The families who initially participated in mobilization and occupation were generally small landholders or renters, those who were expelled from latifundia. As the MST broadened its reach, salaried rural workers

started to compose a growing percentage of its membership. And the families in the third round have started to include economic refugees from *favelas*, those who wish to go back to the land. This has made necessary the "re-socialization of workers who'd never had land," denizens of the Brazilian informal urban economy, turning into peasants. This does not represent a problem for the MST, given that the movement itself is a learning process. The movement is in a constant process of self-construction. The presence of those in flight from fetid slums in fact provides considerable insight into the nature of the MST. That it is able to accommodate such folk is due to its housing spaces of political socialization, "interactive" spaces and other spheres for "struggle and resistance," that is, the occupations. Furthermore, it teaches those from *favelas* who wish to join the movement how to farm on abandoned plots of land on the peripheries of cities, thereby making an eventual transition to the countryside far easier. The movement doesn't sit around, pestering power, nor does it sit easy at its encampments, waiting for an inflow of campesinos with which to gird itself. The MST goes where there are dispossessed leaseholders, for example, usually dispossessed illegally, and organizes, "territorializing" itself through the encampment, the occupation, and the settlement.

In the Northeast, there exists a greater cooperative tradition. Thus, a culture of smallholding did not need to be broken since there had been no smallholders in the region Acrimony has arisen within the movement over land titling and distribution. The MST wants land-use titled in a way that does not permit resale, recalling Polanyi's point about land being a "fictitious" commodity (Harnecker, 2002: 163-170). The MST seeks to make sure that land isn't even a fictitious commodity. It seeks to decommodify land. But at the local level things obviously play out differently—in practice, land titling partially comes to the decision of individual settlers. They may choose (1) family possession, with a state-granted "use-concession" title; (2) private property title alongside familial ownership, meaning that the couple owns the land; (3) collective ownership through the cooperative. The prevailing pattern is a mix of the familial and private options. INCRA grants land, at first following an invasion, as a "use-title" that lasts for ten years, after which it may be renewed or turned into private possession. INCRA adopted the decade-long holding period after it realized that new *acampados* were frequently selling their land when they ran into financial difficulties. The MST opposes even use-titles, viewing them as facilitating land sales, and a way for the government to avoid its social responsibilities of aiding the settled. The MST leadership would prefer that INCRA land grants take the form of a "real use concession," a

legal obstacle to turning land into a commodity. But for now, the holding-period and the option to choose private-property endures. In any case, the holding-period has turned the settlements into tightly meshed communities, from whence few leave. Such stability enables the formation of political communities (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 213-216).

The MST settlements hold a series of mini-assemblies to discuss their business. These assemblies converge into larger assemblies within settlements that make decisions about providing services, education and health programs, social infrastructure, and attractive spaces for social interaction. The assemblies are designed to stimulate solidarity-oriented actions, festivals, and the like (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 172). Planning for production tries to take into account both economic and ecological concerns. The MST does its best to hew to an agro-ecological model. As Mauro puts it, "for us, the settlement is the rebirth of human life and of nature." The settlements have links to both local and regional markets, but there is a great deal of subsistence production (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 177-179). The MST has tried to design its production model to survive market pressures, but the movement also seeks to mold the market to its own terms, making produce available for landless local families at reasonable prices that are "convenient for popular sectors," while taking into account the needs of the settled families (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 182). In this sense they actually re-embed the market in society, making it accountable to social needs that they collectively assess and, in turn, to which they respond.

Cooperative production in this vision is a malleable dream, or a dream that needs nurturing, through the creation of appropriate material and cultural pre-conditions, and it turns out that salaried workers are far more prepared for this kind of transition than are small-landholders with a culture of individualism. (Some experiences with forced collectivism were Kulakian. The principle of creating appropriate cultural pre-conditions isn't quite as lofty as it might superficially appear.) The MST is well aware that co-operativism contains many advantages. Socially, it helps facilitate organization, and it aids in the transcendence of various social pathologies, at its best rupturing the individualist, or capitalist, consciousness that capitalist social relations foster. Social reproduction in the most literal sense occurs within these settlements, creating the social structures that support the "spirit of help and *compañerismo* of the group, eliminating little-by-little the individualism and lack of solidarity," the ruinous psychological scarring of capitalist culture (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 188, 194).

Politically, co-operativism creates the space for political discussion, and it liberates cadres for movement-building and organizational work because the settlement provides for their essential needs and the needs of their families while they carry out political work. Co-operativism gathers forces together, a countervailing force to capitalist atomization. It encourages group problem solving, and serves as an example of a breathing anti-capitalist social organization. The MST has attempted to set up credit cooperatives, too, but existing legislation has impeded this project (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 195, 202-207). Moreover, the cooperatives help women achieve equity within settlements, divvying up work, the domestic work that falls upon women due to a sexist culture.

Perhaps most importantly, the cooperatives provide a crèche for the creation and raising of MST children, *sem terrinhas*.[37] The making of the *sem terrinhas* is one of the more enchanting aspects of the MST. Some of this takes place in *cirandos*, kindergartens, envisioned as places of play where the MST's future grows. The MST considers its children its "patrimony" and its future, the "seeds of transformation and struggle" (Wright and Wolford, 2003: 246-248). Their model is overtly libertarian, shattering the ossified model of a vessel waiting to be filled with external knowledge. The MST does not truck with authoritarian conceptions of teaching. Its schools center their pedagogy on the formation of children, but quite importantly, on a particular type of child—on the creation of "a new man and a new woman, for a new society, and a new world." MST leaders seek to join theory and practice, and their theory is based around sharing knowledge, as the MST co-operatives are meant to share material and emotional resources. They seek to create human beings who are in turn the molders of their own education, constructing their own knowledge and conception of the world, in which all can learn and all teach. Their pedagogical principles include the re-casting of work as socially important and socially necessary—rather than the burdensome task that work represents in capitalism and late-capitalist ideology. They aim to indoctrinate their children in democratic participation, organically linked to the settlement. In this vision, the MST itself is a school (Harnecker, 2002: 218, 220-225).

[37] On this in particular, a passage from Wolford and Wright is invaluable. They describe the movement's preoccupation with its children, with its future. If Collier's comment quoted initially, that people prefer to move to the city, is true, then the whole MST enterprise is a mere holding action. Results vary. Some families wish their children the best, to become metropolitan professionals. And some hope that they'll continue farming. Wolford and Wright recount an anecdote about a family of German-Brazilians, leaving their children at the farm, their verbal tussling over what to do, and which video to watch. The North American mind automatically makes dismaying predictions. But the *sem terrinhas* choose well: *The Management of Small-Scale Agricultural Systems* (Wright and Wolford, 2003: 333-335).

This educational theory interweaves tightly with the MST's own practice. The MST conceives of itself as a form of organization and continuous struggle—reflecting on a given struggle, evaluating its results, locating errors, analyzing them, and struggling again, moving from practice, to theory, to practice. There are, furthermore, technical and vocational schools where cadres can go for more advanced training before returning to their communities. MST leaders are aware of the importance of nurturing professionals within the movement, to add skilled workers to its direct action tactics. As Stedile observes, "no organization has a future if it does not form its own cadres on all fronts of human organization." He cites the Chinese proverb speaking of the man who does not walk on his own legs. Such a man does not get far (Stedile, 2003: 73). Concretizing these principles, the MST has taken the logical step of creating its own institutions where such professionals can train and learn, helping the movement reproduce itself. The Florestan Fernandes School, the MST's national university in São Paulo state, is one such institution, perhaps the most impressive (Stedile, 2003: 233-245).

These educational practices stem from a vision, one containing several fundamental principles: organizing rural workers, ensuring that workers themselves lead the movement, gender-equality and equality of female participation within the movement, and the recognition of the need for a united anti-imperialist coalition within the South American continent. Stedile has spoken of their need to "topple" several barriers. Obvious ones are capital and the latifundia. Perhaps less obvious is the third one: "ignorance" (Stedile, 2003: 72). The MST aims to "democratize" knowledge, sharing it widely and promiscuously, among the greatest number of people. They claim that it is as "important to distribute knowledge as to distribute land." The MST is well aware that its struggle is not, per se, about land. It's about people and how they live. Those people must be educated (Stedile, 2003: 72-74).

Another basic principle has to do with the need for the formation of cadres, technical and political, facilitating class-war on both economic and ideological fronts. Cadres are formed in a libertarian manner. As Stedile says, "the first question that is asked of a militant is…what would you like to do in the MST. From there comes forth a diversity of aptitudes and abilities" (Stedile, 2003: 32-33). Their ideological formation is broad and deep, delving most deeply into the texts of liberation theologians, the principal philosophical wellspring of the movement. Paulo Freire is one extremely important figure. His theories and pedagogy self-evidently suffuse the movement. Many of the most sophisticated militants are the fruit of Catholic Church education, having been

taught in Church seminaries (Stedile, 2003: 54). Others are the spawn of radical evangelicalism. But the MST is not dogmatic. They take what works: the canon, Marx, Mao, Lenin, Luxembourg. Or North American and Latin American radicals, sociologists, historians, theologians: Fernandes, Prado, Chomsky, Furtado, Gandhi, Mandela, Lumumba, Martin Luther King, Jr. (Harnecker, 2002: 264, 271).[38]

The MST tries to use national events as teaching moments. It self-consciously creates a tapestry of historical resistance, to which militants and settlers can mentally point and say, My Brazilian History. And the leadership is organically interlinked with the base too (Harnecker, 2002: 279). They see regional meetings and National Congresses not as drearily obligatory bureaucratic make-busy sessions but as part of their continual attempts to construct movement-wide and national unity, seeing them, as Stedile puts it in a cuttingly revealing analogy, as "a Mecca on which militants converge, to unite, to strengthen links of solidarity" (Harnecker, 2002: 81). This point is important. The MST in a certain way is a politico-religious movement. It has its sacred text. It has its people, fervent ideologues, or believers, in the goals of its movement. It has its utopia: the abolition of capital, an end to the latifundia. It has its seminaries: the settlements. It has its legends: the historical memory of revolt in rural Brazil. And it has its potential martyrs: militants ready to die to defend its societal vision. It is within this context that ideal-interest mobilization has explanatory power.

3.7. Formal Organizational structures, Modus Operandi, and Alliances

I now discuss the MST's organization: the national structure, and how the MST's members elect its members, as well as more local structures, such as those that exist in occupations. I also discuss the sorts of alliances that the MST makes.

The MST National Coordination deals with national finances and the expenses of its national headquarters, but municipal and state-level MST organizing is fully autonomous. This is a product of a national coordination structure that orients its practice towards "creativity and decentralization." The general secretariat mulls over the tactics to be used against latifundistas and ostensibly, the state. Thirty percent of its members are up for re-election every two years.

[38] One could go on, hopefully not boringly—they also read Engels, Petras, Harnecker, from Brazilian leftism José de Castro, Manuel Correia de Andrade, Celso Furtado, Florestan Fernandes, Paulo Freire, Darcy Ribeiro, Clodovis and Leonardo Boff, Frei Betto, Don Tomas Balduino, Pedro Casaldàliga , from other lefts, Che Guevara, Jose Marti, Castro, Sandino, Zapata, Mandela, Gandhi, Zamora, Machel, Amilcar Cabral, Lumumba, Agostinho Neto, Martin Luther King, Jose de Souza Martins, Caio Prado (Stedile, 2003: 54-58).

Thirty percent of the people on the National Coordination committee are generally female, too, although there is no formal quota. Decisions usually take place using a consensus-based model, relying on unanimity, but this is a tendency; like much about the MST's organization, it is not a rule, even one that is broken. As Stedile comments, the absence of rules and regulations is one of the MST's traits. Or their rules are anti-rules. As he puts it, "If it doesn't work, we drop it and try something else. We don't have a commitment to bureaucracy."

The MST's national headquarters in São Paulo is housed in a small two-story gated building in a middle-class neighborhood, with a couple of staff-members on the premises. It is a small bureaucracy for a million-plus-member organization. As Stedile adds, such traits are why they "please the anarchists" (Harnecker, 2002: 92). Of course, the MST still does have some formal organization: a skeletal staff and bureaucracy, and for that bit of administration, financing is important. Each family gives one percent of its annual production to the movement, essentially a tax, although a tax with real, tangible benefits. Settlements are required to give four percent of their income, but there's variability—some barter, packing off cadres, or packaging food, in lieu of cash. The MST also receives funds from the urban educated-but-sympathetic middle-class, as we've seen, a group potentially capable of great largesse, if its sympathy were to be handled and helped along appropriately. It also gets some government funds, and money from national and international NGOs. The MST reciprocates these gifts, but in spirit—donating to peasant movements operating in sharper penury, in other Latin American countries or in Africa (Harnecker, 2002: 295-299). Seventy percent of these sums go to state-level MST coordinating bodies, and 30 percent to the national directorship. The MST demands that mass struggle be a monetary as well as physical commitment, and it strives to avoid dependence, to secure autonomy.

The MST is also well integrated into the Via Campesina. Mançano Fernandes refers to this process of integration as the fourth stage of the MST, as it moved from merely being a national movement to becoming a trans-national actor. Within the FNCEZ, the example of the MST and its organizational, pedagogical, and intellectual lineage is clearly evident. It's also prominent within the Via Campesina, nudging or guiding the trajectory of Via's actions. This is important, given its great and growing power (Baletti et al, 2008: 123-146). Indeed, its increasing influence within international food-policy debates and discussions about the necessity of agrarian reform are likely the reasons why the World Bank in the late 90s started integrating talk of "market-led

agrarian reform," MLAR, into its planning documents, and why it financed several MLAR pilot programs in Brazil, the Philippines, Colombia, and other states of the global South (Mondragón, 2006: 165-176; Sauer, 2006: 177-191).[39]

Trans-national links with other NGOs abound, too. International allies can pressure the state differently than the MST and its politics of domestic pressure can be here a necessary compromise. The MST conducts its own international politics. The MST comports itself in some ways as a state. As an example of this type of effort, the MST Director for Bahia state has emphasized that the movement wants Brazil to expand its alliances with international NGOs in future centers of accumulation like South Africa, India, and China. These governments, according to the MST's vision, could develop more intricate and involved trade relations with one another in lieu of their dependency on the developed world, and such "relationships among equals" would better enable the Brazilian working-man to more directly benefit from trade (Sinek, 2007: 25).

3.8. The Occupation and *Mistica*

One of the more interesting aspects of the movement is that through the occupation, encampment, and settlement process, ideology and organization meld, as do theory and practice, and they meld to a degree uncommon among purposefully structured social movements. One aspect of this is the abjuring of authoritarianism or patriarchy, even within families, as the whole family participates in occupations, breaking apart traditional patterns of domination through new forms of mobilization. The MST has also made a conscious decision to be non-sectarian: no credentials were needed to fight for land. This ecumenicalism is surely one of the many reasons for the movement's staying power (Stedile, 2003: 22). Another has been the decision to use collective leadership. This is a lesson learned from the tutelage of history: a movement with one leader is susceptible to decapitation. Or to betrayal.

The MST may have more than passing resemblance to anarchism, but its actions and settlements look nothing like anarchy. As Stedile says,

> If there is not a minimum of discipline, which makes people respect opinions…the organization can not be constructed. This is one of the rules of democracy…disciplinary norms consists in

[39]. Sauer comments that MLAR has three core elements, a frontal challenge to the MST's vision: (1) "reduce agrarian policy to a compensatory or social-welfare type policy" (2) decentralization (3) "commodification" of demands.

> accepting the rules of the game…It is clear that they must be accepted voluntarily (Stedile, 2003: 22-34).

Other core principles included an emphasis on mass struggle, a real commitment to the formation of cadres, and a continual emphasis on links between leadership and base. Stedile observes that no matter the magnitude of a leader's erudition, acumen, and commitment, more than anything else what is necessary is a commitment to "grass-roots activism…links with his social base." Without such rootedness, a leader will go nowhere (Stedile, 2003: 36).

The emphasis on mass struggle emphasizes both mass and struggle. The struggle is the MST's work, and its leaders and activists knew from the outset that, despite Brazil's nominal or even institutional transition to a civilian democracy, they could not wait for charity from political power. They knew that people had to generate pressure in order to get what they needed. That was their "guarantee" for possible success and from a doctrinal commitment to mass-struggle, "there emerged the slogan, 'occupation is the only solution" (Stedile, 2003: 45). Accompanying this slogan was, then, another slogan, reflecting their doubts about the depth of political democracy, their suspicion that it was merely a veneer for continued hierarchy: "without agrarian reform there is no democracy" (Stedile, 2003: 50). From 1985 to 1994, the MST used the slogan "occupy, resist, produce," reflecting their deepening confidence, a forceful drive to accumulate social and economic power. By 1995, another slogan had been added to the MST crest: "agrarian reform is everyone's struggle" (Stedile, 2003: 49). The MST also views itself as part of Jacob's ladder. As Stedile puts it, "The MST is the continuation of a historical process of popular struggles. We hope to be the link that links them with future struggles. That is our historical role." This departure from the theory of revolutionary rupture meshes with a concept the MST calls *mistica*, which is at the core of the creation of an MST culture.

Mistica is multifaceted in every sense of the word. It is the representation through words, art, and symbols of the struggles, and so of the reality of the MST. Therefore *mistica* is also ideology, or more precisely, *mistica* creates ideology—it leads the landless to declare themselves, for example, anti-capitalist. It refers to the abstract emotions underlying, enabling, strengthening, and encouraging mobilization, the "feeling of empowerment, love, and solidarity" that inspires the campesinos to "self-sacrifice, humility, and courage," as Daniel Issa writes. This is the rich bequest that the MST received from the CPT, the base communities, the opening of the Catholic Church, and the bloom of liberation theology that brightened the possibility of social

transformation throughout Latin America, a belief system that "sees the poor as the object of love." But *mistica* is not merely a substrate of belief. Or, rather, a substrate of belief doesn't only lead to the creation of ideology. It also leads to the creation of a political community, and what communities share is culture. So *mistica* is the process of self-creation as a *sem terra* political community, undergirding organizational coherence and strength (Issa, 2007: 125).

Mistica exists within the movement, fostering identity and belonging, creating a class-based campesino identity, around which the *sem terra* can fight to exercise the citizenship rights that are denied to them under the formal framework of Brazilian institutional democracy. Some argue that the *mistica* has been the key element that ties the MST together, the "ideal interest," in Weberian terms, the "fire" as one analyst puts it, basing itself on "solidarity, generosity, ethnics, and morality" (Issa, 2007: 129). In political science jargon, *mistica* creates "the subject" of revolutionary peasant agitation in the countryside. The subject is a member of the movement, a movement created in part by disinterring the memory of past campesino struggles, and recalling the contributions of those "martyrs" of the land reform (the MST death toll is alarmingly high, a point to which I will return), erasing the "myth of Brazilian passivity," and inscribing a new one: Brazilian subaltern militancy. It is, as Issa continues, the tale that must be told "to a largely unlettered class," using "representation, celebration, and ritual," deploying creativity to great effect.

Symbols are enormously important in the movement, including the MST flag, its hymn, the tools of fieldwork, the harvest song, the *Jornal Sem Terra.* It is not discourse itself but the belief system that informs the discourse that is important, and art and creative work and symbols play a signal role in the creation of that underlying sentiment. All this "weaves an identity…materializes an ideal." The MST emblem, showing a man and a woman together at a protest, was taken from a Nicaraguan poster, illustrating a core MST principle: that nothing in the world is created from nothing (Stedile, 2003: 131-132). The role of leftist, landless art is also important to this symbolic edifice. As two Brazilian psychoanalysts note, poetry and song have been key elements in the MST since the very beginning. Texts, too—liberation theology is rooted in a radical re-reading of the bible, reading it as a document capable of inspiring resistance. The MST's idiosyncratic re-reading of foundational texts extends not only to the bible but also to Marx, emphasizing the humanistic side of his works (Lara Jr. and Lambiasi, 2005: 72-74; Bloch, 2009).

Some of the *sem terra* claim that this ideological formation directly correlates with the likelihood that a campesino will hold fast in the encampment and eventually move on to the settlement and become a member of the movement. In one case in which campesinos left an encampment after a series of delays and pitfalls, they "weren't committed to the struggle, and many of them left the encampment precisely for the reason, in my judgment, that they lacked strong belief in the *mistica*," one settler said. Conversely, a belief in the *mistica* gives them the courage to invade a land-parcel surrounded by men with guns—they die in the struggle, emboldened by this "courage without equal" (Lara Jr. and Lambiasi, 2005: 75-77). Ideology in this sense finally becomes an independent variable, which in part determines the success or failure of a given settlement. The levels of social consciousness a set of settlers achieve—the process of *conscietizacão*, consciousness-raising—combined with the history of struggle of those encamped can determine the success of a struggle. The MST may be the brand name for rural occupations and settlements, but the brand isn't applied to just any action. Those organized by other movements frequently fail to stay on their land; at the first sign of trouble or turmoil they'll often depart, selling their land, having no inner strength upon which to fall back, and so having no formal organization to fall back upon—"If they had this consciousness, they'd unite, because the greater the number the greater the force" (Stedile, 2003: 100-102).

The MST invokes with great pride and gusto moments like Canudos, *quilombos* like Palmares, and the struggles of the Peasant Leagues – struggles that stretch from the late 19thcentury to past the mid twentieth (Stedile, 2003: 134). They are quite conscious of the power of these beliefs and memories, something under-analyzed in leftist accounts of social movement construction.[40] If neo-liberalism needs atomistic individualism, the landless vision of socialism needs the solidarity of class politics, expressed in a united struggle for land. If this seems corny, so be it, but these two components, organization and ideology, are terrifying to Brazilian capitalists. All the more terrifying given that the movement's goals are now not only land for the landless, but the creation of a more just society, alongside guaranteed labor for all who wish to work, and equality of all rights—economic, political, social, cultural. And yet more fear inducing is that MST activists throughout the movement have "identified neoliberalism as a primary cause of the inequality and injustice that exists within Brazil." Identifying something as the cause of that which you wish to

[40] How many leftist intellectuals have truly thought through the implications of Howard Zinn's project, for example, or have taken seriously Staughton Lynd's sternly astute comment that Zinn's work has done more good, and reached more people, than all of their books put together.

do away with means doing away with the cause (Sinek, 2007: 23, 23). The MST is not scared to dream beyond the confines of neo-liberalism or capitalism, and as one MST-affiliated poet writes, “To dream is detrimental to the established order, and organization is what the dominant class fears, because what they fear isn’t weapons but these two elements” (Issa, 2007: 136). Political imagination un-rooted in a social organization that can make it bear fruit is not threatening to power. As C.P. Otero writes,

> One can always get together with one’s friends to discuss the possible forms of one’s preferred Utopia, say, “anarchocommunism,” to the end of time, pretty sure that those in power are likely to leave the nonactivist alone. They couldn’t care less. In fact, they have reasons to be quite happy. Quietistic day-dreaming is just as welcome to those in power as plain apathy (Otero, 2003: 15).

But the MST doesn’t just discuss. It acts. Its settlements are the result of a conflict with state and landed power. They are the movement’s future, the physical site of accumulation of social and economic power as a part of the class struggle. So it is through the lens of land-occupations that one can see most clearly the dynamic of MST interaction with the state. These interactions can vary greatly, even during one administration: Collor’s repression, Cardoso’s initial accommodations and subsequent repression, then Lula’s glad-handing, his preemptive prevention of occupations through unfulfilled political promises. So, I will look at the occupation, and then see how it fits onto the broader MST vision of societal change.

3.9. The Significance of Occupations

Initially, the goal of the occupation was direct-action in the most raw and unmediated sense. Campesinos moved on to a piece of land, sometimes surreptitiously, sometimes extremely publicly, with the intention of settling it. But as time passed, the movement changed its conception of an occupation, from a physical challenge to property rights on uncultivated estate land to a symbolic attack on land-use rights in a given region. The occupation aimed to pressure the federal and state governments into action. As Mançano Fernandes writes, “the state walks in the caravan of the peasant movements” (Fernandes, 2006: 283). In more repressive states, with governors quick to resort to bullets against the MST’s violation of the prerogatives of capital, the MST camps along the side of highways, highlighting their struggle and their landlessness while being less likely to provoke a fatal reaction from the state. The occupation in this sense has

become far more symbolic than it first appears, a way to re-write the social codes governing the legitimacy of one pattern of land use, seeking to re-write them to legitimize another pattern.

The initial legal codes governing agrarian reform were very unfriendly to it, reflecting the condensation of class forces in the mid-1980s—politically liberal but hesitant to advance a radical economic program. In no way did the great opening of the late 1970s and early 1980s shatter the power of the landed oligarchy, and while the Land Statute, with the provision that land that did not fulfill its social function was subject to expropriation, gave great legal heft to agrarian redistribution efforts, the Constituent Assembly's stance was still subject to interpretation (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 281). Some jurists contend that, according to the Brazilian Constitution, fallow land is actually illegal. In this sense, the abstract property rights-regime that legitimates land-ownership is subordinated to a different conception in which "life" and "work" are central. Such re-orderings are not unknown in Latin America. Struggles often use social-uses of land clauses as the legal scaffolding to help build up the legitimacy of land occupations (Veltmeyer, 2005: 285-316). In this reading, a land occupation isn't an attack on property but a form of civil disobedience.

This logic is fatal to the logic of capital, which correctly perceives re-framing land occupations as a defense of rights that transcend property rights as an attack on the fundamental symbolic legitimization of capitalism. And perhaps for that reason, as the land reform agency notes, "the Brazilian justice system . . . tends historically to decide in favour of the owner each time it understands that this right [to property] is or might come to be threatened" (Meszaros, 2000: 4). Following this logic, the mainstream Brazilian media take up the role of spokesperson in this war over symbolic legitimacy, referring constantly to invasions and invaders, terms that are as loaded and threatening in Portuguese as in English, in lieu of a different terms that would undermine absolute property rights—terms such as occupations and settlers. The war over legitimacy is zero-sum, for if the MST were to prevail, the existing system of land distribution would change. It is society's tacit acceptance of the symbolic codes that legitimize unequal land-ownership that would allow state repression of wide-scale occupations. This fear of repression is likely why, despite the MST's seemingly impressive numerical strength, it at best has organized five percent of Brazil's rural people. MST leaders are aware of their relative weakness (Harnecker, 2002: 74, 85, 87, 89).

The occupation is important within the broader context of movement building too, for a different reason: it is within the occupations that the movement itself germinates. When landless families carry out an occupation, take over land, and then organize a new occupation, that is the movement, and it is precisely how the movement acted when it was just starting, in the early 1980s. The occupation and the resultant settlements are the physical locations for a process of formation, conjoining the "economic struggle" with the "political struggle," in the process re-creating the *sem terra* as a campesino, as a landed person (Fernandes, 2006: 283-287). The process of land-occupation itself is a forcedly compressed learning process, an "apprenticeship" in the historical trajectory of Brazilian land-struggle, and a process of elaborate re-socialization. In this sense the MST is less the offspring of an ideology than its physical embodiment and cyclical reproduction. MST settlers reproduce the movement through planting, creating security, schools, health-care, education, re-asserting sovereignty over spheres of life that had theretofore been subject to the caprice of state resources, or more typically, denied by the structural violence embedded in the state (Fernandes, 2005: 317-340).

The occupation is also a very anarchist idea: creating the fact of a future society right then, right there. The notion of the occupation as the incubator of the movement, in some ways the very place where the movement exists, or is "territorialized," in the language of Mançano Fernandes, accords with the idea that, as Stedile adds, "either *you* [my italics] will do it or you won't solve the problem" (Stedile, 2003: 77). They are well aware that no agrarian reform has ever been wholly carried out through an "official registry," one that carefully tallied up the landless and cataloged the land, mixing and matching until it settled the agrarian question through meticulous bureaucratic efficiency. The state is in the business of post hoc sanction of what might already have been both legitimized and, according to the law, should have been legal. The correlation of social forces and the scaffolding of law contribute to legitimization and legalization. The MST knows that law only exists alongside "social initiative" (Stedile, 2003: 115-116, 119). But the state controls much of society's violence, and in this sense, it is violence's acceptance of or rejection of social change that permits social change to continue, or stops it. This has something to do with legitimization, no question about that, but also having to do with the fact that a gun can enforce a social understanding, even a minoritarian one, because it can kill those who refuse to accept its power, notwithstanding the letter of the law itself. In rural Brazil, this takes on added importance.

Sociologist John Hammond refers to the occupation-repression blood-dance as following a "pre-modern pattern corresponding to the lack of a modern, rational state structure in rural Brazil" (Hammond, 2009: 156). Law is not unimportant—it is the residue of past struggles, codified in documents that can be used to symbolically legitimate or de-legitimate the modern state's deployment of violence. Such law is important when the state's symbolic legitimization itself rests on a liberal democratic self-image, whether or not such an image is fictional. This is the tension that the MST seeks to exploit in its favor. In this sense it has an extremely ambivalent relation to the state. Out of one side of its mouth, the MST leadership asserts that the argument that the MST is seeking to replace the state is claptrap, since it relies on the state to bring about the agrarian reform. This is true in a very literal sense, but occludes a great deal of disputation, which has led to tactical errors: even if the state can help along an agrarian reform, peasant unrest and action is a necessary condition. Simple logic suffices to establish this because sufficient peasant unrest could spell revolution. Conversely, no peasant unrest would mean no pressure on the state to carry out an agrarian reform of any stripe.[41] It is no coincidence that capital is quite happy with peasants who are mired in immiserated shantytowns, walled off from participation in the economy, far away from the countryside, where their unrest could take on more immediate and dangerous form. On the other hand, the state can choose to respond violently or cooperatively to uprisings and occupations. A cooperative state, which the Lula administration is not, could push along a reform, direct monetary support to settlements, lean on state and federal police forces to enforce the law, and prevent violence against land-occupants, as opposed to cutting off funding flows or sending in troops armed with truncheons to beat down campesinos who occupy the land. The MST is clearly aware that the state would prefer to veil its coercive enforcement of the status quo. Such coercion will first take the form of co-optation; when that doesn't work, division, and failing that, violence (Stedile, 2003: 122-148).

This violence doesn't consign the remainder of the people living in the Brazilian countryside to quietude. There are other rural organizations in Brazil, like the CONTAG, and these other rural groups' members are somewhat less likely to wake up to the rat-tat of the assassins' gun and a bullet. CONTAG is Brazil's major rural grouping, with 10 million members. It has federations in twenty-four states and 3,365 rural workers' unions. It is immensely suspicious of the MST, and

[41] A simplification, clearly. The demands of sustainable development show the necessity of agrarian reform in every country on earth, with the possibly exception of urban statelets like Monaco or other limit situations.

the MST of it. After a great purge of CONTAG's communist component in the late 1960s the generals permitted it to continue mobilizing in the Brazilian countryside, tying many campesinos into a corporatist relation to the state, echoing the FCV's experience. Offering publicly funded social services, the state was able to make use of them to channel or cloister rural dissent. In the early 1980s, CONTAG's rural unions were supposed to be involved in any expropriation processes, consulting and discussing. The MST's militant occupations were thus a frontal challenge (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 296-297). But CONTAG, too, carries out occupations—for example, of the 1,709 occupations that took place between 1996 and May 1999, the MST did not organize the majority (63 percent). However, the MST took responsibility for 57 percent of the occupying families. The disparity between those numbers, and of course between the membership rolls of the MST and the CONTAG, shows just how threatening the MST is, and why more campesinos are members of CONTAG than are members of the MST—most likely, fear of repression.

3.10. Conclusions

Questions of state repression and the effect of that repression on the dynamics of mobilization are directly related to the movement's overall goals. The MST seeks to dispel ignorance and to do away with capital and the latifundia. It seeks to root itself as a mass movement in the Brazilian countryside. And it seeks to start creating an alternative to neo-liberal capitalism and its penetration of the Brazilian countryside. One aspect of this is educational: the fostering of militants. But another aspect is economic. The settlements are interlinked through CONCRAB, the Cooperative Confederation of the Brazilian Agrarian Reform. This is the economic arm of the MST. In capitalism, capital hires labor. Through the CONCRAB, the MST seeks to let labor hire capital. It is a complicated affair, part of the "process" and not an "objective" as such. The MST aims to absorb and transcend capitalist ideology, but its leaders agree that in some measure that absorption must occur by refusing to throw the baby out with the bathwater. The MST wants a mixed-system. It also accepts specialization, and accepts that there is a need for doctors and schoolteachers and lawyers. They seek to move beyond simple "peasant" or sordid "capitalist" production, but deny both the reactionary Utopianism that they call Chayanovian as well as capitalist social objectives—accumulating capital through exploitation. They suggest that the technical development of society's productive forces could lead in a very different direction (Stedile, 2003: 93, 108).

So, the MST seeks to carry out a rapid, thoroughgoing agrarian reform, in contrast to the drips-and-drab pattern of a welfare agrarian reform, the calling card of the Lula administration. They seek to briskly redistribute enough land, through outright confiscation, for 4.5 million landless families, 20 million Brazilians.[42] This goal is instrumental. The land is a means through which people can extricate themselves from the structural problems of poverty and social inequality. The land reform is a strategic objective, linked not just to the liberal goal of ending poverty but to the radical goal of ending inequality. Ending inequality means "democratizing capital… meaning… accumulated means of production". The catechism the MST leadership and ideologues read out of is much more Capital than Keynes. They flatly identify "the barrier of capital" as the most difficult to overcome, as it itself prevents the construction of MST "agro-industries," forcing them to compete against subsidized agro-capital—doubly-subsidized, as it racks up an ecological debt that it won't pay and doesn't, in fact, recognize. And so finally, they recognize that the debate over whether their reform is itself "capitalist" or "socialist" is in its way irrelevant, since what's important is the societal "correlation of forces," the matrix of power that will enable or bar the prosecution of the political change they seek.

The MST's formation, trajectory, and insertion into the Brazilian political economy also confirm some of the theoretical suppositions I outlined in the opening chapter. Landless workers are challenging their landlessness in Brazil, and doing so in a way that actually re-constitutes the peasantry in close to its class mold. Some of what is occurring echoes van der Ploeg's discussion of re-peasantization in Europe, mixed economic systems blending subsistence production with carefully handled interactions with the market. The MST does not accept that the peasantry is moribund, nor does it accept that rural development should be de-linked from local economies and inter-linked with trans-national commodity supply chains. Nor does it accept that capital formation should be a trans-national process. During the moments when MST practice veers

[42] The numbers may be off. Artur Zimmerman of the University of São Paulo argues that rural-urban population numbers are skewed throughout the underdeveloped world by the inclusion of relatively small towns, organically inter-linked with the country, in the "urban" column. This sorting decision makes sense when considering population distributions in the developed world—a town of 5,000, 15,000, or 50,000 is unlikely to be tightly interwoven into a rural economy because in the US, at least, there is scarcely a rural economy worth the name. In the global South, where the land question is thankfully still at hand, such a sorting decision may seriously distort the actual population distribution vis-à-vis those living in the "countryside" and the "city." In turn, while the MST tends to use the number of 4.5 million landless families, the number who actually desire land but may live in shacks in smaller towns may increase that number considerably, particularly as we recall Kay's comment of the blurring of the countryside of the city in contemporary Latin America. This hardly touches on the millions upon millions in swelling *favelas* who could lead far better lives in the Brazilian countryside than in urban slums.

close to MST ideology, labor hires and controls capital, harnessing it to a development project that, if it were to permeate the countryside, would entirely re-jigger the Brazilian development model, changing it from a capital, land, and input-intensive ecologically destruction system to an ecologically balanced, land and labor-intensive system that would radically increase Brazilian lower-class standards of living and destroy the power of the landed oligarchy. MST practice gives proper status to the land struggle in the global South as a struggle over development.

In terms of sociological propositions, the MST's experience also confirms or supports a number of my claims. The first is that when looking at peasant politics, the most important consideration is not analyzing the peasant or semi-proletarianized former campesino for signs of revolutionary class-consciousness, but rather, looking at the field of forces within which he is inserted. What are the market relations within which he is embedded? What is his relationship to the federal state, and to what extent is the state a homogenous entity or internally fractured? Different regions may evince different levels of tolerance or support for social mobilization, even within a country. The resources peasants can draw upon are central to understanding their willingness and ability to engage in oppositional politics or make a revolution, as Wolf insists.

The second claim, a corollary of the first, is that beyond factors such as economic grievances, peasants engage in confrontational class politics when political opportunities open up for them. In the case of Brazil, the wane of the dictatorship generally in the late 1970 and early 1980s, and the presence of a sympathetic politician in the Rio Grande do Sul gubernatorial seat. Political opportunities manifest through a reduced fear of repression, not manifested mechanically but through the experience of class struggle, in this case the occupations in the early 1980s in Macali and at Encruzilhada Natalino, which the government refrained from repression. The MST has also created its own opportunities, as Lichbach's argument suggests is possible, offering "selective incentives" for those who join the movement and occupy land—the promise of land for the landless, and the examples of its successful cooperatives as a way to concretely better the day-to-day lives of formerly landless peasants.

But Lichbach suggests that selective incentives may not be enough. The MST also mobilizes around ideal-interests. Mentally freed from the tranquilizing after-effects of decades of repression, MST militants organize around a core set of principles, for which they are willing to flood onto land owned by powerful landlords, fully aware that in the past, such landlords have

deployed assassins and mercenaries to beat MST occupiers off the land. They are also aware that the state sides quite frequently with landlords, sending in state or federal police to protect landed capital. As Carter's ethnographic work confirms, the creation of an MST ideology, centered around a success-oriented commitment to winning land, adds to the MST's strength. This strength and this commitment to ideal-interests also partially explains MST social organization. The MST has a core commitment to a certain social vision, and attempts to implement that vision through its political, economic, and educational programs.

The MST's trajectory also supports making ideology an explanatory variable in the social sciences, and in discussions of the modalities of peasant mobilization. The MST's actions themselves embody an ideology: direct action-oriented and internally democratic.

Finally, the MST experience exemplifies an understanding of class as something created through struggle. The MST solidifies class-consciousness amongst dispossessed campesinos in the Brazilian countryside, assisting them in consciousness-raising through both formal pedagogy and the teaching laboratory of class struggle, difficult-to-detangle experiences for the MST. This process is not authoritarian or vanguardist, marked by the "correct" ideology's forcible implantation in a supine, confused campesino's brain. The process is dynamic and reciprocal, one in which the peasant creates himself as a subject of history, as Thompson suggests.

But the question remains: where will that history go, and could it have turned out differently? To try to answer those questions, I turn now to the FNCEZ's and MST's political tactics, and their economic strategies, measuring both against their societal visions, and how the over-arching capitalist agrarian system in its turn determines the contours of their fight.

Chapter 4. Comparing the MST and the FNCEZ

I begin with a sketch of the world agricultural crisis, or the crisis of the countryside and its people. Agriculture actually appears to be doing relatively well, it would seem from production statistics, although such statistics seriously mislead since they don't identify who will pay, or when, for the ecological and human costs associated with "petro-culture," and the overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. I then link the global agricultural crisis and its global dislocation of the peasantry to urban slums and rural semi-proletarianization to the structural dislocation of the Brazilian and Venezuela peasantry. Next, I discuss how the organized campesinos in Brazil and Venezuela fight back—through politics, though economics, through ecology. In considering politics, I am referring to the MST's and the FNCEZ's relations to the state, right now: the Lula and Chávez governments. I discuss what those governments are doing right, and what they're doing wrong, not remonstrating them for being insufficiently revolutionary but discussing if other options were and are available to them and if so, what those options might be. When I discuss economics, I discuss the FNCEZ and the MST's alternative models for economic organization, essentially their cooperatives and how they connect to the overall economic system. When I discuss ecology, I discuss the ways in which the MST and the FNCEZ are attempting to surpass the existing agricultural model and to move toward agro-ecology. I note here the sheer and brazen artificiality of these separations, since economic questions are political, ecological questions economic. Having noted that, I then proceed as outlined above.

4.1. Neo-liberalism and the Agrarian/Food Crisis

If developmental state-capitalism hit the campesino sectors of the developing world with staggered blows through the late 1960s, 70s, and 80s, in the late 80s and 90s, deepening neo-liberalism would make sure that such impacts were increasingly damaging to the rural social fabric, and that the pain would be felt more deeply and more widely, as capitalism's latest mode of accumulation slammed not only the people currently living in the countryside but those who used to live in the countryside and moved to penury-ridden urban peripheries. In the late 2000s, urban and rural poverty in the global South became a flash point—namely the food crisis, now structural to the world economy. In part, the crisis occurred due to a long-run deflation of rural and urban incomes, alongside decelerating food output growth—analytically distinguishable from

absolute declines in food output—and falling per capita output in the world economy during the 1980s and 1990s. Decreased incomes for the lower-earning sectors of the population led to a decline in both rural and urban demand, as both the urban and rural people ate less and less, in a slow process no less painful for the fact that it didn't produce riots of the sort that garnered the world's attention in 2008, a suffering to which "urban intellectuals *en masse* seemed to be conceptually blind," as Utsa Patnaik writes. Full-scale industrialization of agricultural production worsened this vulnerability, through the replacement of photosynthetic energy, free and with centrifugal tendencies, by fossil-fuel energy, expensive and with centripetal tendencies, in the form of oil and oil-input-based agricultural systems. When oil prices rose and staple grain production was diverted to ethanol production, the dual shock raised food prices to the stratosphere (Patnaik, 2009: 74).

Farshad Araghi weaves these threads into a more-or-less unified account, linking the existing food regime of metropolitan surplus production to proliferating peasant dispossession and metastasizing urban slums, and the promotion of production for export and bio-fuel production. Araghi's account goes like this: the 1917-1973 period of national-developmental states was an interruption in the regime of metropolitan capital accumulation, from the late 1980s to the present going under the moniker, "neo-liberalism."[43] Meanwhile, minifundia blossomed, while even the most competently-managed agrarian reforms led to a profusion of farms just-above the subsistence margin while, more broadly, even successful agrarian reforms had little long-run impact on ruinous inequality. By 1980, in the global countryside, 80 percent of campesinos lived on 20 percent of the land while 20 percent lived on 80 percent of the land. Until the mid-1970s, as in the cases of Brazil and Venezuela, a system of state-credit and subsidies just barely propped up feeble small-farm units, constantly buckling under market pressures. Meanwhile, credit and subsidies made subsistence farmers subject to the market. This market soon gutted formerly autonomous production systems. Post-colonial states diverted their limited funds to urban-infrastructure at the expense of rural investment, further contributing to the hyper-growth of the cities of the South, a phenomenon that Araghi calls the "visible foot": systematic state intervention in the economy (Araghi, 2009: 111-114, 127-130).

[43] The periodization is roughly congruent with the end of the Bretton Woods system and its fixed capital controls, but it took a bit for those structural changes to fully open the way for a different mode of capital accumulation. In this respect David Harvey, for example, dates the emergence of the neo-liberal regime to 1979, amidst Thatcherism and Reaganism (Harvey, 2007)..

Simultaneously, a food regime constructed by overweening metropolitan power led to surplus-production in core states, far more than their home-markets could absorb. Production-subsidies and home-protectionism further elevated prices, further undermining the underdeveloped world's comparative advantage—the "visible foot." Producing more than they could consume (between 1980 and 1987, the rate of increase of supply in the EU and United States was over 100 percent higher than the rate of increase in demand) the global North dumped the surplus onto the global South. In the US, farmers were shielded from losses because the state was ensuring above-market-prices in domestic markets and subsidizing exports. The contradictions of this model, namely the question of convincing the periphery to accept the arrangement, contributed to the transformation of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs and its replacement by the World Trade Organization (Araghi, 2009: 132-133).

Neo-liberalism had a quite different visage in the global South, prodded along by debt negotiations. Such renegotiations forced several changes: (**1**) land markets were deregulated; (**2**) there were cuts in subsidies and price supports; (**3**) there was an expanded use of bio-technology; (**4**) there was an increasing dependence on chemical, biological, and hydrocarbon-based inputs; and (**5**) agro-exports were promoted at the expense of food crops. Ultimately, as I've shown in chapters two and three, trans-national corporations and their local affiliates increasingly bought up land in Brazil and Venezuela. In some cases *fazendeiros* and *terratenientes* extracted a surplus and exploited labor, and when needed left some scraps of *de jure* land ownership in the hands of smaller farmers, "partially dispossessed peasantries," as Araghi puts it (Araghi, 2009: 134). Meanwhile the state facilitated the enclosure of previously public land, as it let market forces turn millions of acres of land from state-property to private property in the 1960s and 1970s in Venezuela, and regularized several million hectares of land in the 1980s, as Delahaye's research has confirmed, while in Brazil the federal state colonized the Amazon and then looked away or prodded along large farmers as they took over land on which smaller farmers had started to cultivate. The state also subsidized industrial food production.

The results, according to Araghi, include: (**1**) overproduction of food commodities and the suppression of domestic food and wage costs, thereby benefiting all sectors of capital by reducing the costs of social reproduction; (**2**) the subsidization of Northern overconsumption, again to the benefit of core metropolitan capital; (**3**) the depressing of the price of food commodities, to the advantage of urban consumers and non-agrarian southern capital; (**4**) the displacement of petty

commodity producers, thereby increasing the percentage of the world's population subject to market relations; (**5**) wage-deflation through coerced under-consumption; (**6**) the creation of a global network of mobile agricultural refugees, thereby providing a reserve army of labor, able to move to and between city or country, wherever work is needed, and thereby driving down wage costs yet further, often—see Patnaik—below the cost of social reproduction. Point (**7**), adding to Araghi's list, is that the displacement of the campesinos from the land makes them more amenable to primitive forms of exploitation, robs the soil of its fertility, and converts that fertility into evanescent capital.

As Araghi continues, "peasantization under national developmentalism was the precondition of global depeasantization under postcolonial neoliberal globalism." He rightly places agriculture and food at the center of his analysis, and highlights the role of peasant movements, and movements of peasant movements, which are attempting to regain control of the capital-enclosed commons, adding, "it is the outcome of this struggle that will resolve not only the peasant question, but indeed all of our questions" (Araghi, 2009: 125, 137). Note that Araghi has placed the agrarian question at the forefront of the struggle against global Capital. Wide-ranging, nigh-revolutionary agrarian reform in the global South would be the key contribution of the subaltern peoples to that struggle. Peasant movements are engaged in a fierce attempt at "defetishizing accumulation," and their notion of food sovereignty, essentially the total de-commodification of food and eating and the partial de-commodification of agricultural systems in the countries of the global South is of momentous significance, because "in the narrative of capitalist modernity, its [the radical peasantry's] project is virtually unthinkable" (McMichael, 2008: 42, 52). With that settled, propositions like those made by Bernstein to the effect that "with contemporary globalisation and the massive development of the productive forces in (advanced) capitalist agriculture, the centrality of the 'classic' agrarian question to industrialisation is no longer significant for *international* capital" are simply incoherent, so lost in lofty abstraction that the movements of on-the-ground producers are simply rendered invisible (Bernstein, 2007: 40).

As three of the most prominent agrarian sociologists point out, the conclusion of this argument is that land must be redistributed in the global South. Without that redistribution, even the most committed efforts at top-down development will fail, foundering on the current system of capital reproduction. Looking at land in the context of inequality and poverty as merely a "commodity" is wantonly irresponsible. It is a "source of life and society." And how, these sociologists

(rhetorically) ask, will this land reform be carried out? It will depend on the political, historical, and social context, and it will require a "mass democratic engagement" along with the iron will to carry out a profound redistribution of land. The state will have to become an enabler, in redistribution and in after-the-fact support.[44] The poorest campesinos need protection from the state, and they need funding too. The change cannot simply be "cosmetic," a patina of redistribution overlying encrusted structural inequities. It must go all the way (Courville and Patel, 2006: 7, 9, 12). As the International Planning Commission for Food Sovereignty, a part of the Via Campesina peasant international, insists,

> No agrarian reform is acceptable that is based only on land redistribution. We believe that the new agrarian reform must include a cosmic vision of the territories of communities of peasants, the landless, indigenous peoples, rural workers, fisherfolk, nomadic pastoralists, tribes, afro-descendants, ethnic minorities, and displaced peoples, who base their work on the production of food and who maintain a relationship of respect and harmony with Mother Earth and the oceans (McMichael, 2008: 46; Borras, 2008: 91).

Via Campesina-linked movements are well aware that previous state-led agrarian reforms generally left intact large properties, and did little to shatter the power of large estates, by now linked to trans-national capital. They are also aware that even the majority of the most wide-ranging reforms did little to change the fundamental rural dynamic of the concentration of landed property around poles of rural capital accumulation: the manor. Meanwhile such reforms' end-result was to create a market for the goods produced by urban capital, thereby strengthening market relations and turning agriculture into an economic activity wholly dependent on the market and the caprice of capital (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2007: 371; Dorner, 1992: 32-74).[45]

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[44] Once again I dance around the subject of reform vs. revolution. To be fair to Courville and Patel, they speak of the continuance of the state because that is what civil society actors in the global South do. Venezuelans speak constantly of the "process," and the MST hardly speaks of a rupture, but view themselves as a link in the class struggle. In this sense, and in others, Courville and Patel are being fair. In Venezuela, for example, the revolution has seized the executive, and made Chávez what he is. But the process is the point. Even if Chávez wanted to, it is not clear that he could engage in wholesale confiscation of estates in the Venezuelan countryside. The moderate wing of his movement would turn on him. In Brazil, the question of Lula "wanting to" is not even worth discussing. So the MST and FNCEZ rhetoric, and in turn Courville and Patel's rhetoric, echoes those things. They discuss what civil society wants. Reform and revolution are just labels for that, obfuscating more than they illuminate. See extended discussion below.

[45] The market itself is not the problem. While a worldwide gift economy is possible, markets are not intrinsically pernicious. The problems are unchecked markets and the unchecked power of financiers and capitalists in the ordering of social relations.

4.2. Venezuelan and Brazilian Peasant Movements and the State

In Venezuela and Brazil, land reform means both breaking up large-scale estates and inducing migration from *favelas* and *ranchos* to the countryside. Venezuelan peasant organizer Braulio Alvarez claimed in 2005 that 180,000 Venezuelan families already had returned to the land, through movement organizing and perhaps also through the efforts of the government retraining and resettling program, *Misión Vuelvan Caras*, Mission About Face (Dragnic García, 2005: 205-206).[46] In Brazil, the overwhelming percentage of *sem terra* are *camponeses*, but an increasing percentage are people from the cities, some of who have been involved in agricultural production, some of them, as day-laborers (Meszaros, 2000: 13). This is a necessary shift in emphasis. As Meszaros argues, the conceptual reliance on a rural-urban bifurcation is increasingly incoherent. Posh suburbs do not ring Latin American cities on the European or American models. Shanties surround and pock them, forming rings of former agricultural land that has only been "urbanized" by dint of increased population density and the cessation of agricultural production. They don't look like cities, and as they spread further and further from urban cores, they look like nothing remotely familiar to the eye accustomed to the metropolitan scenery of the global North.

Meanwhile, capital has encroached on the countryside, stratifying labor there, and often making it superfluous, while non-agricultural activity abounds, because dispossessed peasants have to resort to service work in lieu of subsistence cultivation.[47] As Meszaros adds, "Authors rightly talk of the 'urbanisation of the rural environment'" (Meszaros, 2000: 13). Other analysts agree, commenting on the campesino mentality of those dwelling in peri-urban regions (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2007: 381-382). This gives added heft to the suggestion that one should not separate urban and rural problems. In an intriguing twist, the MST produces goods for the urban poor through Lula's *Fome Cero* (zero hunger) program. Campesinos and slum-dwellers alike have an interest in this sort of economic cooperation (McMichael, 2009c: 296).[48]

While some of this sounds vaguely promising, a look at the nitty-gritty of the MST's relationship with the Brazilian state offers a darker picture. Through 2005, all the MST received by refraining from criticizing the Lula government was powerless governmental posts and honeyed rhetoric of

[46] There is no way of independently verifying this information. I doubt it is correct.
[47] The problem is not non-agricultural rural activity per se but the destruction of peasant livelihoods and their structural dislocation into non-agricultural employment, often enough in the informal or service sectors.
[48] The program cuts both ways, locking the Brazilian *favelero* into a clientelistic relationship with the state, but at the same time cultivating a politics of solidarity between the city and the country (Jardim 2003).

"reform." The legitimacy accorded to land-occupations in the wake of the rural massacres at Corumbiara and El Dorado dos Carajás had dissipated. A concerted campaign of demonization had systematically dried up the MST's reservoir of moral support within broader society.[49] When the media and intellectual journals described occupations as "invasions" and cast the *sem terra* as scoundrels and thieves, the occupation, the MST's primary mode of struggle, moved beyond the envelope of legality. The timing was unfortunate. Alliances with PT officials forced the MST to abstain from engaging in extra-legal activities, so that the PT could gain and hold legislative and national posts. Radical action could have associated the party with the movement, and then the gains the party would have expected from the movement's support would have been counterbalanced by a concomitant loss in support from those repulsed by illegal activities.

Furthermore, the alliance with the PT almost certainly served to moderate the landless movement's actions (Sinek, 2007: 7). Because of its electioneering for the PT in the 2002 through 2005 campaigns, sometimes rising to the level of ferrying voters to the polls in MST trucks, the MST expected materiel and political support in return. Sinek suggests that the "The benefits [of electoral support] are clear: since most conflicts over land take place at the municipal and state level," the way they turn out depends on the action or inaction of mayors and governors, who may or may not "belong to a political party that sympathizes with the movement's goals" (Sinek, 2007: 26-27). Such local leaders could look the other way at repressive violence or deploy the state to prevent it, assist MST projects or wrap endless yards of red tape around them. Alliance building is therefore considerably more complex than simply MST ties with the central state apparatus. Power in Brazil resides both in Brasilia and in state houses and municipalities, and some of those state houses are thousands of kilometers from Brazil's capital city, near rural regions larger than central European states. Within those states, landlords exert vast influence, and the state, while far from able to exercise a Weberian monopoly over violence, does matter, because the state too has power. Sinek thus considers local level support "crucial" for the MST. In the early 1980s, for example, the *sem terra* benefited from state support through the distribution of tractors and machinery by the governor of São Paulo, Franco Montero (1983-1987).

[49] Just Google "MST" and "*Veja*," the Brazilian version of *Time* magazine.

Meanwhile the PT has participated in the creation of a *Núcleo Agrário* that discusses legislative issues with campesino movements (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 302). In 1998-2002, the MST could count on the support of 17 PT deputies, four deputies from other leftist parties, and five PT senators. The MST leaders do not think this is where power truly resides; power lies in the distribution of capital, and is reflected and reproduced through the symbolic and political structure of the larger society. As Stedile comments, "the parliament is only a reflection of this correlation of forces" (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 304). But the fact that the state cannot build a new society doesn't make the state superfluous to social change. There is power there. As one settler comments, "if you don't occupy the space, it ends up being occupied by the right. We participate without illusion" (Vergara-Camus, 2007: 306). Or some do, in any event. It appears that the MST leadership, for a time, mesmerized by the PT and state-power, the perennial foible of leftist leadership, participated with a great deal of illusion.

Meszaros recalls Stedile's comment that "It is necessary to negotiate but never at the price of demobilising the movement. Otherwise you have nothing to negotiate in the future" (Meszaros, 2000: 10). It does not seem that the decisions made during the initial years of Lula's first term had the effect of demobilizing the movement, but they were certainly steps in that direction. Petras summarizes the general effects of the MST policy: a land distribution that covered a minute fraction of those campesinos eligible for reform, less than a third of the number envisioned as able to receive land in the dreams of the MST leadership. Meanwhile government credit and subsidies for export flowed to the large plantation owners, the MST's core class enemies. Small farmers went bankrupt, as Lula liberally imported food, bringing down the general price-level to one below that which would enable small-farmers, who were less likely to externalize their costs onto the ecology or hired laborers, to subsist.

Additionally, in working closely with the PT leadership the MST decided against a mobilization against the Lula pension-reduction scheme, abandoning class-solidarity with public-sector unions. The reform incited no small schism. The Worker's Party lost several parliamentarians, including rogue Senator Heloísa Helena, who would go on to form the socialist PSOL (Partido Socialismo e Liberdade, Socialism and Liberty Party). Lula used the schism over pension reforms to co-opt the CUT by replacing its leadership. He "invited" João Felício, head of the schoolteachers' union, to resign, and replaced him with Luiz Marinho, a leader of the metalworkers' union, which had been castrated by the hollowing-out of the Brazilian industrial

base and so had little clout. As Francisco de Oliveira comments, “The irony is that the CUT, created to counter stooge-unionism under the dictatorship, has been transformed under the Lula government into a transmission belt for neoliberal policies” (Oliveira, 2006: 13). The Lula government’s synchronized gutting of oppositional organizations did make the MST’s work harder, but the judgment stands: Political strategy was a failure during the initial years of the Lula administration, in turn accelerating economic problems within the movement (Petras, 2008: 492-493).

It was only in 2007 that the MST really started to sharply move away from critical support for the Lula government, de-emphasizing support and reemphasizing “criticism.” The leadership has become increasingly clamorous about the rancidness of Lula administration policies, which had left over two-thirds of the families that were encamped in 2003 languishing still in 2007. Seventeen thousand delegates attended its national convention in 2007, a stunning number. And also in 2007, the MST leadership stood with CONLUTA, the umbrella for the anti-Lula leftist trade unions, and the theretofore co-opted CUT in several mass protests. They christened April 2007 “Red April,” due to the frequency of social mobilization. As agrarian geographer Ariovaldo Umbelino comments, “Without confrontation, there will be no agrarian reform, not by the Lula government” (Umbelino, 2007). Thus has the MST broken sharply with its “critical” support for Lula.

The Venezuelan peasant organizations’ relations with the Chávez government have had a very different character. The FNCEZ has occupied land, and the movement stages mass rallies. It has mustered 15,000 campesinos in Caracas on several occasions, protesting impunity, pushing for the agrarian reform to go deeper and faster. Fifteen thousand campesinos in a country of 28 million, in which campesinos represent 15 percent of the population is a tremendous number.[50] The Venezuelan peasant organizations also occupy land—quite frequently in the early years of the Chávez government, reportedly with less frequency now, to allow the government more maneuvering room (Uzacategui, 2008). The government has also responded favorably time and again, first by sponsoring the convention that wrote the 1999 Constitution that included a social use of land clause.

[50] Similar problems occur in measuring Venezuela as in Brazil. There is perhaps peasant deflation in Venezuela, but less so, given agriculture’s historical weakness and the way the country deliberately weakened its agricultural base through exchange-rate chicanery.

The aspects of the constitution related to agrarian reform point up an important but practically unmentioned point, at least in most discussions of the Bolivarian Revolution: the ideas which tie the Chavistas together. It is not simply Chávez and his radiant charisma that weld together the process's disparate elements. This soldering started to take place far earlier, beginning in a process of cultural radicalization that began well before 1989, but one that changed qualitatively that year, when "Venezuelan history broke in half," as Ciccariello-Maher puts it. Thereafter, Venezuela underwent intensifying social radicalization. Chávez was elected, and the Chavistas convened a Constituent Assembly. As Roland Denis comments,

> There was no real central revolutionary organization here. What we had was a mass rebellion movement—first a rebellion of the masses [in 1989] and then rebellions of the military [two in 1992]. These were very heterogeneous, dispersed, fragmented. What united them was the project to develop a new basis, a new constitution. No one would have been able to centralize this movement's program, not even Chávez. His leader was and is undisputed, but his ideas would not have been enough to bring together the movement. The constitution fills this gap. It is a political program and simultaneously serves the purpose of providing a framework for the process. This constitution is not simply a dead text. It reflects values and principles. Perhaps not enough, perhaps one day we'll have to reform it, maybe later one will not need it anymore for the revolutionary process. But at the moment it has the function of *Mao's Little Red Book*: it represents the demands and goals of the grassroots movement (Wilpert, 2007: 43-44).

Social movements created that political program, and that political program provides the scaffolding for social movements to go about their business of change—*el proceso*, the process. The social-use of land-clause was a product of social pressure and input. During Chávez's initial electoral campaign, and during subsequent campaigns, the rural poor have voted for him in as close to a bloc as modern political democracy tends to allow for. Having inscribed their concerns in the legitimizing document of the Venezuelan social order, social movements then pressed for change, amidst foot-dragging and laggardly implementation. In 2003, in Jacoa, the movement prepared to jolt laggards into action. One leader commented, "We'll have to enter by force. But, listen carefully, with a banner saying: 'We are revolutionaries, we are with the president; the problem is with this particular official.' Otherwise, the press will get hold of it and use it for the opposition's benefit," for example by depicting dissension, unhealthy sectarianism, within the movement. The point is never weakness but perceived weakness (Lemoine, 2003). Likewise, in

an open letter to Chávez in March 2005, the Revolutionary Peasant Front Simon Bolívar, the FNCEZ, and the Movement of the Popular Bases declared that

> In the southern zone of this country the Land Law has not had the needed reach, for among other reasons the tenure of inept functionaries, the centralism within this extensive state, the weaknesses of the law, and the inexistence of spaces for the *campesino* movement to participate effectively in places and ways provided for by the law. This has permitted the latifundistas to begin a counteroffensive against the *cartas agrarias*, aiming for the expulsion of those who have produced and obtained credits, making all the incentives to alternative development worthless. In this region of the country *campesino's* human rights are being violated. Murder, torture, illegal detention, and paid assassins exist in a zone where the state presence is weak (Masiosare, 2005).

This sort of repression was not inevitable, but these events again point to the multifaceted spectacle of Venezuelan social change. On the one hand, the state lollygags, evades, procrastinates, dithers, and dallies, while peasants push hard for land. But another facet of the state, more rejectionist, more corrupt, looks away while local landlords buy assassins. Local judiciaries, far from the core of Venezuelan federal power, refuse to prosecute human rights abuses, while soldiers and local police officers masquerading as upholders of the law moonlight as rural mercenaries. And on yet a third front, peasants push, demonstrate, and occupy land, and the state expropriates in response, legalizing the land, reinterpreting the constitution, issuing decrees, allowing *ocupación previa*, and the like.[51] As Brazilian journalist Claudia Jardim comments, land reform began "without sufficiently advancing a strategy for protecting peasant leaders from the entirely predictable violent reaction of the landowning class" (Gindin, 2005). Only recently has the state started to sanction the forming of peasant militias (Janicke, 2010).

Clearly, the Venezuelan state—like the Brazilian state—is a conflicted structure. If its formal ideology, its laws, and its leadership support agrarian reform and land redistribution, that does not mean the whole state does. In this case, as Philip Abrams notes, one must distinguish between the state-as-ideology and the state as simply the sum of its component institutions, their personnel and their practices (Abrams, 1988: 58-59). In this case the issue is made more complicated yet because vast sectors of the opposition consider the government fundamentally illegitimate. They reject its program, and so justify any and all actions taken in opposition to state action as

[51] *Ocupación previa* is when the state allows campesinos to stay on the land while a legal process wends its way through the courts.

resistance against tyranny. This is the self-serving "ideology as a mask of class interest," vital for understanding contemporary Venezuela. The Bolivarian Revolution is not hegemonic within Venezuelan society, probably an inevitable output of political polarization and a political process that maps quite neatly over certain class lines.

Having considered the relationship of the peasant movement to the state in both Brazil and Venezuela, it's important to consider if they could have acted differently than they have —and I am including land-occupations in this calculus—and if so, how. In Brazil, the MST could have refused to supply electoral support to Lula in 2002 and 2006 and as a consequence he might have lost in the second round, particularly in 2006. In that case, the result would have been an even fiercer repression of the MST than what the Lula government has carried out. The small flow of money diverted to the cooperatives would likely have been re-routed. Perhaps Jose Serra, his rival in 2002, or Geraldo Alckmin, the rival contender from the center-right PSDB (Brazilian Social Democracy Party, Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira) in the 2006 elections, would have reinstituted the law which Cardoso enacted towards the end of his second term. That law placed land off-limits if the MST occupied it, and really damaged the MST. That would have been a disaster, and MST strategists were wise not to support Lula's opponent. They were aware that it was a choice between Lula, standing for a softened neo-liberalism, or another leader, un-beholden in any way to the left or the workers, putting in place a rawer, harsher version of neo-liberalism. Vis-à-vis supporting or not supporting the public sector trade unions in their battle against Lula, that seems a mistake. Perhaps it provoked a greater cleavage in the left than would otherwise have taken place, and prevented Heloísa Helena from mounting a stronger candidacy that could itself have impelled Lula to run a bit to the left, and thus put in place policies further to the left in 2006.

But all this necessarily took place within tightly circumscribed limits. Lula is himself constrained by overwhelming structural forces. De Oliveira notes that well before Lula's 2002 victory, former workers had become the managers of massive pension funds belonging to the laboring classes, controlling access to them, while hobnobbing with the Brazilian bourgeoisie in cafes and clubs. The jobs of these ex-laborers consist of ensuring the profitability of the pension funds they helm, and in the Brazilian model, that means they finance production in such a manner as to create unemployment—usually functional for capital reproduction—while tying landed capital into trans-national commodity production systems that have neither a place for nor an interest in

subsistence production. These nouveau riche bureaucrats have fused with the upper levels of the PT, itself a massive, clientelistic apparatus that fills 20,000 governmental posts. That the Lula administration has evinced almost total disinterest in agrarian reform in this context is unsurprising. What would have been surprising would have been the converse (Oliveira, 2003: 55-57).

The links between Brazilian capital and agro-industry are many. From 1997-2007, the largest 200 firms grew seven percent annually, coming to control 52 percent of the Brazilian economy. Many of these firms were agro-export firms. The new agrarian model, against which the MST struggles, effectively links capitalist landowners, their political representatives—the *bancada ruralista*—with "primarily foreign-owned" firms that supply the other inputs, including tractors and seeds, and who in turn set world-commodity prices. These landlords exploit the peasantry and the environment. In turn, they are also linked tightly to the bio-diesel and sugar cane ethanol production system, growing at awesome velocity in Brazil and effectively functioning as an "agrarian counter-reform," through which they buy up land and destroy the social and ecological basis of sustainable agriculture in the countryside (Stedile, 2007: 193-194, 202-204).

Because the 1960s' agricultural modernization program facilitated and, indeed, relied upon the concentration of land into production units the size of small states, these large farmers had significant internal resources with which to weather the withdrawal of state support, including independent financing and their own marketing networks. So the integration of Brazilian national agriculture into trans-national commodity chains that began in the late-60s under the generals has by now become essentially complete. The result has been concerted market liberalization, enabling large Brazilian capitalist agriculture to be competitive on world-commodity markets. For some products, like oranges, orange juice, soybeans, wheat, and cattle, Brazil is a sectoral titan, while the overall production of staple food crops has stagnated, a reduction in the cultivated area counterpoised with productivity increases. Stagnant food supplies alongside a steadily-increasing population meant that Brazil, like much of the rest of the global South, had to begin importing food to feed its people: imports remained steady at about one billion dollars a year in the 80s, but amidst escalating neo-liberalization, between 1995 and 1999, that number increase to 6.9 billion dollars annually.

If Lula were to simply redistribute the great tracts of the land upon which these projects are set up, there would be massive capital flight, and Brazilian interest rates would rise even higher than they already are, in an effort to attract foreign capital, or prevent it from fleeing. The Brazilian bourse would plummet, and Brazil would lose great quantities of its international reserves. Those would be the likely economic consequences of large-scale redistribution. Radical action on Lula's part could incite civil war in the countryside, and the Brazilian federal state would not have the resources to prevent or control the rage. Mercenaries would murder resettled peasants, and assassins would be found, and found easily, as the Brazilian economy shuddered under the blows of capital flight and stock-market crisis, alongside a severe weakening of the currency and a short-term drop in agro-exports. The only way to stop such a process would be if peasants were to join the MST in huge waves. Or, the only way to stop it would be to have a revolution. But putting it this way involves an element of fantasy: the PT is not interested in an agrarian reform. Its flirtation with radical rural change, through the team Lula convoked in 2003, was deliberately coy and fleeting. Even in 2002-2003, international and local capital was far too tightly interlinked with agrarian production to contemplate real change. Only the campesino mass has contemplated change. And what have been their options, not merely political in the sense of supporting the Lula government, but political in the sense of upping the number of land-occupations?

Here there is a core problem. Many campesinos don't join the MST because they are afraid of dying. As Hammond writes,

> Under such domination, autonomous popular organizing, especially around class interests, is extremely difficult…Not only are the mechanisms for representation of those interests weak but the local elites do not hesitate to inflict violence on those who try to use them (Hammond, 2009: 158).

Peasant concerns are understandable: hundreds upon hundreds of campesino activists have been murdered, there have been numerous wide-scale massacres, and the press portrays the *sem terra* as lawless thugs. For the urban-middle class, repression against the MST is thus justified. Campesinos in the countryside cannot be unaware of this fact, and what they are aware of, and what they are confronted with every day, is the fact that their lives, and the livelihoods of their families, depend on their work as day-workers in plantations. Many live day-to-day on subsistence incomes and without that work, they would starve. If they occupied land, local security forces or state police might put them down, aiming to enforce the "law" against

"expropriation." Large-scale revolts would precipitate large-scale repression. This is true in any revolutionary situation. But given the structuring of the Brazilian economy, its industrial plant increasingly hollowed out, and given that the MST has, to some degree, broken solidarity with the urban proletariat—a solidarity it is now fastidiously re-forging—many are now, for example, increasingly joining the security forces, one of the major growth sectors in the Brazilian economy (Rosa, 2007). Given a choice between joining the forces of repression, quiescence, joining up with less-confrontational rural organizations like CONTAG, or starving, it's understandable that poor Brazilians choose the former three options. For this reason, the MST's stance during the struggle over public-sector pensions, when it refused to directly criticize Lula, was a real mistake, and its current solidarity efforts over the Oil is Ours campaign are a turn-around, perhaps one way out of the cul-de-sac into which neoliberal agrarian accumulation has placed the peasantry in Brazil. But egress from the cul-de-sac will be a long-time coming. Brazilian leaders' options are few.

In Venezuela, there are different problems. The Venezuelan government helps the FNCEZ and allied peasant movements along. They are killed by paramilitaries in the country's Western regions, often imported from Colombia, but they also are now being encouraged by Chávez to form local-self defense initiatives. Chávez himself understands that state violence cannot be relied upon to protect peasant mobilization in Western Venezuela. And here the situation is more complicated. In contradistinction to Lula, who if he pursued certain policies, would incite a class-war, Chávez and the manner in which he holds the Chavista coalition together, in some measure through unalloyed personal charisma, are maybe some of the factors preventing Venezuelan civil war. In the countryside, in particular, Chávez is well aware that the initiative to expropriate comes from the campesinos, not from the initiatives of urban leadership; to get land expropriated, administrative and judicial roadblocks have to be removed, and that tends to occur through popular mobilization.

In Venezuela, despite appearances, initiative does not come from the state, but from below. Systematic investigations have shown that INTI passes out *cartas agrarias*, legitimizing land occupations, in response to peasant mobilization, and not as bribes, dangling the bauble of ownership in front of campesino eyes in order to get them to move from wage-labor to a farm on a former estate (Dragnic García, 2005: 198). The take-over of the Charcote Vestey cattle-ranch, in 2005, is a good example: peasants invaded the ranch-land and ordered the government to look

into the legitimacy of the land titling, or, in effect, to legitimize their occupation and start diverting credit and other forms of support to the peasants. In fact, that land had probably been illegally privatized in 1920, easily so, since the core state was still attempting to concentrate power in those years and had not yet congealed into anything even remotely resembling a sovereign over the Venezuelan national territory (Bruce, 2008: 77-78; Ellner, 2008: 124-125). Ultimately the owners of the estate were unable to produce the documentation that would have proved ownership, but they kept two-thirds of the land, the actively used portion.

In another case, idle land south of Maracaibo Lake, in Western Venezuela—land that legally belonged to the state—was claimed by a third-party as private land, according to rumors acting as a proxy for ex-President Carlos Andres Perez. The head of a local land-committee that had organized to pressure the government to assign them legal title was assassinated (Wilpert, 2007: 113-114). Despite the large number of assassinations, over 300 by now, that figure is actually comparatively low, that is, when compared to the number it could be if the Venezuelan government were to more precisely follow the letter of the law, and forcibly expropriate idle land and re-distribute land that large property owners have falsely claimed as their own.

There are two reasons why the government allows landowners to keep possession of fallow or illegally obtained land. The first is demographic. The pressure on the land is far lower in Venezuela than in many regions of rural Brazil. Most of the population lives in Venezuela's titanic and over-crowded cities, and while the government and popular movements seek to get people to move back to the land, this process is slow, although not without hope. The Venezuelan government thus has far more room for maneuver than Brazil's does. There is also abundant land that is acknowledged to be in the state's possession, which enables it to partially postpone the issue of land re-distribution. So it is able to let off campesino pressure by distributing government owned-land, negotiating with landlords on campesinos' behalf, in part a similar policy to the Brazilian colonization of the Amazon, although not with the same intention: the destruction of independent social organizing. It thereby prevents even worse conflict in that countryside than that which is ongoing. The land law also allows for extremely large plantations, up to 5000 hectares. (By comparison, the Sandinista land reform allowed for farms up to 700 hectares of the lowest quality land, just 35 hectares of the highest quality land, while the Cuban land reform stipulated a maximum farm size of 67 hectares.)

The distribution of public land has the not-so-incidental effect of preventing fissures within Chavismo from widening into fractures. Landholding sectors are increasingly not only persons who are living in the countryside, but during the 1980s and 1990s came, in increasing percentages, to be people who live in cities—or the metropole. Capitalist agriculture has come to be closely tied in with urban capital, and with trans-national commodity production chains, a development that occurred in Venezuela paralleling its hypertrophic progress in Brazil.

Still, agrarian reform in rough outline in Venezuela has broken up a number of the largest estates— Eliécer Otaiza, the former president of INTI, claimed even in 2005 that 56 estates exceeding 5000 hectares had been broken up (Dragnic García, 2005: 205-206.[52] The government claimed in January 2009 that 2.7 million hectares, 6.6 million acres, of idle latifundia land had been reclaimed (Schiavoni and Camacaro, 2009: 133). Uzcategui has suggested that while land has clearly been redistributed, it is unclear how much. Either way, the point is that between the confiscation of privately held fallow land or other less-disputed parcels, the government has been able to avoid expropriation of core capitalist land, or at least avoiding expropriating all of them according to the letter of the law. In this way, the government has avoided raising tensions to the point where they could suddenly cross the event-horizon into open warfare in the countryside. The campesino mass has been aware of this delicate, deliberate dance. Uzcategui told me in 2008 that the FNCEZ was self-consciously de-emphasizing land occupations (Uzcategui, 2008). Presumably some of this was due to government initiative, or government pressure. Feuding factions within Chavismo prevent the Venezuelan political economy from transcending fully the capitalist system.

This is important, if frequently overlooked. Chavismo has within it two distinct tendencies. One is reformist and redistributionist, desiring to change the balance of power but not to really restructure or transcend the state or capitalism. The other, rebellious and revolutionary, seeks to deepen the process, expropriate capital and property, and move decisively beyond the current political economy.

Could the FNCEZ by itself move beyond capitalism in rural Venezuela with at best the potential to mobilize—even if fully hegemonic in the countryside—some 15 percent of the country's population? Not a chance. So tactical and strategic alliances with amicable fragments within the

[52] As we shall get to presently, there is an element of make-believe in these cleanly-cut numbers. They beg the question, who is counting, and the truth is, a lot of people are counting. They seem to be getting different numbers.

state apparati are not clientelism but the only option. And the FNCEZ is aware of these limits. Orlando Zambrano, one of its coordinators and spokespersons, has noted that the FNCEZ views the ongoing dynamic of social change as a process, surely but slowly moving, trundling along, until they have the power to engineer the change they want. The view is overtly Gramscian, a war of position within the matrix of societal power. They envision a decades-long process of change. Other of the most ardently radical currents share this vision (Denis, 2006). Zambrano emphasized that the FNCEZ's alliance with nascent urban movements, particularly the FNCCB, the city-bound twin of the FNCEZ peasant organization, was intended to organize politicized but perhaps still atomized urban slum-dwellers into a force able to offer it the urban alliance it so desperately needs (Zambrano, 2008). More broadly, in January 2008 there was a gathering of grassroots organizers in El Valle, a *barrio* in southern Caracas, in which the FNCEZ played a prominent role. The assembly was intended to bring together radical-left Chavista elements, aware, as Zambrano put it, that "There is a reformist sector that has been working internally to construct a force to build a counterweight to the revolutionary sector that is in the government," a sector that only pressure from below can overcome (Fox, 2008).

These organizers and FNCEZ are of the "cultural optimist" strain of the Venezuelan left, the more anti-statist current even within the left wing revolutionary arc of the Chavista movement. They believe that moving through state institutions, stiff with sclerotic corruption, can only lead to the downfall of Chavismo and the Bolivarian Process. These leaders consequently push for a centrifugal distribution of power, consciously urging for the devolution of power away from state institutions that they rightly regard as unaccountable. The FNCEZ is not a perfect organization, and it has surely taken mis-steps, but none so glaring as those committed by the MST—perhaps in some measure because Venezuelan social movements act with the clear awareness that "we created him [Chávez]," while Brazilian social movements, or large sectors of them, not only rightly are aware that their social mobilization created Lula but in turn draw the conclusion that Lula is their man. He is not, or at least not in the way Chávez, a campesino from Barinas, is the man of the Venezuelan campesino and slum-dweller. But such perceptions have their limits, too. Venezuela is in the midst of an ongoing revolutionary process. Brazil is not. This makes all the difference in the world.

4.3. MST and FNCEZ Ecological and Economic Visions

I now move on to a discussion of MST and FNCEZ ecology and economics. Both in their way seek to de-link agricultural production from the imperatives imposed by a homogenizing world-market system—in the Brazilian case, massive links with trans-national agrarian production, in the Venezuelan case, its conversion into an agricultural periphery. The MST and the FNCEZ both seek to turn food-production into an enterprise focused on the creation of use-value—growing food for its own sake and not, or not primarily, for exchange on a global market. Nevertheless, their strategies have differed.

The Venezuelan model rests on the conversion of oil-rent to agricultural production, in a sly inversion of the industrial model. In the latter, oil is burned, and the result is food calories, the conversion of fossil fuels into food. But Venezuela is using its oil-funds to shield and protect infant agricultural systems. The FNCEZ is a part of this. It receives money from the government and has received land, often land that the government has paid for, not confiscated. The FNCEZ is affiliated with hundreds of the cooperatives speckling the Venezuelan countryside. Great plots of land have been returned to productivity. According to once-again unverifiable government figures, one-third of the land that had been part of latifundia in 1997 has been distributed to Venezuelan campesinos (Schiavoni and Camacaro, 2009: 133).

Before proceeding further, a quick point. In the case of the MST, its settlements are readily distinguishable as independent production units. MST settlements that are the fruit of occupations are likewise analytically isolable. I can foggily see, and so clumsily measure, some of the effects of MST social organizing. In the case of FNCEZ social pressure, it is necessarily diffuse, because it is pressuring a conflicted, but in some respects allied state structure, alongside other peasant movements. Its development strategy is difficult to detangle from the greater Bolivarian agriculture development strategy. So, to speak of the changes in agrarian structure and agricultural production as the output of unitary causes—FNCEZ pressure—is overdrawn, although there are distinct FNCEZ cooperatives. Drawing sharp diagrammatic causal relations between social mobilization, social pressure, and social change is, in this case, extremely hard. But much of the change is the result of some FNCEZ pressure, and so that is the reason I discuss it here.

Agricultural change and changes in the Venezuelan food production system has moved well beyond isolated distribution of land, a familiar enough theme within Venezuelan agrarian history (Schiavoni and Camacaro, 2009: 134).[53] It has extended to the systematic and targeted provision of credit and materiel support for farming. Agricultural credit has increased from 164 million dollars in 1999 to 7.6 billion dollars in 2008, a 5,738 percent increase. Banks are required by law to reserve a certain—escalating—percentage of their portfolio to agricultural loans. Some even comply with this requirement (BCV, 2008).[54] Agriculture also receives preferential interest rates, and "FONDAFA, the government institution that gives loans to small farmers, covers 75% of losses that result from environmental conditions, such as late rains, but the small farmers are still responsible for 25% of the loan amount that was lost" (Page, 2008). Meanwhile the federal government supplies campesinos with tractors and seeds, and through Campo Adentro, over 2,000 Cuban agricultural specialists are teaching and training in the Venezuelan countryside, trying to share the lessons of Cuba's ecological revolution. FNCEZ settlements and other cooperatives are increasingly turning to various forms of agro-ecology, using organic fertilizers and biological pest controls in lieu of expensive, imported, and ecologically pernicious inputs. These processes build up soil-fertility, adding to the country's real wealth. Venezuela offers specific credit channels for farmers engaged in agro-ecological production processes and is nurturing natural pest-control through the establishment of twenty-four laboratories devoted to studying them and natural fertilizers too, "in an effort to eliminate the toxic agrochemicals of Bayer, Cargill, Monsanto, and others," as Jaua explains (Schiavoni and Camacaro, 2009: 136). Indeed, the 2008 Law for Integrated Agricultural Health establishes agro-ecology as the "scientific basis for sustainable agriculture in Venezuela," attributable mostly to the government learning from social movements, emphatically not the other way around. Other state-society collaboration includes the moratorium on GMO crops and the Barinas agro-ecological institute, run with the aid of the MST and Via Campesina, partnering with FNCEZ.

All of this agitation has had unclear but definite results. The total amount of land that has thus far been redistributed is the least clear—different agencies and government officials scatter numbers

[53] Except where specifically indicated this section draws from Schiavoni and Camacaro.

[54] This report technically corroborates the trend, finding that agricultural loans went from 6,966 Bolivar Fuertes (Bs.F) in 2006 to 11.510 Bs.F in 2007 to 17.699 Bs.F in 2008, but as is usual in these reports, accounts for neither inflation nor the fact that dollar amount cited, as in the *Monthly Review* article, was based on a conversion from the official exchange rate. See p. 223 of the report. Also in 2008, from February to December banks were supposed to increase the percentage of their portfolio devoted to agricultural credit from 14 percent to 21 percent. See p. 70.

like confetti, and of all different kinds: 200,000 hectares, 2 million hectares, ranchland here and coffee plantations there. An agricultural census is ongoing, at the direction of Jaua, but data collection only began in April 2008 (Bruce, 2008: 87-88). The amount of credit cascading down to the agricultural sector has increased tremendously. The use of agro-ecological techniques, such as organic fertilizers and biological pest controls, is also waxing (Bruce, 2008: 90). Problems remain, particularly salient ones for the FNCEZ. MERCAL, the government-owned-and-subsidized food-distribution system will not take products from land-reform settlements because they are "improperly packaged," preferring instead the produce from large capitalist farms that have the resources to standardize such things, or imports from Brazil or Argentina.

Finally, the government also offers price supports for agriculture, alongside subsidies for staple crop production, and guaranteed markets, through a government-run agriculture corporation. Reports suggest that MERCAL, the government-run supermarket program, prioritizes purchases from cooperatives. For example, it is now getting half of its milk from small campesino producers (Ellner, 2008: 193). But there's still work to be done. As Uzcategui notes, "So we've made progress in handing over the land, in credit and machinery, but the distribution, warehousing, and marketing chains are still very weak" (Bruce, 2008: 193). Weak but not non-existent. The government has steadily re-nationalized various physical parts of agricultural infrastructure, attempting to place the various pieces together again into a coherent whole. A 2006 law, for instance, renationalized grain silos that previous governments had privatized. The 2008 Law of Food Security and Food Sovereignty established strategic reserves of staples, thereby stabilizing prices and shielding Venezuelan supply from the vicissitudes of natural calamity, or human interference in the food supply—something the opposition has resorted to on numerous occasions. The government has started to install cooperatively run processing plants, alongside integrated agricultural complexes, in Portuguesa state, for example.

The results on overall Venezuelan agricultural production have been stupendous.[55] Overall food production has increased 24 percent since 1998, sharply outpacing population growth. In certain staple crops, the increase has been more marked. In 2008, relative to 1998, corn and rice

[55] It's perhaps intrusive and belaboring to note that the following figures are quite hard to confirm. The government doesn't release systematic figures for agricultural production, or hasn't since 2005. What can be independently verified is generally not at odds with the numbers I cite here, which is why I've reproduced them. If agricultural production is fairly elastic, responsive to rises in prices, as it may be in an under-utilized land-mass like Venezuela, then it makes sense that in the midst of a massive increase in basic commodity prices, food production would correspondingly increase sharply, as I suspect it did in Venezuela from 2006 to 2009.

production had increased 132 and 71 percent respectively. Pork production was up 77 percent. In all of these goods Venezuela is now self-sufficient. In others, it has progressed, but the strides have been smaller. For beef, chicken, and eggs, domestic production now meets 70, 85, and 80 percent of national demand. Milk production has swelled enormously, 900 percent, now fulfilling 55 percent of the national demand.[56] These are core components of the Venezuelan food-basket. Other items, such as black beans, root vegetables, and sunflowers for processing into cooking oil, have seen great increases—143 percent, 115 percent, and 125 percent. Still far from meeting national domestic demand, they move Venezuela closer to the food sovereignty espoused by the FNCEZ and endorsed by the Via Campesina. The country will soon also be able to export corn, and it is already able to export pork.

These are momentous changes. The process of structural transformation has probably proceeded furthest in the agricultural system. This progress perhaps explains why, although there's a bit of a tendency towards a ministerial merry-go-round within the government's cabinet, Jaua has remained at his post for the last decade. The question that emerges in the last instance is this. To what extent does all this represent a foretaste of Venezuelan social change, on a massive level? The USSR, for example, saw massive productive increases, without a corresponding increase in local democracy or social transformation, what I call "socialism." The answer, rather bluntly, is that we don't yet know and neither does the FNCEZ. Zambrano and the libertarian current of Chavismo within which the FNCEZ operates imagine a process of transition lasting decades, a spiraling revolutionary process. The state is scaffolding. The oil money is undergirding. The sectors with the most heightened consciousness are aware that their goal is to make new men. That takes a while. But a society attempting to make a transition to a new economic model must be able to survive external assault, whether by foreign agents or the seismic impacts of market upheaval. Agricultural self-sufficiency is the core of that process, and the core of economic development, as development economists have recognized for long decades. It is the right start. It may founder and fall, but the FNCEZ's willful autonomy will enable it to weather the worst, except the re-installation of a repressive state that beats them down. And it is for that they support Chávez—*por ahora*, for now (Ciccariello-Maher, n.d.).

[56] I have seen correspondence suggesting that the government imports and re-labels milk, turning "imported milk" into "Venezuelan milk."

In Brazil, the situation is both more complex, and more straightforward. More straightforward because the working-class is losing in the Brazilian class struggle. The agro-capitalist complex is in glittering ascendancy. More complex, because the MST knows this, and has organized itself so that while losing it can't lose—it is too independent and robust for that. On the micro-level, at the level of decisions taken by individual *sem terra,* most settlers use a mélange of intensive, familial, subsistence-oriented production strategies and input-intensive, cash crop, commodity-production strategies. Some suggest that this mix is leading to a new sort of a production system, melding mechanization with economies-of-scale, cultivating cash and subsistence crops, using agro-ecology where possible, falling back on chemical inputs where not.[57] This has resulted in a strong, pointed orientation towards subsistence production, in the sense that MST settlements are able to produce their own food. In a limited way, they have erected a barrier to capital's encroachment. And small producers out-produce large ones (Malvezzi, 2009). The result is that settler families are able to eat three meals a day. Changing mentalities can take generations, but moving from a situation in which a rural shanty-dweller can eat one-and-a-half meals a day to where a subsistence-oriented *sem terra* can eat three meals a day of food she grows can take place in the time-span of years. There is not a firewall, though, between MST settlements and the market. There can't be, because settlers must buy inputs that they cannot themselves produce, and in any event they are seeking to create a careful balance between food security and market production.[58]

Often *sem terra* invest preferential agricultural infrastructure credits in animal husbandry, for milk, which can guarantee a secure yearly minimum income. MST settlers also are involved in soybean production, through the PROCERA-PRONAF government loan program or regional cooperative loan institutions. The latter are the result of a conscious decision by MST settlers to turn to collective investment practices. They are used for community-building or technological assistance, and are "an experiment in socialized accumulation of capital." They tend to run through CONCRAB, the offspring of a network of cooperatives created through the agrarian reform. CONCRAB "might be thought of as the economic arm of the MST," turning the logic of capital on its head, strategically deploying capital to defend given socially determined goals, in some ways presaging the Venezuelan model (Martins, 2006: 270-271). This capital amounts to

[57] Here I draw on Vergara-Camus (2007: 241ff) again except where explicitly indicated otherwise.
[58] I thank Liisa North for this clarification.

tens of millions of dollars. But it is distributed economic power—there are over 60 major MST co-operatives.

The MST is not a legal business entity, not a private corporation. It can't be sued. It can't go bankrupt—its cooperatives have a loan-default rate of less than 1 percent, which is very low given who the recipients of MST loans are: impoverished or cash-poor *sem terra*. They sign contracts with multinationals like Coca-Cola and Parmalat, and also have signed thousands of contracts with the state, at municipal, state, federal levels, dealing with land ownership, management of land and their infrastructure, technical assistance, education, and sometimes, even legal advice (Meszaros, 2000: 9). It is for that reason that a settler can comment, "the MST has transformed itself into a species of state. We do what the state should do and much more" (Harnecker, 2002: 161). The metaphor only goes so far, and that is part of the tragedy. The Brazilian state is a neo-liberal state, inserted into a global, neo-liberal economy. It depends either on the hugely powerful cues of domestic and international capital, and the reactions of the Brazilian suffering poor, struggling to mobilize. Even were the Brazilian left to take state power, it would be in a very different situation than Venezuela's left, because an equivalent for the Aladdin-esque Venezuelan oil wealth does not exist in Brazil.[59] While the distribution of oil-rent is a zero-sum game, it is centralized in a state apparatus susceptible to storming. In Brazil the state is no *rentista*. It must respond to domestic capital, even were it to be run by leftists.

The MST can resist state power and voice a radical agenda because their production, their subsistence, their survival is ensured by their settlements and their land. The state-market nexus in Brazil is powerful, but does not permeate Brazilian society. What the MST carves out are protected enclaves within this larger system, and it is intent on making more of them. This has had discernible effects: in most regions, settlement activity has led to an increase in rural but not total population; one possible "inference is that…the increase in settlements has helped to detain the migration of the rural population to the cities" (Heredia et al, 2006: 281-282, 285). Ultimately, the MST's strategy is dual, moving towards a situation of dual-power. Ondetti claims that the left will only become a "hegemonic force" among settlers if the Lula government or subsequent PT governments were to have a real commitment to redistributing farmland. He puts the cart leagues ahead of the horse. The MST instead is building autonomous rural communities,

[59] Although this may be changing, with the sub-salt discovery. Hence the immense social mobilization around the subsalt fields (Ajl, 2008).

"warrening" Brazilian society, building the new society at a distance from the institutions of the old. This is a new idea for the modern left, but for anarchists is old—and redolent (Ondetti, 2008: 238; Lynd, 2002; Thompson, 1959).

There is a real difference between MST settlements and other types of agrarian settlements. The difference is ideology—what people believe. MST militants believe in the creation of a new society. At all levels, as Sinek says, they identify neo-liberalism as their enemy in the Brazilian countryside and in the social system more generally. This is the core of their struggle, a positive transcendence of that corrosive political economy. They now know that Lula is not their ally and that the PT is no more than a tactical partner. The PT is too institutionalized, too corrupted, and too wedded to its own power. But better the PT than the others. As better Chávez than the *oligarquía*, "*que nunca se volverán*," as the Chavistas say. Is this revolutionary in the old classic Marxist sense? No, but the old Marxist sense of revolution—as sudden, Jacobin-style epochal rupture with the past—may have experienced its own rupture, and it's possible that the time of revolutions identifiable by a sharp rupture is over.

That's what makes it all the more interesting, and relevant, that the *sem terra* are not totally subject to the pressures of the state or the market. Their settlements, as I've shown, constitute "semi-autonomous rural communities," with massive potential. They maintain an "interstitial distance" from the state, in Simon Critchley's formulation, "articulations of an ethical demand whose scope is universal and whose evidence is faced in a concrete situation" (Critchley, 2007: 132). José de Souza Martins, the elder agrarian sociologist of the Brazilian left, suggests that the MST understands "perfectly" that there is an "umbilical relation" between simple commodity-production and a "social structure dominated by the family and a community of neighbors." This is not Zerzanian primitivism. Far from it. It is the grounded articulation of values that "could form a proposal for resistance within the globalizing market-economy…a proposal [comprising] transformation and not simply negation" (Martins, 2004: 33-34). The notion is that Critchley's interstitial distance could in turn become an archipelago of mini-economies, within which capitalist culture does not reproduce itself. But a volcanic archipelago, constantly shooting up new growths, breaking the surface, eventually becoming a continuous mass, leaving no spaces for capital. This is not just Rousseauian romance, or a mis-placed emphasis on the agrarian question. As Araghi shows, the countryside could not be more central to capital accumulation.

So perhaps the lesson of the MST and the FNCEZ, of the PT and the PSUV is that state power is important, that there's no question about that. To laugh at state power is to jive and giggle in the face of a gun-barrel, and is idiocy. But the revolution is at the level of culture and society, and the state can help or hinder, never make, but certainly break, the Revolution. If such a revolution is ongoing, it can de-commoditize increasingly large, swelling spheres of social life, crowding out capitalism, then controlling it, democratizing it, then transcending it, too. Likely the FNCEZ and the MST won't be able to do so, but it seems hard to suggest that they should be doing otherwise than what they currently are.

Moving to a slightly differently analytical plane, it's apparent that the question of their revolutionary nature both is and is not misguided. At the level of the variables of tactics, strategy (usually), and ideology, they are emphatically revolutionary, joining together Marxist or socialist thinking with native lines of thought, imbuing it with meaning and preventing it from becoming sterile dogmatism. But structural forces, the positioning of the MST and the FNCEZ vis-à-vis the field of power, prevents them from making a revolution. This is clear when one looks at the two movements in the context of the larger Brazilian and Venezuelan economic and political systems; the relative mobilization of other societal sectors, and the way those sectors, many potentially allies, are incorporated into the political system, often within clientelistic arrangements. Trans-national capital, always capable of influencing local political outcomes, plays a strong role in this too. For the FNCEZ, it pushed the Venezuelan right to mobilize violently against agrarian reform, while in Brazil it prevents the state from doing much of anything insofar as even idle pondering of a push for land redistribution.

Sociologically, I have confirmed that the origins of both the FNCEZ and the MST stem from a two-step maneuver of first forcing peasant agriculture onto reliance on the state and then selectively pulling away state support for agriculture. This has contributed to the creation of independent, autonomist movements that are nonetheless willing to enter tactical alliances with the state, but never at the cost of shattering their independence. The movements exist outside the state and pressure it to enact policies necessary for agricultural development. They run into the wall of landed capital. It is a wall they know they need to break down, but they don't seek to do so via the battering ram. Both are engaged in processes of social change that rely on the cultural construction of a socialist alternative.

Furthermore, I have confirmed the importance of political openings, political opportunity structures, and repression in understanding the shifts in peasant movements' power and mobilizational capacities. The key to understanding the actions of movements, and of understanding the lack of revolutionary outcomes in light of revolutionary ambitions, is to look at the field of power, and to see what the forces of repression are up to—usually engaged in some repression, but with the ability to engage in far more if confronted with a sufficiently serious threat to their power.

Finally, I have considered the importance of the FNCEZ's and MST's economic and ecological strategies and visions within a global neo-liberal system that is consummating a project of destruction of independent, subsistence agriculture in the global south and along with it, prevent the countries of the global South from developing. The MST and the FNCEZ are radically democratic and have a vision of subsistence agriculture as the foundation of independent development and, indeed, socialism within their societies, alongside a vision of Food Sovereignty. They fight for that vision, with the same amount of romanticism as their predecessors but also with a considerable admixture of pragmatism. They have not made a revolution. In Venezuela, they are closer than the Brazilian MST is to revolutionary change in the countryside. Venezuela is in the thick of an ongoing revolutionary process. It makes sense that constituent rural components of that process speak the argot of revolution. The Brazilian economy and state are neo-liberal to their core. Yet in Brazil, the MST has survived 30 years of neo-liberal repression, and it is still alive, and still growing. From one perspective, it has staved off defeat. From another, it has produced a miracle. The latter is, I think, closer to the truth.

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