

# New centrality of territory and identity in social struggles and the increasing complexity of the agrarian question

**Carolina de Freitas Pereira**

Universidade Federal Fluminense. Instituto de Geociências. Niterói. Rio de Janeiro. Brasil  
ninadfp@gmail.com

 0000-0003-0255-2063

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# The new centrality of territory and identity in social struggles and the process of complexification of the agrarian issue

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## Abstract

Until the 1980s, Brazilian agrarian interpretations pointed out that conflicts and contradiction in the field are explained through the relationship between two opposing poles: peasants and large landowners, who reflected two different perspectives of land use – for work (means of production and life) and for business (associated with expansion and speculation in the capitalist market). However, from that decade, new voices have emerged on the public scene, politicizing aspects such as identity and territory and reconfiguring the field of disputes, which we understand as a complexification of the agrarian question. This article deals with this process in Brazil, which is diverse from the point of view of the subjects and territories and which requires the need to incorporate new approaches in terms of the problems of territorial uses and conflicts in the field.

**Keywords:** Land. Territory. Identity. Conflicts. Agrarian question.

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## Nova centralidade do território e da identidade nas lutas sociais e processo de complexificação da questão agrária

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### Resumo

Até a década de 1980, as interpretações da questão agrária brasileira apontavam que os conflitos e as contradições no campo se expressavam na relação entre dois polos opostos: o camponês e o latifundiário, refletindo duas perspectivas diferentes de uso da terra – para trabalho (meio de produção e vida) e para negócio (associado à expansão e à especulação do mercado capitalista). Contudo, a partir de então, novas vozes irrompem na cena pública, politizando aspectos como a identidade e o território e reconfigurando o campo de disputas, processo que

comprendemos como de complexificação da questão agrária. Este artigo trata desse processo, que é múltiplo do ponto de vista dos sujeitos e dos territórios e que impõe a necessidade de novas formas de abordagem dos problemas dos usos territoriais e dos conflitos no campo no Brasil.

**Palavras-chave:** Terra. Território. Identidade. Conflitos. Questão agrária.

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## La nouvelle centralité du territoire et de l'identité dans les luttes sociales et le processus de complexification de la question agraire

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### Résumé

Jusqu'aux années 1980, les interprétations de la question agraire brésilienne soulignaient que les contradictions et les conflits ruraux s'expliquaient par le biais de la relation entre deux pôles opposés: celui du paysan et celui du grand propriétaire terrien, reflétant deux perspectives différentes d'utilisation de la terre – pour le travail (moyens de production et vie) et pour les affaires (associées à l'expansion et à la spéculation du marché capitaliste). Cependant, dès lors, de nouvelles voix ont émergé sur la scène publique, politisant des aspects tels que l'identité et le territoire et reconfigurant le champ des conflits, un processus que nous comprenons comme une complexification de la question agraire. Cet article traite de ce processus, qui est multiple du point de vue des sujets et des territoires et qui impose la nécessité d'intégrer de nouvelles formes d'approche en ce qui concerne les problématiques des conflits ruraux brésiliens et de l'utilisation du territoire.

**Mots-clés:** Terre. Territoire. Identité. Conflits. Question agraire.

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### Introduction

The analysis and interpretation of the Brazilian agrarian question began in the mid-1950s, fundamentally based on the opposition resulting from the different and conflicting forms of land appropriation and use carried out by peasants and large landowners. Data on the agrarian question in Brazil disclose that, from the time of “sesmarias” rule to the period of agribusiness, the monoculture latifundia and large landowners mark our geo-history. The tenacity of land concentration reproduces (and is reproduced by) a pattern of inequalities and injustices that, by legitimizing power and access of a few to land, negate and expropriate the same right from many others.

When reflecting on the origins of Brazilian political-territorial configurations, the privileges of the landowner class are undeniable, and this still-in-force state of things continues to determine them. However, the mercantile and landowner logic predominance, which implied deterritorializing dynamics in the lives of rural people did not uniformly and unlimitedly expand itself to the point of “domesticating” (Santos, 2008) the rural world as a whole.

Re-territorialization and r-existence (more or less actively) took place in several ways and manifests themselves in the heterogeneous forms of appropriation and transmission of land along with the many group or collective conceptions, work, and land use of the “Brazilian rural world”. The previously highlighted expression is explained precisely because, as Brandão (2007a) states, it is far better diversified and polysemic than what is generally imagined and suggested.

Countless forms of land use and occupation (of social management of time and space, of lives, and worlds of life and work) were molded within the limits of large farms or beyond them. Although decisive, both official and misguided methods did not lead to the absolute liquidation of those subjects and kinds of territoriality that oppose the latifundia/large landowner. Even today, there are a lot of subjects with different modalities of land use and management in Brazil – many of them previously subsumed in the peasant category –, such as indigenous peoples, quilombolas (descendants of slaves), rubber tappers, faxinalenses (traditional peasant system found in the south of Brazil), people living in the pasture land, etc.

From the 1980s onwards, these subjects began to assert that their struggles were for existence, identity, and territory – therefore, they are demands based on the idea of collective (and not individual) and social (and not civil) rights, echoing the provocation of Martins (1985). Rather than vanishing in face of the expected and inevitable progress of modernization in rural space, they re-emerge on the public scene and in political arenas questioning themes like identity and territory, claiming recognition of their demands and trajectories. We interpret such a struggle as part of the agrarian question’s real complexity.

Aiming at demonstrating such increasing complexity, we first present the classic debate on the agrarian question and then its reconfiguration. Indigenous people, quilombolas, rubber tappers, babaçu coconut shellers, and geraizeiros, among others, are strengthened as political subjects, revamping their perception and action whose forcefulness lies just on identity and territory.

### **The classic debate on the agrarian question: land for work vs. land for business**

In Brazil, the theoretical and political systematization of the agrarian question began in the mid-1950s. For those who pored over conflicts in the rural space, the contradiction has taken shape in the relationship between two opposite poles: the peasant and the large landowner, which indeed reflected two different conceptions of land use – for work (the peasant’s means of production and life) and for business (associated with capitalist market’s expansion and speculation). Although this article does not intend to review interpretations about the peasantry’s place within the agrarian question framework in Brazil, it is important to stress that there are divergences around the role and future of these subjects in rural space.

Inspired by Karl Kautsky and Vladimir Lenin old debates on the issue, theorists such as Abramovay (1998) and Veiga (1991) conceive the peasantry as a remnant of traditional societies

(or a pre-capitalist residue), in the transition process towards the typical and contemporary mode of life in industrial societies. Thus, they understand that peasantry is doomed to disappear, becoming proletarians or capitalists. They are affiliated with a rather static, positivist, and utilitarian conception, as observed by Brandão (2007b). The place where struggle occurs is seen, in this perspective, as something given, natural, ahistorical, and not institutionally or socially constituted. Come out, therefore, as a “homogeneous space-platform, inert, contiguous, a geometric plane, where human settlements would cement and certain economic activities would be grouped” (Brandão, 2007b, p. 44).

Abramovay (1998) and Veiga (1991), both are based on a positivist and utilitarian reading, are examples of those who have given priority to economic dimensions and the development of productive forces when dealing with the agrarian space. As Porto-Gonçalves (2011) rightly points out, the prioritization of these approaches resulted – not by contradiction – in a loss of ground in the debate on the agrarian question. Complementing, the same author stresses the significance of thinking about the agrarian question, mostly due to the reconfigurations and social contradictions they express, empirically proven by the permanence and transformations of the conflict over land.

Another approach, such as Martins (1981, 1985) and Oliveira (1981, 1994, 1999) promoted, highlights the endurance and permanent struggle that leads to a reinvention of the peasantry as part of the contradictory logic of capitalism in the rural space. The reproduction of non-capitalist relations of production within capitalism is, for these authors, essential for the contradictory and unequal movement of capital. In other words, as Oliveira (1999, p. 91) properly puts it, “there is a historic place for peasants in the future”. This is because “the peasants, instead of becoming proletarian, fought to continue to be peasants” (Oliveira, A., 1999, p. 72). It thus draws attention to the peasants’ struggles, violence, and conflicts over land, and provides visibility to these subjects, to their trajectories and demands.

Since 1985, the Pastoral Land Commission (Comissão Pastoral da Terra - CPT) has produced an annual dossier on rural conflicts in Brazil.<sup>1</sup> 2020 data reveal 1,608 conflicts over land (the highest number in the entire time series), 96 labor conflicts (peak of 416 in 2007), 350 conflicts over water (also a record), and 18 murders (maximum of 73 in 2003). A fact calling attention to is the total area of conflicts over land in 2020: 77,443 hectares. By far, it is the largest area recorded in all reports, and it has been growing exponentially since 2015.

According to Porto-Gonçalves (2011) and Cuin (2013), conflict is immanent to social and power relations, resulting from different interests and worldviews. The specifics of rural space’s reality in present-day Brazil disclose that conflict takes shape when an attempt to impose a specific form of appropriation and use over land, enforcing a particular way to give meaning to space and resources over other possibilities. Namely, to allow the encounter of different rationalities, subjects, and their respective trajectories, practices, and social representations (or socio-spatial organization), these are excluded. It concerns, therefore, the existence of multiple territorialities in contradictory relationships (in which some territorialities impose themselves, deterritorializing others), and the plurality of perceptions and interests in the territory. Given this, conflicts are a result

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.cptnacional.org.br](http://www.cptnacional.org.br).

of an unequal generation of impacts and the dispute for the legitimacy of use and appropriation of resources, but they go further. They also represent, at the same time, struggles to reinforce cultural meanings (PORTO-GONÇALVES; CUIN, 2013).

A similar standpoint is presented by Acselrad (2004), for whom conflicts need to be analyzed, simultaneously, in spaces in which power conflict over the resources of territory occurs and in the field of symbolic representations. Therefore, the methodological choices involve identifying the type of material and symbolic capital (kind of power) in dispute and those strategies carried out by subjects around their goals.

The debate on the agrarian question and the contradictions in rural space highlight that the expansion of capitalist relations of production in the countryside is, paradoxically, followed by an intensification of contradictions, namely conflicts, a fundamental interpretative direction in the work of Martins (1988). This perspective strengthens the author's view that the analyzes of land issues imply reassessing the role of notions as contradiction and process, stressing that in Brazil peasants, indigenous peoples, quilombolas, and riverside dwellers, among others, are social subjects of capitalism as much as the capitalist.

Within this logic, struggles are immanent to capitalism. According to Oliveira, A. (1994), the 20th century saw the first peasant social movements arise, many of them now wage-earning workers, in the struggle for land and better living and working conditions. With the organization of the Peasant Leagues in the 1950s, the Brazilian peasant struggle has taken on a national dimension. This movement roused a large contingent of peasants and rural and urban workers, in a context of social tensions, injustices, inequalities, and violence. For Martins (1985), the scale taken by countryside conflicts and the social organization of peasants, who wave the banner of agrarian reform in the national debate, is fundamental in explaining the Military Coup of 1964 and the subsequent and hasty formulation of focused-on-this-issue legislation, named Land Statute.

Although the Land Statute brought out into the open debate the concept of agrarian reform (recognizing a land issue), the idea that Brazilian agriculture would chiefly develop through adjustments in economic policy and infrastructure gained momentum, mostly due to the response of anti-reformist groups and large landowners.

For social movements that captained and carried the banner of agrarian reform, military government actions turned to the reproduction of capital and social control (containment of conflicts) in three types of strategies: a process of political demoralization of social leaders and mediations; demobilization of local groups (via re-settlements in extreme cases of social tension); and through violence. "The agrarian reform was limited to environments of grievous social tension, in those priority areas, the only instance in which expropriation for social interest can occur, and in those cases of small landowners resettlement or victims of conflicts in other regions" (Martins, 1985, p. 33). And conflicts aggravated in this scenario, with more deaths, violence, expulsion, and migration, indeed reinforcing Martins' (1985) thesis that contradiction and process are essential to grasp the issue.

In the 1980s, with the period of dictatorship coming to an end, there was a rearrangement of social movements. Grzybowski (1987) categorizes the peasant struggle in this period into three sections: peasants' movement for land; rural workers' movement against labor exploitation and wage-earning; and, finally, peasants' struggle against expropriation. According to the author,

the movement of peasants for land was larger in North and Northeast regions, and of the urban workers in the country's Center-South region.

In this context, the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura - Contag) is reorganized, and the need for agrarian reform returns to the public agenda (through the First National Plan for Agrarian Reform - PNRA, 1985). Thereafter, the social function of property is finally legitimized in 1988's Federal Constitution.

The Landless Workers' Movement (MST) is conceived in this effervescence. As stated by Carter (2010, p. 503), it was born and acts "as a movement engaged in an arduous struggle to transform a very uneven society in the distribution of wealth and power, sustained over several centuries by unfair State policies". The leading role of MST is manifested in its nationwide status and its organization that, in turn, generates an "important mechanism for recreating peasantry, because it implies recovering the material condition for peasant territorialization" (Campos, 2006, p. 150).

But entities shielding the landowner standpoint are also born, whose main expression is the Rural Democratic Union (UDR), founded by Deputy Ronaldo Caiado and Plínio Junqueira Junior. UDR was the first political-ideological reevaluation reference for the landowners, trying to impose the same political identity on rural employers, based on a corporatist view of politics as the thread of their actions, aiming to elect a militant parliamentary to fiercely defend property and private sector (Barcelos; Berriel, 2009). UDR, the genuine spokesperson for anti-reformist positions and discourses that call for violence, is worked to ensure that in the 1988's Federal Constitution, "productive farms" would not be expropriated, leaving the definition of what was productive for complementary legislation (Medeiros, 2010).

## **Identity and territory gain strength in social struggles: the increasing complexity of the agrarian question**

In the 1980s, alternative forms of organization, struggles, and conflicts also emerged in rural space: "new" voices are heard, being linked to environmental and ethnic banners: rubber tappers, riverside dwellers, fishermen, babassu coconut breakers, those affected by dams, quilombolas. Cruz (2011) designates this process as the emergence of "a kind of political polyphony", a diversity of "new" political subjects, and "new" protagonists that show up on the public scene and political arenas.

Thus, as Almeida, M. (2007) points out, there is a change in the widespread "agrarian narratives". The author draws attention to the fact that this does not typify the death of the peasant, but the end of a single narrative. It is paradoxical that the end of the "anthropology of agrarian societies" takes place coexisting with a great vitality of fragments nested in the old categories of the peasantry – ravines and forests, islands and beaches, plateaus and swamps, babassu and açai trees, sugarcane, and coffee plantation; riverside dwellers and rubber tappers, quilombolas and caiçaras, sertanejos and mountain people, collectors and planters; knowledge, traditions, memories; "doings" (Almeida, M., 2007, p. 177).

In the case of indigenous peoples, from this period onwards, claims and organization of those not yet described in the ethnological literature, nor recognized by the governmental protection agency for indigenous people, the National Indian Foundation (Funai), such as the Tinguí-Botó, Karapotó, Kantaruré, Jeripancó, Tapeba, and Wassu. They were called "new ethnic

groups” or “emerging Indians” (Oliveira, J., 1998). However, Oliveira, J. (1998) provides a critique of who takes this phenomenon from the “ethnogenesis” or “ethnic emergence” perspectives.

Thus appears, for instance, the term “ethnogenesis”, used by anthropologist Gerald Sider (1976),<sup>2</sup> in the context of an opposition to ethnocide. It would not be appropriate to take it as a concept or even a notion, as this and other authors who also apply the same idea in the indigenous ethnography (such as Goldstein, 1975),<sup>3</sup> had not felt the need to better define it, taking its meaning for granted. In theoretical terms, the application of this notion (as well as others that promote the same “singularization”) to a collection of peoples and cultures can end up making abstract their singular historical process, creating a false impression that the process of forming identities would be absent wherever there is no mention to “ethnogenesis” or “ethnic emergence” (Oliveira, J., 1998, p. 62).

Taking the perspective of Oliveira, J. (1998), it is a mistake to classify indigenous peoples publicly recognized from the 1970s and 1980s onwards as “new ethnicities” or “emerging Indians”, since cultural components taken as legitimate do not constitute exclusive or original traits of those societies. This indigenous were indeed constituted, and it is part of their trajectory, those previous encounters with other cultures and peoples, especially with Northeast Indigenous who, via alliances or wars, faced Portuguese colonizers in the 16th century, having been subjected to enslavement, pacification, and forced settlements (Oliveira, J.; Freire, 2006; Oliveira, J., 2010).

It follows the assertion that the emergence of a new indigenous society is not only the act of granting territory, of purely administrative “ethnification”, submissions, political mandates, and cultural impositions, it is also that of shared meanings and values, baptism of each of its members, and the obedience to both a religious and political authority (Oliveira, J., 1998, p. 66).

The key point of Oliveira, J. (1998)’s critique rests, in my view, in denying the built ambivalence between the traditional and the modern. In these cases, there is no clear and absolute separation between a communitarian and traditional “we” and those modern and global “others”. As Haesbaert (2014) points out, it is a realization of tradition through modernity, through which traditional agents relate to these “others” and trigger modern practices.

As stated by Bourdieu (2000), knowledge of the world and the real world itself are mutually constitutive and the power to preserve or transform the social world implies preserving or transforming its categories of perception. Thus, in making something public, official, and objectified, the act “represents a formidable social power, that of bringing into existence groups by establishing the common sense, the explicit consensus, of the whole group” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 142). It is the force of *habitus*, which is at stake here,

2 SIDER, G. M. Lumbee Indian Cultural Nationalism and Ethnogenesis. *Dialectical Anthropology*, v. 1, p. 161-172, 1976.

3 GOLDSTEIN, M. Ethnogenesis and Resource Competition among Tibetan Refugees in South India. In: DESPRES, L. (Org.). *Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Plural Societies*. Paris: Mouton/The Hague, 1975. p. 159-186.

those “schemes of perception, appreciation, and action which, below the level of the decisions of the conscious mind and the controls of will, are the basis of a relationship practical knowledge and recognition that is profoundly obscure to itself”. (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 207).

These schemes of perception and knowledge of the world occur in relation to other groups, with their respective *habitus*. Bourdieu (2000) states that reality and representation depend on knowledge and recognition, since “the representations that social agents imagine from divisions of reality [...] contribute to the reality of the divisions” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 120). Moreover, this takes place in a social field of relations of material and symbolic forces classification and representation of oneself and others, to maintain or transform these relations.

For Bourdieu (2001), the social world is constituted on the basis of principles of distribution and differentiation constituted by the set of properties actives in the social universe under consideration (agents and capital they have), able to confer power on their possessor, in that universe, at a given moment (incorporates power over accumulated work). Knowledge of the position occupied in this space contains information on the intrinsic properties (i.e. condition) and the relational properties (i.e. position) of agents (Bourdieu, 2001). Thus, Bourdieu (2000, 2001) helps us to grasp the emergence of new alliances, new mechanisms of representation, new plans for the future that make political units (and not purely identity aspects) that did not exist on the public scene, emerge from the 1970s onwards.

It is also important to highlight that this process is closely linked to the performance of external mediators, especially non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Catholic Church, as well as the enactment of the Federal Constitution of 1988 (CF/88). There is what Lifschitz (2011) calls, for this period, the “ong-nization of culture”. This is thus when culture starts to be understood as a new economic resource (capitalized through projects), engendering demands for (re)creating identities. Thus, community culture is embodied in the institutional sphere.

With 1988's Federal Constitution, the new rights have led to important changes both to opening up possibilities for demands of now-legally recognized indigenous peoples and quilombolas to take the political arena, and in the sense of producing a different context, in which new actors, whether in the governmental field or civil society, will reach legitimacy as representatives of indigenous interests and quilombola communities (Steil, 1998).

Lifschitz (2011) investigates the articulation between public policies aimed at recognizing the rights of quilombolas and to think the community as an imaginary and scope of action. It affirms that the community situation is marked by their singular trajectories, today linked to “external agents” interference. These actors all together have been triggering processes of reconstruction of territories and practices, producing ethnicities through a model called neo-communities by Lifschitz. “Quilombola neo-communities represent a situation of prescriptive identities or, simply putting, induced by a public policy, which makes this process of knowledge, practices and territories reconstruction even more unique” (Lifschitz, 2011, p. 15-16). They are identities “from the State”, or a new community reality that he calls into question. We have a paradoxical junction between late modernity and the re-creation of politically meaningful identities.

As rightly pointed out by Steil (1998), although formulated in reation to these external agents, this new ethnocultural code is not foreign to communities. We understand this new

ethos function as positive updates of issues, such as ancestry, parentage, material culture, and face-to-face proximity in domestic/external relational contexts.

Therefore, a key element of this process is putting the ethnic issues on the political agenda centrally. This implies a real shift of emphasis in social movements' political action in which ethnic identity is carried out as a strategic category in their social practices and struggles, now guided by new and proper categories that value their ways of being and living. It is "a new idiom of action", characterizing what Steil (1998) calls "ethnicization of politics". Much of the emphasis is on the political act of exploitation of the ethnic component, and not on an idea of sudden and unexpected emergence or the formation of new absolute and essential identities.

This diversity of "new" political subjects, of "new" protagonists in the public sphere and in political arenas (who know themselves to be indigenous people, quilombolas, babassu coconut breakers, rubber tappers, riverside dwellers, geraizeiros, etc.), lends new meaning to previous stigmatizing and negative contents long-standing rooted in common sense, or that were made invisible (adding that these contents are in permanent re-signification). What would be proper to these groups is that, in these contexts, "the historical update does not nullify the feeling of reference to the origin but even reinforces it. It is from the symbolic and collective resolution of this contradiction that the political and emotional strength of ethnicity arises" (Oliveira, J., 1998, p. 64).

Until then, many of these subjects were assimilated in the peasant category - the quotation marks above indicating what is new, as Cruz (2011) puts it, already gave us clues. From then on, they assert identity and territory and redefine "the pattern of conflict and the relational field of antagonisms" (Cruz, 2011, p. 7). Henceforth, what we name the "complexification" of the agrarian question surfaces. Identity, ethnicity, and territory questions gain momentum in social struggles, becoming major concerns of the bulk of countryside conflicts, especially those located on agricultural frontiers' areas of Amazonia in constant expansion.

[...] they began with ethnic claims and the traditional use of land and natural resources, which is also mirrored in public policies for securing access to land: these, formerly, were limited to redistributive land policies within the scope of the agrarian reform, and now include indigenous, environmental, and quilombo's demarcation policies. It would now be a question not of using redistributive instruments of Agrarian Reform aiming at meeting the indigenous peoples, quilombolas, and extractivist demands, but of adequate demarcation of their territories (Vianna Jr., 2008, p. 90).

Hence, one can see what Medeiros (2010) calls the diversification of manifestations and the emergence of new cycles of struggles. These "new" subjects cause, therefore, important ruptures concerning struggles in rural space after the 1980s. As shown in Table 1, making the agrarian question an ethnic question implies new demands, new values, and renewed repertoires, digging up the right to the environment (to the forest, especially), to identity and territory that stand out alongside the banner of agrarian reform, labor rights and social security, and the leaseholder's struggle, general workers and small rural and landless producers.

**Table 1 – New cycle of post-1980s struggles**

situation	phenomenon	consequences
stays	Agrarian Reform	Gains new centrality - a new cycle of land occupations
	Labor and social security rights	Gains new centrality - like the extreme situation of slave labor
	Leaseholder's <i>struggle</i>	Criticism of inequality and land concentration
ruptures	In the sense of <i>rural worker</i> category	New identities and organizations were forged questioning this category
	Birth of new identities: landless, affected by dams, rubber tappers, babassu coconut breakers, quilombolas	New forms of struggle, with new themes and values related to the effects of modernization: innovation to the repertoire of collective actions such as reassessing property's social function notion (via MST), the struggle carried out by rubber tappers, and the Movement of People Affected by Dams mobilizations, workers' strikes, the growth of quilombola's movement, etc.
		Update of legal references and creation of new rights
	Reordering the political place of <i>small farmers</i>	The operating category in the political debate and workers union vocabulary becomes that of the <i>family farmer</i>

source: Prepared by the author based on Medeiros (2010).

In the second half of the 20th century, this emergence echoes as new forms of conflict in rural space and in unfamiliar articulations within public debates around agrarian reform; also in a reopened discussion of agriculture place in the national development process, rethinking and recognizing socio-spatial specificities of these “new” traditional and/or ethnic subjects.

In the 1990s, MST occupations and conflicts in rural space increased. Police violence increase explicitly, and an intellectual trench of action against the movements, led by mass media, are created. Between 2003 and 2009, there is a period of greater conflict and greater violence, especially the abuses perpetrated by the private sector and especially by the agribusiness, and by federal government infrastructure projects.

The “Indians” category appeared in CPT’s reports on conflicts since 1987. In 1988, the report brings the notion of “forest peoples” referring to indigenous, rubber tappers, and leaseholders, even though there is a gap of more than 10 years in which indigenous people were not mentioned on the reports as subjects of conflicts.

As for Quilombolas came to be acknowledged as such in land conflicts data only in the 2001 report, exposing the cases of the communities of Camaputiua, in the municipality of Cajari, and Pau Pombo dos Pretos, municipality of Santa Helena (both in the State of Maranhão); Sesmaria Boa Vista/Quilombo Mata Cavalo, municipality of Nossa Senhora do Livramento, State of Mato Grosso; Camutá, municipality of Gurujá, Pará; and from Cafundó, in Salto do Pirapora, São Paulo.

Oliveira, A. (2016) shows that quilombolas are the subject of 77 conflicts in the rural space (10.1%), while indigenous peoples, 100 (13.1%). It is important to highlight those other traditional populations, such as rubber tappers, castanheiros (gathering-of-nuts workers), riverside dwellers, pastures close and bottom, geraizeiros, fishermen, vazanteiros (people whose lives are intertwined with the river), etc., are included in the leaseholder peasant category, with 253 instances of conflict (33.2%). In this context, between social configurations and political

identities, the definition of rural workers, traditional populations, indigenous peoples, quilombolas, etc. are in dispute, and the right to territory, based on each movements' particular form of organization, are at the heart of these struggles.

As for the land issue, this change opens up the complexity of this debate. The land issue is still a key element, but the ethnic-cultural recognition and specificities of traditional territories, such as indigenous peoples and quilombolas, gain centrality.

Steil (1998) understands that this new way of putting themselves on the public scene, meanwhile searching for be presented respectfully, helps break the historical invisibility that covers the way these “new-old” subjects were treated.

Today, in Latin America as a whole and more specifically in Brazil, processes of (re)territorialization involving social groups defending territories and/or more closed, stable, and “conservative” places are taking shape. These are groups officially known as “traditional peoples” (a deeply controversial term, but inserted in the Brazilian Constitution of 1988), but that obviously will not build “traditional” territories/places. What cannot be defended here is a dichotomous view between “traditional” or “conservative” and “(post?)modern” or “progressive” conceptions of territory and/or place. These Brazilian examples are highly representative of the ambivalence in which these properties are built. These territories are “multiple”, implying in a multiplicity of identity and power situations that take turns or intertwine, depending, for example, on the historical and geographic context (in terms of scales of action) in which they are constituted.

[...] closure (always relative) or clearer territorial delimitation does not necessarily mean the defense of a retrograde or conservative political vision. It can represent, as demonstrated by the so-called traditional peoples, a moment within a broader struggle that instead of dividing visions of “tradition” and “(post) modernity” refounds them, combining them under a new amalgamation. For Brazilian traditional peoples, such as indigenous peoples and quilombolas, the relative territorial closure, at the time that the physical limit of their “reserves” was established, depending on the situation can mean exactly the opposite, in other words, the subject matter in question is the very condition for the survival of the group as such. Concerning old-traditional quilombos, their relatively closed territories and the fact of being isolated and hidden meant for those inhabitants the long-awaited freedom – or the freedom that, through resistance struggles, they could conquer (Haesbaert, 2014, p. 98-99).

Traditional communities actually represent a “biopolitics from below” that results in new forms of use and jurisdiction far from capitalism. The very existence of these communities imply, therefore, “a positive and broader transformation of the territoriality of the State, but above all a multiple one”. This is historically based “on the affirmation and legitimization of private property and jurisdiction over ‘public lands’, but in general not so much ‘public’” (Haesbaert, 2014, p. 148).

Quilombola communities [we understand that indigenous communities too] are groups mobilized around a common goal, generally the struggle for land, and defined based on an ethnonym that expresses a collective identity founded on allegedly primordial factors, such as common origins or ancestors, shared habits, rituals or religiosity, centuries-old territorial bond, generalized social parentage, racial homogeneity, among others. But none of these traits, however, are present in all considered situations, and there is no substantive trait capable of translating a unity between such different social and historical experiences and configurations (Arruti, 2006, p. 39).

The starting point is particular and contemporary social situations, distinguished by political-organizational elements to guarantee the land and affirm its own identity (Arruti, 2006). Indigenous lands, quilombolas, faxinais, pasture lands, among others, are:

[...] new forms of territorialization that generally combine a specific type of collective legal domain with traditional forms of economic and symbolic space appropriation by each of these sociocultural groups. Territorialization is somehow constituted by a legal-political domain, by economic usufruct, and symbolic-cultural appropriation of space (Haesbaert, 2014, p. 149).

Traditional communities are fighting for the delimitation of common use zones:

[...] many of the zones defined and legally recognized as indigenous areas, former quilombos, or other spaces of common and exclusive use of traditional peoples make zonal reasoning of territorial ordering come to fruition (broadly subordinated to state legitimacy) which for many may sound an incongruity or which runs against the grain of a world increasingly qualified by network relationships and by the combination of cultures and identities.

Most areas combine a complex power situation, the essence of which has been the struggle for recognition and legitimacy of their territorialities, with the strengthening of intragroup(s) cultural relationships. In many cases (especially the indigenous ones), a specific relationship with nature is reworked, not only in the sense of mastering its material resources but also in terms of its symbolic appropriation (Haesbaert, 2014, p. 115).

Like Oliveira, J. (1998), Haesbaert (2014) draws attention to the paradox of defining territories based on ethnic identity, which broadens the discussion by highlighting multiple forms of common land use. Haesbaert (2014) adds that the process of legal recognition of territory through State may imply a search for a certain essence of identity and territory, that is, a forced and clear definition between “us” and “the others”, and a two-sided relation between the constitution of collective identities and the territory. For many, nevertheless, this represents

the only possible route to keep the group as such, in face of the advance of a deterritorializing private-productivist capitalist logic of land use.

But there is a contradiction in the process of defining traditional territories which resides in the need to clearly determine these groups and their territorial identity, and to align them to the legislation (and its assumptions, which is part of the zonal logic that Haesbaert mentions [2014]). This can inevitably lead to an essentialization. Though, the conclusions of Almeida, A. (2010) allow us to stress that, in these cases, it is important to distinguish between need and awareness of the need. In other words, these processes and their contradictions are further guided by mobilizations and political-organizational criteria that reaffirm these group identity despite opposing interests and different realities they face. This involves becoming aware of their needs to ensure social reproduction, often breaking away with an economic vision (of production and ownership) (Almeida, A., 2010).

Since the number of traditional peoples and communities claiming public and state recognition is increasing, several thinkers who focus on the agrarian question have gradually, from the 1990s onwards, paid more attention to “traditional communities”, with special emphasis on how these groups have been constituted, especially concerning struggles for territory and State recognition of a collective demarcation of their “traditionally occupied lands”. These claims are taken as constraints and limitations to the new frontiers of accumulation, which is another prominent point of this agenda (Guedes, 2013). This is because:

[...] it is not about territories in line with the multiple hegemonic political-economic interests, whether from large companies (agribusiness and the exploitation of natural resources) or from the State (that build infrastructures such as roads and hydroelectric or base stations military) (Haesbaert, 2014, p. 116).

Concerning studies on black communities, until the 1980s the emphasis was on rural communities that had the particularity of being black. As for further studies, they focus on black communities that have the particularity of being peasants (Arruti, 2006). For the ethnologist's work, Lima (1998) points out that until the early 1970s, ethnography sought to reconstitute the origin of these cultures to safeguard them, as they would inescapably be assimilated. From the 1980s onwards, the future becomes a utopia, being necessary to search for and demonstrate an ethnic revival.

There are two essential changes in these notes: first, the main analytical point becomes ethnicity, the particularity of being black or indigenous; second, the ethnic no longer denotes decadence but resistance, political project, and particularities, including territorial ones, and are taken as essential starting points (Pereira, 2018).

Between advances and obstacles, the recognition of indigenous and quilombola territories finally seems to be taking shape, and, to a large extent, it is being appropriated by the same social groups that arise from the recognition of these rights. These “new” subjects emerging, together with the principles of recognition, provide alternative forms of sociopolitical agency, and their dominant characteristic is to be centered on the affirmation of differences and the right to the territory (Cruz, 2011, 2013). Indeed, it is now recognized that qualifies this type of struggle. It is a new repertoire and a new grammar.

With the incorporation of this new repertoire in the 1988's Federal Constitution and following resulting public policies, it was verified:

[...] the growing importance of recognition (“multicultural”) policies, together with the expansion of redistributive policies, considering the identification of territories of traditional communities (including indigenous peoples) and environmental issues. A quick examination of these issues seems to confirm simultaneously the competition and complementarity of these standpoints. In addition, perhaps they also highlight some unique characteristics of recognition policies concerning lands and territories in Brazil. Those recognition policies for territories seem to occupy one of the pillars of what is at stake in the Amazon: the creation of a land market that includes reformed areas (of redistributive agrarian reform) and the establishment of other regions that are “protected from the land market”, as common goods or “commons”, inherently at odds with the market (Vianna Jr., 2008, p. 88).

Attention has been drawn to the fact that the communities' and traditional peoples' struggles go beyond recognition of identity. Vianna Jr. (2008), in turn, discusses these communities in terms of “territorialized” identities, that is, those concerning the “recognition of traditional forms of use and ownership of land and natural resources, as well as for the commons and a strongly territorialized identity” (Vianna Jr., 2008, p. 88). This corroborates with Haesbaert's (2006, 2007) insights, which draw attention to the clear-cut bridge between territory and the universe of symbolic appropriation, coming out that the process of appropriation and identity constitution go hand in hand, also considering representations they convey and produce.

The articulation between territory and identity was privileged in this political and academic field. Taking recognition policies and indigenous and quilombola territories as a relevant part of the debate, the terms of the equation is altered, with new territorial demands being incorporated. These claims go far beyond those that can be met by a redistributive agrarian reform and are based on the recognition of territories and natural resources as collectives, as Vianna Jr. (2008) rightly points out.

In a context of multicultural recognition, the acknowledgment of indigenous peoples and quilombolas seems to be different for Vianna Jr. (2008), since several disagreements between those defending universal rights supporters and those shielding the recognition of differences arise (as for indigenous peoples and quilombolas), especially in the debate on land and territories, which is:

[...] superficial and with a “strong ideological influence”, delving into paradoxes: anti-agrarian reform “conservative” sectors (a universalist policy) associating with universalist “progressives” who question the differentiated access to land for what they deem to be “invented” quilombolas and indigenous; groups that advocate targeting social policies on the poorest stand against differentiated policies for quilombolas or indigenous peoples, for instance (Vianna Jr., 2008, p. 83).

Vianna Jr. (2008) considers readings from Fraser (2009) and Hale (2002) to be forward-looking ideas in the debate on recognition made in a multicultural context, as they “distinguish an assimilable (or indeed assimilated) cultural multiculturalism by neoliberal policy from another

that would be challenging this same neoliberal government (and perhaps even the State), one that is more ‘structural’ and that targets at economic inequalities” (Vianna Jr., 2008, p. 83).

Based on Fraser, Vianna Jr. (2008) dwells on the Brazilian context to argue that injustice is fought against redistributive policies combined with recognition policies. Injustice has to do with any type of inequality (the author analytically values and works with different spheres of injustice) (Fraser, 2009). Fraser (2009) actually goes against the controversies about methods to fight social injustices or the false need to choose one over another. She helps us to think about “the division between a great redistributive policy – Agrarian Reform – and a set of policies of recognition, both related to the underrepresentation of traditional peasants, peoples and communities in politics” (Vianna Jr., 2008, p. 85), especially in the Amazon.

Martins (1985, p. 17) draws attention to the need to reflect on the diversity of experiences born out of struggles, social movements, and forms of organization in the rural space, that extend beyond the institutional limits and often push the boundaries of it. For the author, “it is important to consider that the birth of community relations or a demand for it has been a phenomenon often associated with the expansion of capitalist relations in many societies”.

These subjects – indigenous people, quilombolas, rubber tappers, landless people, etc. – represent the social plurality of rural space and its different shades of rationality and experiences, thus revealing the struggle for recognition, for justice, and for the transformation of reality (which are placed in the contradictions of capitalist development). It relates to multiple manifestations of the struggle for human rights and collective mobilization that may result in a humanization process within social movements’ scope and democratic struggles and experiences. Both social organization and territory are part of the struggle of these subjects and it is in this very moment that social movements such as this are formed. These create new lines of thought, highlighting political questions, the action of certain agents, and the practice of classifications. In other words, the classifications in dispute by indigenous people and quilombolas (together with external agents) are mirrored in their shifting positions towards objective classifications and in the movement of change of the very principles that contribute to producing these classifications within the hegemonic system.

Porto-Gonçalves and Alentejano (2009) give an interesting overview of this process: on the one hand, there is a geography of latifundia, monoculture, and slavery, with capitalists (private power) and State (public power) operating through violence and political domination as a rule of thumb; on the other hand, there is the Geography of productive diversity and freedom carried out by peasants, traditional populations, and social movements, those who produce to (r)exist and in name of liberation and autonomy strategies. In this perspective, complementing Oliveira, A. (1994), conflict profoundly marks the Brazilian territorial formation, which in turn is born as a response to violence and domination.<sup>4</sup>

4 Other strategies are judicialization, co-option, and omission. Examples of conflicts and violent reactions to the organization of rural people are abundant in our history: Quilombo dos Palmares (1862) and Cabanagem (1835) in colonial time; and Canudos (1896), Contestado (1912) and the strikes of settlers on coffee plantations (1913) in the Portuguese Empire period are some of the first major Brazilian conflicts fed by a response to oppression and expropriation of land, of work, and modes of life. Challenging those who call these movements “pre-political”, Martins (1981) skilfully demonstrates that it denotes an evolutionary view of the history of struggles in rural space that deeply devalues forms of organization and manifestation based on popular culture.

Martins (1988) states that the struggle for land is an instrument for reinventing the everyday lives of the poorest through practicing “new meanings for old deeds and new acts for old meanings, producing both new forms of action and taking on new meanings” (Martins, 1988, p. 11), in the face of the expansion of the contradictions of capitalism (companies, injustices, land grabbing, violence, etc.). For the author, this form of resistance can break “old relations of domination, questioning an unfair property right, and demolishing conventional political pacts and alliances without the involvement of all concerned” (Martins, 1988, p. 11).

The perspective pointed out by Martins (1988) allows us to grasp the “contradictory duality” of the encounter between capital and indigenous and quilombola populations. While the former destroys or modifies these societies, those, by contrast, struggles to subvert and resignify the same logic that has been imposed. This means that during this movement they become political subjects, demystifying the false idea that the capitalist project operates linearly.

The perverse logic of capital ruins these people, but simultaneously reinvents them, since the greatest impact for indigenous and quilombolas populations is the transformation of land into a traded commodity, with the consequent transformation of capitalist into landowner. “The siege, removal and the definition of a territory no longer by the tribe but by the State, introduce the mediation of market and land-commodity in human-nature relationship” (Martins, 1988, p. 35). As an impact of this process, the author points to the inexistence of land for free use, with a dearth of production of small farms, of traverses and hunting, forcing them to reinvent or adapt their tradition-based subsistence logic. So they are forced to restore their world.

Agrarian conflicts highlight violence and other mechanisms of domination that hinder the realization of social and political rights. The struggles of rural people - peasants and traditional populations - call into question “the current right to property and its social consequences, [...] the struggle for land also calls into question this political pact,<sup>5</sup> questions its social and political legitimacy” (Martins, 1985, p. 9). Therefore, they are fundamental subjects of the Brazilian political process and current crisis. In a thought-provoking reflection, Martins (1985) draws attention to the fact that questioning the extent of labor exploitation is different from questioning the right to land ownership.

The specific features of these conflicts, which many studies fail to cover due to the expressed perspective, lies in the de-reterritorialization process - of traditional populations, the deprivation of access to land and its resources and, still, of territorialization – of a full range of symbolic, cultural, and affective relationships of these peoples with and in the territory. It is to settle these people in a new kind of legitimacy within a certain legal and institutional State framework, a truly classic instrument of employer-corporate hegemony, gaining ground in the structure of instituted domination.

The actual movement of de-reterritorialization of so-called traditional peoples in Brazil, more than building well-defined territories, is that of recognizing that is always present at different levels (in these “multi” or even “trans” -territory) *also* a

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5 A deal between the urban classes, large landowners, and co-opted union members. It constitutes the basis of State support and unequal distribution of property in our country.

“being between” or a triggering/producing different territorialities – which betoken entering an in context of multiple identity situations and multiple power relations. Knowing this multiplicity and being conscious of how deals with many diverse situations of de-reterritorialization is strategically fundamental in the political activities of these groups (Haesbaert, 2014, p. 100).

With the agrarian question increasing complexity, the claims and conflicts started to be addressed by subjects themselves based on an ethnic-territorial component. This strategic political line of action also needs to be incorporated into approaches of land use and of the conflict of interests that lead to more conflict.

The agrarian question is no longer expressed only in the contradiction between landowners and peasants, since indigenous, quilombolas, rubber tappers, babassu coconut breakers, *geraizeiros*, etc. gives the social field a new shape, reformulating its schemes of perception, appreciation, and action, as stated by Bourdieu (2001). In terms of the agrarian question, the small farm (“numerically representative minority”) and *latifundia* (a few number) (Mesquita, 2011) dichotomy remains. Actually, at this moment, this situation becomes even more complex when it incorporates the challenge of defining and recognizing ethnic and common-use territories.

## Concluding Remarks

Before the increasing complexity of the agrarian question, with more attention to demands for identity and territory, we see emerging new configurations of land conflicts in Brazilian’s rural space, making clear the relevance of this set of questions at the dawn of the 21st century. In this social context, concepts such as land and territory are in dispute, ideas that will be printed in rules of regulation and use, in public policies, and in the determination of the subjects with legitimacy to implement and/or benefit from them. Each vision expresses reading of social reality and projects for use and appropriation of space.

Although below communities demands, data from the National Indian Foundation (Funai) and the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (Incra) certifies 847 indigenous and quilombola territories<sup>6</sup> in Brazil up to May 2021. These are configured as “new” forms of territorialization resulting from semantic, political, and strategic articulations. But not new from a geohistorical standpoint. Despite several instruments for restricting access to indigenous peoples and blacks to land, the land tenure was a constant reality, both in the vicinity of the settlements and in more distant areas. Sometimes tolerated and often considered residual and the cause of a precluded land, the reality shows that the inclusion of these peoples in the Brazilian agrarian context cannot be reduced to their total submission to large landowners, since many defense strategies have been used to defend occupation, such as legal disputes, collective organization, and physical resistance.

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6 The data represents the sum of delimited, declared, homologated, and regularized indigenous and quilombola lands, with published ordinances and issued titles. It should be noted that, under Bolsonaro’s administration (January 2019 to the present date of May 2021), no indigenous land was demarcated and just one quilombola territory was titled (Quilombo Rio dos Macacos – Bahia).

The novelty is in the double recognition, which came not only from official public recognition but also from self-recognition. In such an identification context, one can highlight their cultural and territorial trajectories, now a part of State policy and actually addressed, in terms of acknowledgment of rights, by political subjects themselves. The formalization of recognized rights led to new policy-making that address indigenous peoples and quilombolas demands for territorial use and control, policies now guided on principles of self-recognition, original law, and traditionality, and that is mapped, delimited, and ruled by two types of different domains instead of individual private: public, in the case of the indigenous people; and collective, in quilombola's context.

Hence, the pattern of conflict and antagonisms in rural space is redefined as well. The agrarian question now finds its expression in the contradiction between landowners, peasants, family farmers, indigenous people, quilombolas, rubber tappers, babassu coconut breakers, geraizeiros, etc. Finally, they transform the reality of struggles and put the legal system under strong pressure, thus seeking to impose legal restrictions on capitalist-private use and occupation of land, as in the case of indigenous territories, quilombolas, and extractive reserves as new legal models of property build upon common/collective use orientation, of territorial identity, and traditions. In the same vein, it can be noticed the diverse resistance schemes, expressed in group-entities alliances, requirements to respect their recognized rights, complaints, etc.

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