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“One Single Agriculture”: Dismantling Policies and Silencing Peasant Family Farmers in Brazilian Foreign Policy (2016-2022)

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Abstract

Brazil experienced the opening-up and democratization of its foreign policymaking in the last decades, but since 2016 a wave of bureaucratic reforms sought to reverse that process. This paper contributes to understanding this phenomenon by looking at the agri-food dimension of Brazilian foreign policy. Through the analysis of official documental and discursive data, we discuss successive symbolic-discursive, as well as policy-institutional governmental efforts to close-off foreign policymaking to peasant family farmers and their interests. The study reveals changing patterns in state-society interfaces, and contributes to bridging the fields of Foreign Policy Analysis, Policy Dismantling and Social Participation.

Keywords: Peasantry; Family Farming; Brazilian Foreign Policy; Policy Dismantling; Social Participation.

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Introduction

“In the PT governments, Itamaraty was home to the MST [Landless Workers’ Movement]. Now it will be available to the producer” - Ernesto Araújo, Minister of Foreign Affairs (2019-2021).

For almost three decades, Brazil experienced a slow but steady move towards de-insulation, pluralization and democratization of its foreign policymaking (Cason and Power 2009; Faria 2012). While such move began with Brazil’s democratization in the 1990s (Milani and Pinheiro 2012), the successive Workers’ Party (PT) governments under Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff

(2003-2016) made Brazilian Foreign Policy (BFP) significantly more open to other bureaucracies (horizontalization) as well as to a range of societal actors (verticalization). Indeed, access to foreign policymaking was neither comprehensive nor homogeneous across different interest groups and, yet, the participation of new social actors, including traditionally marginalized ones, reached an unprecedented level during the PT rule (Pomeroy and Waisbich 2019; see also Farias and Ramanzini Jr. 2015).

Such trajectory has radically changed in recent years, under the rule of Michel Temer (2016-2018) and Jair Bolsonaro (2019-). Not only did the economic crisis and turn-to-the-right give new strategic directions to the BFP (Lopes 2020), but also both Presidents led on significant bureaucratic reforms to abolish participatory institutions in different sectors and policies (Milhorance 2022; Bezerra et al. 2022; Serafim et al. forthcoming). Under a rapidly accelerating democratic backsliding, policy dismantling and the selective closing-up of state institutions to a range of social actors and interests became the norm.

This paper contributes to understanding this phenomenon in the realm of foreign policy, using the agri-food dimension of BFP, and specifically *peasant family farming* (or *peasant agriculture*), as a case study. Although the concepts of peasant family farming and peasantry are complex and contested (Shanin 2005; also Section 3), we consider peasant family farming and peasants in Brazil both as a sociological category and a subject of public policy (Motta and Zarth 2018; Wanderley 2014). Taking foreign policy as a public policy (Milani and Pinheiro 2012) the question of whether and how socially marginalized groups and interests, like peasant family farmers, are represented and participate in policymaking bears both political and normative implications for foreign policymaking.

Rather than solely a pragmatic–functionalist move to include diverse views on a particular issue, thus improving information available to policymakers and overall policy legitimacy, the representation of socially marginalized voices in foreign policymaking is a political choice embedded in rulers' sectoral policy and political preferences as well as in their conceptions of social participation. These preferences and conceptions, we posit, can be traced in the domestic arena as well as in Brazil's international affairs.

Our analysis here is guided by two questions. First, to what extent and in what ways is the dismantling of peasant agriculture policies in Brazil (Sabourin et al. 2020; Milhorance 2022) instantiated in Brazilian Foreign Policy? Second, to what extent ongoing policy dismantling efforts relate to closing foreign policymaking to the participation of actors and social interests of this same field?

Analytically, the present case study sits at the crossing of three research fields: Foreign Policy Analysis, Policy Dismantling and Social Participation. Through them, we interpret official documents (policy and legal acts) and discursive data related to the agri-food field in BFP from 2003 to 2022, focusing on the shifts that occurred since 2016. Our findings point to the selective closure of BFP in two interconnected ways: (i) the elimination of bureaucratic and participatory structures that promoted peasant family farming interests, and (ii) the symbolic-discursive erasure

of the policy idea of peasant family farming coupled with the silencing of its subjects: the peasant family farmers. By showing how the idea of “One Single Agriculture”, under Temer and Bolsonaro, functioned as a paradigm change supporting policy and participation dismantling, including in foreign policy, our study highlights the importance of cognitive and discursive dimensions to policy dismantling. Concurrently, it contributes to rendering visible the linkages between policy dismantling, social participation, and democratic backsliding in the context of BFP. Finally, our analysis shows the selective nature of this closing-up since 2016 (accompanied by closer dialogue with interest groups linked to the agribusiness sector) and thus sheds light on changes to the previous pattern of opening-up and social participation in foreign policymaking.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 conceptualizes policy dismantling and its impact on social participation. Section 3 characterizes the rise of peasant family farming as an issue in Brazil’s international relations and foreign policymaking during the PT era, as well as the tensions it generated. Section 4 develops the policy-institutional and symbolic-discursive dismantling of peasant agriculture in BFP between 2016 and 2022. The concluding section sums up our main contributions.

Policy dismantling and social participation

Policy dismantling is an important facet of contemporary scholarship on policy change (Jordan et al. 2013). Engaging with the current global wave of de-democratization, these studies seek to understand how established policies, programs and systems decrease in both density and intensity. In Brazil, this field of inquiry has mushroomed in recent years, in response to the country’s democratic backsliding (Sabourin et al. 2020; Silva 2021; Luiz and Milani 2022; Serafim et al. forthcoming). Yet its application to foreign policy remains overlooked.¹

Bauer and Knill (2012, 35) define policy dismantling as “a change of a direct, indirect, hidden or symbolic nature that either diminishes the number of policies in a particular area, reduces the number of policy instruments used and/or lowers their intensity”. Dismantling, they argue, might involve changes to the content of policies as much as in their implementation. Bauer and Knill further proposed a typology of dismantling strategies employed by decision-makers: i) *Dismantling by default*: when politicians seek low visibility measures in contexts where the costs of dismantling can be high, or when there are institutional constraints to more direct and expanded forms of dismantling. It involves actions such as letting a policy disappear from inaction. ii) *Dismantling by arena shifting*: when direct decision-making is moved to a different political arena or institutional level, lowering the costs of dismantling, as changes are not perceived or directly attributed to incumbents. iii) *Dismantling by symbolic action*: the

¹ Studies on recent radical shifts often draw on mainstream foreign policy analysis approaches to policy change (see Lopes 2020). An exception is Waisbich et al. (2022) work on Brazil as “policy exporter”, which features (though marginally) the discussion of policy dismantling in the context of BFP.

vocalization of the intention to dismantle, not necessarily followed by concrete changes. The option to remain at the discursive level may result from existing institutional restrictions on change or from the political calculation that actual dismantling is too costly whereas publicly speaking in favor of it can produce political dividends. iv) *Active dismantling*: when politicians effectively dismantle policies because it might be rewarding due to political demands and/or ideological reasons. Authorities pursue active and overt strategies when perceiving few institutional constraints to dismantling.

Recent studies on family farming in Latin America, including Brazil, show a combination of subtle, almost imperceptible, and overt strategies to dismantle rural and environmental public policies in the last decade (Sabourin et al. 2020; Grisa and Niederle 2021; Milhorce 2022). For Brazil, these studies show successive Presidents pursuing distinct dismantling strategies, according to the expectations of their ruling coalitions and electorate. Rousseff resorted to strategies of *dismantling by default*, mainly through budget cuts, to avoid major conflicts with PT supporters. Temer resorted more to strategies of *dismantling by arena shifting* to please his conservative neoliberal and austerity-focused political coalition. Finally, Bolsonaro “integrated and accelerated all the dismantling forms”, including those that generate high visibility (Sabourin et al. 2020, 7. Our translation).

When applying the framework to the Brazilian context, these studies moved beyond the original rational-choice focus of Bauer and Knill’s proposition and shed light on the cognitive dimension of policy reforms and the disputes over *policy ideas and paradigms* in the context of agricultural policies (Silva 2021; Grisa and Niederle 2021). Our study further contributes to enlightening this ‘cognitive turn’ in policy dismantling studies, and connects it to changes in patterns of socio-state interaction.

Such nexus between democratic backsliding, policy dismantling and social participation is widely referred to but poorly studied. Looking at recent urban and agrarian policy reforms, Serafim et al. (forthcoming) offer a contribution on the shrinking of the Brazilian state’s permeability to social movements and its relation to policy dismantling. The authors show the dismantling of participation – through various strategies, such as extinguishing participatory institutions and a strong anti-participatory discourse – as simultaneously a mechanism for and an output of dismantling social policies in these policy areas. On the one hand, they argue, social movements and their allies become less capable of intervening in policy processes, thus reducing their role as veto points and lowering the visibility costs of radical policy change by the ruling coalition. On the other hand, the dismantling of policies undermines the very participatory institutions embedded in them and further dissipates opposition from social actors (ibid).

A final pillar in our analysis engages with studies on social participation in Brazilian Foreign Policy, a baseline for understanding the dynamics unfolding since 2016. Pomeroy and Waisbich’s (2019) study on socio-state interfaces in BFP since the 2000s, for instance, found great variance on who participates, levels of openness from state bureaucracies, and the nature of participatory space across different foreign policy agendas (i.e., multilateral trade

negotiations, human rights and international development cooperation). Notwithstanding the diversity, two common trends were retrieved: i) the fragility of participatory arrangements, given their *ad hoc* and informal nature; ii) the enabling role of the Executive power bureaucracy – both the Ministry of Foreign Relations (Itamaraty) and other line-ministries – in opening-up/closing-up spaces to participation. Underpinning these dynamics, the authors highlight the importance of political opportunities structures as well as cognitive elements for the emergence and sustainability of participatory initiatives in each policy issue, particularly the “conception and praxis on participation” held by different public foreign policymaking institutions (Pomeroy and Waisbich 2019, 123).

Against this background, in what follows we investigate changes in participation dynamics in BFP and its relation to the dismantling of certain agri-food policies since 2016. Before moving forward, however, we acknowledge the challenges to studying current dismantling processes (in which the symbolic-discursive contours are more discernible than their effects). As such, our study is a first step in a broader research agenda on the topic.

Peasant family farming, agribusiness and the agri-food contradiction in Brazilian foreign policy (2003-2016)

The Brazilian agricultural landscape is often characterized by a dualism: small-scale “peasant family farming” versus large-scale farming or “agribusiness”. This is undoubtedly a simplification, considering the heterogeneity of ways in which both peasant family farming and agribusiness unfold in practice (Niederle, Wesz Jr. 2018; Pompeia 2021). Yet, these two broadly defined “agricultural models” have throughout the years acquired political and policy translations inside Brazil. In what follows we briefly discuss the categories of peasant family farming and agribusiness in Brazil and how they played out in the context of BFP during the PT era (2003-2016).

The concept of peasantry is a contested one across disciplines (Shanin 2005). Seminal to these debates was Karl Marx’s analysis of the social transformation and expropriation of peasants in the context of capitalist transformation. Marxist scholarship subsequently examined whether capitalist expansion would necessarily eliminate the relations of production that defined peasantry as a social class or, alternatively, whether the peasantry could survive in capitalist/socialist societies, with their families being able to produce and reproduce using their own workforce and sustaining their cultural way of life (Baiardi and Alencar 2014; Edelman and Borras Jr. 2021).

With the intensification of economic globalization, liberalization of foreign investment and the commoditization of agricultural production, some argued that the peasantry had indeed become a residual category (Bernstein 2004). Yet, Global South scholars, in particular, claimed instead that the agrarian question was not over: firstly, because of the limited penetration of capitalist investments in former colonies, and, secondly, due to a “re-peasantisation” of rural movements,

now comprised of semi-proletarianized or landless peasants, who remained actively struggling against neoliberalism and land grabbing at the national level (Moyo et al. 2013). Alongside national struggles, Critical Agrarian scholars have also shown growing transnational mobilization of peasant social movements, such as Via Campesina or the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) (Edelman and Borras Jr 2021).

Seeking to avoid insurmountable research impasses, we acknowledge that peasant/peasantry remain contested categories (with social differentiation among peasant populations even within the same country). Moreover, here we mobilize this category highlighting three defining elements (as per Motta and Zarth 2018): (i) peasants are producers who use family labor as the fundamental base of production, in relatively small units; (ii) they produce for self-consumption and/or for the market, but their investments and management decisions are based on the perspective of family reproduction, considering their traditions and cultural ties with the peasantry community, and not primarily the making of profit; (iii) peasants are those self-identified as such, even when they lack the material conditions to live as such.² Under this definition, the idea of peasantry is intrinsically related to family farming.

In Brazil, the disappearance of peasants and their social transformation through the advance of industrial techniques of agricultural production is also debated (Baiardi and Alencar 2014). An important landmark in this discussion, however, is the 2006 Family Farming Law (Law 11.326/2006) (Grossi and Marques 2010). The law classifies those who have a percentage of their income derived from their relatively small rural family establishment, as *family farmers*. Importantly, while the social and public policy category of 'family farming/family farmer' includes peasants, it also encompasses other contemporary forms of family farming that operate in dynamic markets, and thus do not constitute peasant agriculture *per se*. Small producers of the semi-arid Northeast, highly dependent on state subsidies to survive, and smallholders in Cerrado who are highly integrated to international value chains illustrate the different ways these categories exist in practice.

Recognizing the value but also the limitations of these legal and social categories, our understanding of *peasant family farming* follows Wanderley (2014. Our translation) as:

a social form of production, whose foundations are in the family character, both in terms of the objectives of the productive activity – focused on the needs of the family – and of the way of organizing the work, which supposes the cooperation between its members. It corresponds, therefore, to a way of living and working in the field that, more than a simple way of producing, corresponds to a way of living and a culture.

²These elements feature in Article 1 of the 2018 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. See <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1656160>. Brazil abstained in this resolution.

The peasant family farmer, traditional indigenous populations, quilombola and ribeirinhos (traditional riverine people), are thus all included in this category.³

Agribusiness, on the other hand, is the contemporary face of economic agents seeking capitalist accumulation from plantations, often (but not exclusively) through large landholdings, pesticide-intensive monoculture, large-scale livestock raising, and exports. While agribusiness is based on the continuous geographical expansion of monoculture, increased productivity from industrial methods and long circuits of production and consumption (including through international trade), peasant agriculture is based on the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, focusing on short production and consumption circuits.

Large landholders, which are major players in the agribusiness sector, have had a longstanding interface with political power, including in foreign policy issues. However, since the 1990s an agro-export policy network, featuring public and private agents, gained influence over foreign policymaking and turned Brazil into a *demandeur* of agricultural trade liberalization (Søndergaard and Silva 2017). Meanwhile, the economic and political marginalization of peasant family farmers in Brazil is historical (Martins 1981; Lerrer 2017; Motta and Zarth 2018). The 2006 Census indicated that 16% of “non-family farming establishments” concentrated 76% of the agricultural land in Brazil, while family farming units represented 84% of the total number of establishments and occupied only 24% of the total agricultural land (Grossi and Marques 2010). Additionally, data from the Ministry of Agriculture shows a widening gap in rural credit provided to each agricultural model between 2000 and 2014. In 2000, the agribusiness sector received 15.7 billion reais from governmental subsidies, against 2.1 billion to family farming. Subsidies jumped to 154 billion reais for the agribusiness sector, against 20.3 billion to family farming in 2014 (Santos 2017). It should be pointed out that the peasantry is a fraction of family farmers.

Combined, these figures show that the broad group of family farmers has limited material power when compared to agribusiness. This is true despite the fact that family farming is responsible for more than 70% of the food Brazilians eat (Mitidiero Junior et al. 2018). The power asymmetry is even greater when it comes to peasants, a smaller fraction of Brazilian family farmers. While the rivalry between “the two models” is less material than symbolic, it is not surprising that until 2003 there was no institutional channel for peasant agriculture interests to be represented in BFP. This has changed with the arrival of the Workers’ Party to power, in 2003.

Opening-up for peasant family farming

Although Brazilian policies for peasant family farming go back over 50 years (Campelo and Bortoletto 2022), it was during the PT rule that family farmers, including peasants and their interests, decisively appeared in the public agenda, including foreign policy (Brasil 2013; Luiz and Milani 2022). That is, peasant interests were included in foreign policymaking, through the

³ See UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, Art. 1 (items 2 to 4).

participation of individuals and organizations self-identified as peasants, as well as the representation of their interests by third parties – organized civil society and state bureaucracy.

Under Lula, agricultural oligarchies faced for the first time the institutional rivalry of the peasant agriculture sector in the highest levels of decision-making (Coelho and Inoue 2018). The main bureaucratic structures that allowed confrontation were the Ministries of Agrarian Development (MDA) and Social Development (MDS), the General Coordination of Humanitarian Cooperation and Fight against Hunger (CGFome) in Itamaraty and, to a lesser extent, the Brazilian Agricultural Research Company (EMBRAPA) and the National Supply Company (CONAB).

The most important vector of the peasant family farming agriculture sector within the government was MDA, created in 1999 and strengthened when Lula came to power. In June 2005, through a Presidential decree (No 5.453/2005), MDA was included in the Council of Ministers of the Foreign Trade Chamber (CAMEX). Through this act, MDA joined the inter-ministerial body in charge of discussing Brazilian trade policy – a major issue of the Brazilian foreign policy agenda. The inclusion of MDA generated an unprecedented agrarian rival to the Ministry of Agriculture (MAPA) – which represents large agribusiness – in trade policymaking (Ramanzini Jr and Lima 2011).

Besides international trade, the social forces linked to peasant family farming were also able to participate in the policymaking processes, other multilateral negotiations as well as in Brazil's international development (Niederle 2016; Pomeroy and Waisbich 2019). A major site for these voices to be included in foreign policymaking was CGFome. Created in 2004, CGFome was a division within Itamaraty responsible for promoting Brazilian policies to combat hunger and poverty abroad (Lima 2020). Inspired by Brazil's own Zero Hunger Program, many of these policies focused on peasant family farming, and CGFome worked in close collaboration with social movements in this field.

Another important site was the Council on Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA). Re-activated and strengthened in 2003, CONSEA was a participatory institution serving as an advisory committee for the President on the Human Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition (Brasil 2013). Such rights-based approach strongly clashed with the agribusiness-led paradigm of food as a commodity. CONSEA was a privileged forum for peasant social forces. From its almost 60 members, 2/3 came from civil society, while the remaining 1/3 were appointed by the government. CONSEA was also chaired by a civil society representative. A significant part of CONSEA's duties consisted of developing and suggesting guidelines for the National Food Security Policy and Plan, through interaction with the Inter-Ministerial Chamber of Food and Nutrition Security (CAISAN), an MDS-affiliated body created by the Presidential Decree 6.273/2007.

As both the Policy and the Plan encompass issues related to international negotiations – including human rights, land governance, and trade – CONSEA and MDS were given a voice on these issues with the Presidency, in addition to holding hearings and missions to monitor Brazil's development cooperation projects abroad (Miranda et al. 2015; Shankland and Gonçalves 2016).

Overall, both bureaucratic and advisory structures described above created institutional channels for peasant family farmers to participate in foreign policymaking, which also generated its own tensions, as discussed below.

The agri-food contradiction in Brazilian Foreign Policy

For some time, it seemed that the PT governments had succeeded in transforming the seemingly irreconcilable rivalry between agribusiness and peasant agriculture into a stable political arrangement, a democratic *modus vivendi* among both agricultural models (Singer 2012; Welch 2017). However, this apparent settlement was filled with contradictions in the domestic sphere, including a modest redistribution of land via agrarian reform, the concession of asymmetric credit for agribusiness in the face of peasant agriculture or the insufficient policies of technical support to small producers (Sauer and Meszáros 2017; Escher 2020; Pompeia 2021).

Externally, PT's agri-food foreign policy also promoted both facets of the "Brazilian model". While the country strived to become a major agro-export power, strongly supported by its diplomatic body and the Ministry of Agriculture (Søndergaard and Silva 2017), Brazil also disseminated policy ideas and experiences on fighting hunger and promoting "alternative rural development" based on small production, through policies such as the institutional markets for food produce (notably the Food Acquisition Program - PAA).

The international diffusion of the peasant side of the model occurred through several channels, including global norm-entrepreneurship in international organizations, sponsoring international seminars, and leading on development cooperation projects, especially South-South technical exchanges involving diverse national public institutions, such as Itamaraty, MDA, MDS, EMBRAPA and CONAB. Some examples are the diffusion of family farming policies, the creation of CONSEA-inspired food security councils in Latin America (Sabourin and Grisa 2018) and the creation of the Specialized Meeting of Family Farming (REAF) in Mercosur, whose objectives were fostering dialogue between the peasant social movements of the member countries, as well as being a locus for diffusion of successful policies (Niederle 2016; Silva 2020). At the global level, Brazil contributed to the modification of food security-related norms at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (Milhorange and Soulé-Kohndou 2017) and championed a World Food Program's (WFP) innovation, with the creation of the Center of Excellence against Hunger in Brasilia (Dri and Silva 2020). The Center disseminates policies linking peasant agriculture to school feeding for reducing state purchase of industrialized foods from long distances and raising awareness about the advantages of using fresh food from the regional surroundings of the schools.

This set of "Brazil-grown policy solutions" generated interest in developing countries and the UN System, as Brazil seemed to have discovered a political formula capable of overcoming hunger, developing peasant agriculture, attracting investments for agribusiness, and raising dollars from exports: four major problems for most developing countries. Brasilia gained international

recognition and got two of its nationals, José Graziano and Roberto Azevêdo, to head FAO and the World Trade Organization (WTO), respectively. The international diffusion of hunger and poverty-related policies, as well as humanitarian and development cooperation actions in these fields, not only promoted the interests of peasant family farming in Brazil's international relations, but also comprised *soft power* tools for Brazil during the PT era (Albuquerque 2019; Lima and Santana 2020).

However, far from having solved the agricultural duality, BFP under Lula and Rousseff echoed the tensions and contradictions of domestic politics in the agri-food field. This was evident in multilateral trade negotiations (Ramanzini Jr. and Lima 2011), humanitarian food aid (Lima 2020), and in Brazil's international development cooperation. Programs such as More Food International and, even more so, ProSavana with African countries like Mozambique, generated different types of civil society contestation, including campaigns and protests, against development cooperation initiatives perceived as promoting agribusiness-like monoculture farming (Cesarino 2015; Shankland and Gonçalves 2016). The ProSavana controversy became a major reputational liability for Brazil's development cooperation portfolio and the program was discontinued in 2021.

In our perspective, unsuccessful development cooperation projects and other inter-bureaucratic disputes observed during the PT era, including during the WTO Doha Round negotiations (Ramanzini Jr and Lima 2011), are illustrative of the very international instantiation of the Brazilian agri-food contradiction: an expression of competing worldviews ported by asymmetric political forces, who had access to the Brazilian state, and among which the PT governments unsuccessfully sought to institute a peaceful coexistence. These tensions and contradictions were not necessarily a zero-sum game, but became unbearable for the agribusiness sector, both in foreign and domestic politics, contributing to further radicalize its conservative agenda (Pompeia 2021), as discussed in Section 4.

Overall, Lula and Dilma governments provided opportunities and incentives for peasant family farmers to promote their interests through Brazil's foreign policy. This did not mean that peasant agriculture became a dominant issue in the agenda, as the PT governments remained primarily aligned with the interests of the large agribusiness (Sauer and Meszáros 2017; Lerrer 2017; Escher 2020; Pompeia 2021). Still, it is important to recognize the groundbreaking nature of the socio-state interfaces created, also at BFP, for historically marginalized social groups, including peasants.

Such innovation bears implications for understanding the contours of the opening-up of BFP to social actors between 2003 and 2016 and the policy and institutional changes that occurred since then. In fact, by strengthening the international networks and the visibility of peasant agriculture and providing institutional channels to their international critique to the agribusiness model, BFP under PT negatively impacted the international image of the agribusiness sector. Unsurprisingly, it became a major target for the "reform" conducted by the right-wing political coalition from 2016 onwards.

Closing the space for peasant family farming after 2016: paradigm shift, silencing and policy-institutional dismantling

The impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, strongly supported by the political arm of agribusiness in Congress, the *Bancada Ruralista* (Castilho 2017), opened the way to the systematic dismantling of peasant agriculture policies. The “governmentality” that seemed to sustain peaceful relations between the two distinct agri-food sectors collapsed to give way to the primacy of agribusiness interests (Welch 2017), with immediate repercussions for the BFP (Lima et al. 2018). Such dismantling, we argue, occurred both through symbolic-discursive means (characterized here as a combination of *paradigm shift* and *silencing*), and more overt *policy-institutional dismantling* strategies.

Policy-Institutional and Symbolic-Discursive Dismantling under Michel Temer (2016-2018)

On May 12, 2016, Dilma Rousseff was temporarily removed from the Presidency, never to return. On the same day, acting President Michel Temer initiated the policy-institutional dismantling of peasant agriculture, starting with “dismantling by arena shifting”. First, Temer extinguished the Ministry of Agrarian Development,⁴ creating a lower-ranking Special Secretariat of Family Farming and Agrarian Development (SEAD) under the Presidency’s Chief of Staff Ministry (*Casa Civil*). Next, MDA was formally excluded from CAMEX.⁵ More than losing the ministerial chair that granted peasant agriculture access to foreign policymaking, the reform was a symbolic move. It asserted the re-establishment of the traditional hierarchy in the design and implementation of agri-food policies in Brazil, including in international matters. On July 4, pro-agribusiness lobby groups, including the Confederation of Agriculture and Livestock of Brazil (CNA), released the “Manifesto of Trust to the Brazilian Government”, reaffirming “confidence in the new stage of our country’s management, under the rule of President Michel Temer” (apud Pompeia 2021, 308. Our translation). In September, Temer’s first Chancellor José Serra operated another arena shift by eliminating CGFome from Itamaraty’s structure and transferring some of its duties, namely Brazil’s humanitarian assistance initiatives, to the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC).⁶

These institutional reforms were accompanied by diplomatic changes, as illustrated in the case of Mercosur’s Family Farming Network (REAF). Here the “dismantling by default strategy” meant a decrease in Brazilian authorities’ participation in REAF meetings, budget reduction and weakening of the network’s secretariat (Grisa and Niederle 2021). Dismantling REAF served the new coalition in power as a means to weaken the international networks of peasants and

⁴ See Provisional Measure 726 (May 12, 2016) and Decree No. 8780 (27 May 2016), respectively.

⁵ See Decree 8.807 (July 12, 2016).

⁶ See Folha de São Paulo. “Itamaraty extingue departamento de combate à fome”, *Folha de São Paulo*, 15/09/2016, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2016/09/1813599-itamaraty-extingue-departamento-de-combate-a-fome.shtml>.

the international diffusion of policies that benefited them, thus reverting the pattern previously championed by the PT.

Alongside the range of more or less overt policy-institutional dismantling, Temer's government promoted a paradigm shift, intensified under Bolsonaro, by openly advocating for "One Single Agriculture". According to this worldview, there is neither room for peasant family farming nor for the policies that strengthen such development model (Escher 2020; Soyer and Barbosa Jr. 2020). The 2019-2020 *Plano Safra*, a major nation-wide rural development scheme, offers an illustration. Under the slogan of *One single agriculture feeding Brazil and the world with quality* (our translation), Brazil's rural development planning for that year concealed the long-standing (political, policy and budgetary) dispute between the two agricultural development models and erased peasant agriculture, offering instead "a single plan for small, medium and large producers" (Soyer and Barbosa Jr. 2020, 340). Such discursive silencing of peasant family farming, we argue, constitutes a crucial part of the political context in which more active dismantling of rural policies operated from 2016 on.

Policy-Institutional and Symbolic-Discursive Dismantling under Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022)

Under Jair Bolsonaro both the symbolic-discursive and the policy-institutional dismantling were intensified. In his first day in office, Bolsonaro championed a combined symbolic and policy-institutional move towards paradigm shift to "One Single Agriculture": extinguishing CONSEA⁷. Through the "active dismantling" of a socio-state interface that enabled the participation of peasants in agri-food policymaking processes, the President removed the institutionalized channels that enabled some space for dissent to historically marginalized social groups. By doing so, Bolsonaro also signaled to the agribusiness coalition that supported him.

Another early gesture of loyalty to the agribusiness sector was Bolsonaro's presidential act reallocating attributions related to peasant agriculture, agrarian reform, and the demarcation of indigenous lands from specialized Ministries and agencies to the agribusiness-centered MAPA (Pompeia 2021). Working through arena shifting this time, Bolsonaro's move aimed at weakening these "anti-establishment" agendas within the Federal government by subsuming them into the very policy sector and coalition they traditionally oppose.

Along similar lines, under Bolsonaro, Brazilian diplomacy was explicitly re-directed to exclusively serve the interests of agribusiness. To this end, the government radicalized the symbolic-discursive dismantling through overtly silencing peasant family farmers. This is clear in the context of Bolsonaro's "Agribusiness Diplomacy", led by his first Foreign Minister,

⁷ See Provisional Measure No. 870 (1 January 2019). The act was followed by an intense reaction from social movements and an attempt by lawmakers to reinstitute the Council. Bolsonaro, however, vetoed this possibility and sanctioned Law 13.944/2019, in June 2019, formally extinguishing CONSEA.

Ernesto Araújo (2019-2021), and first introduced during a seminar in Brasília, in June 2019.⁸ Described as a “new philosophy”, the Agribusiness Diplomacy aimed at re-instating emphasis on international trade negotiations and new markets for Brazilian agricultural commodities. For that, Itamaraty actively used Brazil’s diplomatic missions abroad and worked closely with the Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (APEX), as well as MAPA and the *Bancada Ruralista*. Alongside “actively and systematically” expanding agribusiness trade (“Futuro chanceler diz que política externa vai incentivar o agronegócio.” 2018), an important dimension of Araújo’s Agribusiness Diplomacy was to close-off BFP to the peasant agriculture sector and peasant social movements, such as MST.

Araújo’s public commitment not to engage with the Landless Workers’ Movement and others in the sector (expressed on Twitter in 2018 as a promise to the then future President Bolsonaro and also featuring as an epigraph to this paper), somewhat validates the claim that the PT opened space for the participation of peasant family farming in foreign policymaking. Though Araújo’s thesis that the MST had dominated Itamaraty was certainly exaggerated, the hyperbole makes sense in the context of his intents to erase peasant family farming to contribute to the promotion of “one single agriculture” focused on and driven by the “productive sector”. In that same 2019 Brasília seminar, Araújo called for a “change in mentality” and stated: “It is no longer the government who decides and the productive sector which has to adapt to it. Now, the normative frameworks and agreements are generated from the demands of the productive sectors” (emphasis added).

Such diplomatic paradigm shift found echo in Bolsonaro’s own depreciative opinion about peasant social movements as well as indigenous peoples, quilombolas and other subsistence farmers. When stating that quilombolas “are lazy and don’t work” or that indigenous peoples had “too much land” (see “Bolsonaro: ‘Quilombola não serve nem para procriar.’” 2017; Iglesias and Said 2019), for instance, Bolsonaro reinforced the historical stigma of peasants in Brazil as non-productive units and its symbolic representation as “backwards” (Delgado and Theodoro 2005).

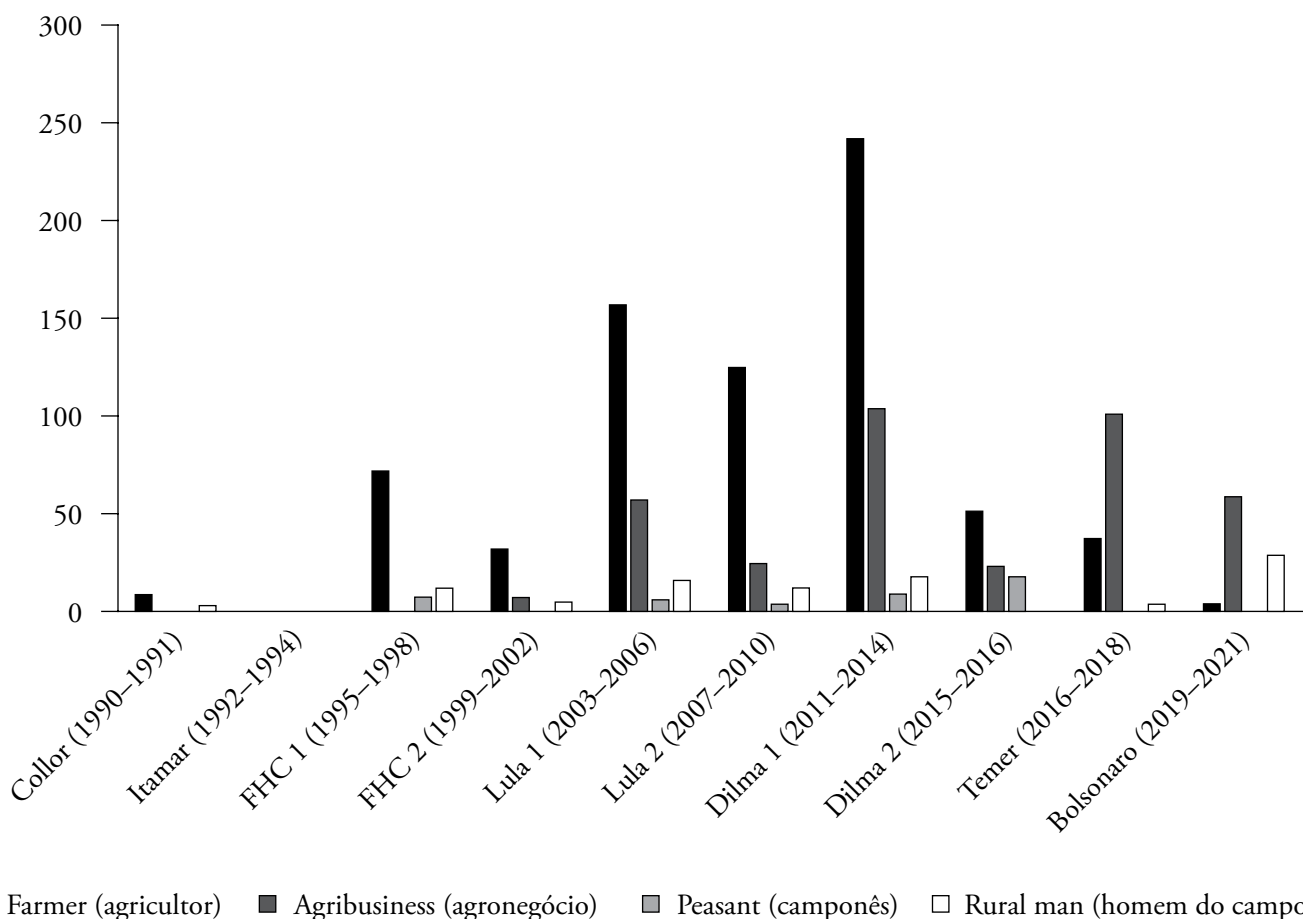
Using diplomatic tools to assist the “productive sector” concretely meant two things for Araújo and his entourage. First, a need to reform BFP and revert PT’s “solidarity-based” South-South cooperation with countries in Africa and Latin America, in which Brazil shared its agricultural policy knowledge and techniques with other developing countries (Cesarino 2015; Suyama et al. 2016). As stated by Congressman Alceu Moreira – from the Parliamentary Front of Agriculture (FPA), the main pillar of the *Bancada Ruralista* in Congress – at the same seminar: “We are not innocent benefactors. We’re competitors (...) We want Itamaraty to be an instrument in our hands” (emphasis added). Second, and more importantly so, the Bolsonaro government had to improve the international image of agribusiness and shield it from criticism. Araújo’s 2018 Tweets already demonstrated such concern, as illustrated below:

⁸ See the notes and full video of the June 2019 Agribusiness Diplomacy Seminar, at <http://funag.gov.br/index.php/pt-br/component/content/article?id=2949> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=st-zAizwkAw>. Last accessed: 11/02/2021.

We will defend the Brazilian producer in international forums, from the completely false stigma of being an aggressor of the environment. The Brazilian agricultural producer contributes to environmental preservation more than anywhere else in the world (quoted in “Futuro chanceler diz que política externa vai incentivar o agronegócio.” 2018. Emphasis added).

Such excerpts illustrate how the notion of “producer/productive sector”, referring to agribusiness, never to peasant family farming, is at the core of Bolsonaro’s agri-food policies, both at home and in Brazil’s diplomacy. In this worldview, the peasant should not exist. In fact, as shown in Graph 1, below, peasant family farming became invisible in Presidential speeches since 2016, when the term ‘peasant’ and its variations virtually disappear from Temer’s and Bolsonaro’s speeches.⁹

Graph 1. Terms related to peasant family farming in Presidential speeches (1990-2021)



Source: Pascoal Gonçalves (unpublished) based on Brazil’s Database of Presidential Speeches.

⁹ Such data is part of Brazil’s official database of presidential speeches extracted, organized and analyzed by Pascoal Gonçalves. It includes 5447 speeches across the mandates of seven different Brazilian Presidents (01/01/1990-10/07/2021). For speeches until 2011 the extraction was manual, since then a specific Python script was applied for automatic extraction. Analysis was done through software Atlas.ti.

What we have shown so far is that symbolic-discursive strategies mattered as much as active policy-institutional ones for both Temer and Bolsonaro's governments to dismantle peasant family farming. If the peasant does not exist it can neither speak nor participate in foreign policymaking process. Next, we discuss the unlikely continuation of some food security and family farming-related development cooperation initiatives and reflect on what this continuity means to our overall argument of the selective closing of BFP to peasant agriculture in the post-PT era.

Continuity by other means

Parallel to the comprehensive reform efforts described above, one can also observe the unlikely continuity of certain peasant agriculture-related international actions, especially in Brazil's development cooperation. While comparatively smaller in scope and scale, such initiatives illustrate ongoing social and bureaucratic resilience and resistance to policy dismantling (Sá e Silva 2021). Indeed, the Brazilian Cooperation Agency portfolio on food security and family farming remained active throughout the period. Both under Temer and Bolsonaro, Brazil secured financial contributions to the UN to enable partnerships such as the Brazil-WFP Centre of Excellence Against Hunger and the Brazil-FAO International Cooperation Program. Both partnerships work to diffuse Brazil-grown policies, especially school feeding and family farming policies, to other developing countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. They are thus largely dependent on the resources and expertise coming from the same public institutions that have been severely impacted by policy dismantling.

Although unexpected, this continuity by other means, albeit "under-the-radar" (Waisbich et al. 2022), of certain peasant agriculture-related international initiatives in BFP results from a combination of factors. First, bureaucratic resilience and resistance, notably by civil servants who had worked in international cooperation projects during the previous decade and by agencies like the Ministry of Education-affiliated National Fund for the Development of Education (FNDE), which have been less targeted by agri-food reforms and had championed peasant agriculture-related policy ideas in the context of school feeding development cooperation initiatives. Second, the relative invisibility of international technical cooperation in national public debates and thus its lower importance for authorities leading to the dismantling. Third, the strong ties with international organizations (i.e., UN), which mediated policy transfer and made Brazilian family farming "solutions" sound "less radical", and also created international constraints for the more extreme forms of dismantling. Finally, the path-dependency dynamics related to the low-cost, high-reputation gains coming from South-South cooperation for Itamaraty as well as other line-ministries and their staff. In the end, a certain degree of continuity in international development cooperation was allowed because it did not fundamentally challenge the strategy to silence peasant agriculture domestically and in Brazilian international relations.

Conclusion

While under the successive governments of the Workers' Party there was an effort to open institutional spaces and include peasant agriculture in BFP, this was reversed under the ruling coalitions that came to power after 2016. Moreover, both administrations led by Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro employed a set of strategies to dismantle the existing formal and informal spaces and mechanisms and close Brazilian foreign policymaking to actors in this sector. Given the Executive branch's enabling role in social participation processes, we identified a clear reversal of the permeability of state bureaucracies working on the intersection of foreign and agri-food policies to peasant agriculture since 2016. Such selective closure, we argue, is directly related to a broader policy and political goals, by the new ruling coalitions, to reinforce the already hegemonic position of agribusiness in national politics.

Ministerial reforms and other institutional changes are clear signs of the vertical and horizontal closing-up for the peasant agriculture sector in Brazilian foreign policy. The elimination of CGFome removed a direct channel for peasant family farmers in Itamaraty. The reform that extinguished MDA and incorporated part of its structure (namely the Secretariat of Family Agriculture) into the Ministry of Agriculture is another example of this type of dismantling. Concurrently, the dismantling of CONSEA and the closing of other informal channels between rural social movements and the MDA's bureaucracy eliminated even further formal and informal indirect channels for influencing BFP. However, the paradigm shift regarding peasant agriculture did not mean the immediate interruption of all international actions related to the sector (especially South-South technical development cooperation), although it significantly altered its visibility and relevance to the government. Future research may answer if they are being dismantled by default.

Still, the repositioning of agribusiness in the post-PT era triggered efforts to exclude from national politics the possibility of an alternative productive and social model, embodied in peasant agriculture. These symbolic-discursive and policy-institutional efforts to erase and silence peasant family farming had an expression in Brazil's foreign policy, a material and symbolic tool for the international economic expansion of agribusiness. These changes correspond to the return to a historical pattern, rooted in the country's agro-export economic political structure. It is, therefore, a move to bring back Brazil's traditional diplomacy, largely reversing the brief moment when the country's international actions, mirroring the domestic sphere, sought to reconcile the diversity of actors from the agricultural domain and their conflicting interests.

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