

'THE SCREAM OF THE MUTES:' GENDER POLITICS AND TACTICAL INNOVATION IN BRAZILIAN RURAL MOVEMENTS

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abstract: This paper investigates how internal dynamics contribute to the explanation of tactical innovations in social movements. As it is shown, shifts in repertoires of actions are associated with political conflicts within movements—which should be seen not as unitary actors but as unified collectives, in which internal negotiations play a key role in defining contentious politics. Gender dynamics within the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) are investigated as an element to make sense of tactical and frame shifts in this social movement in the mid 2000s.

Keywords: Landless Workers' Movement (MST); Brazilian social movements; tactical innovation; gender and women's participation

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"O GRITO DAS MUDAS": POLÍTICA DE GÊNERO E INOVAÇÃO TÁTICA EM MOVIMENTOS RURAIS BRASILEIROS

Resumo: Este artigo investiga como as dinâmicas internas contribuem para explicar inovações táticas em movimentos sociais. Como se mostra, mudanças em repertórios de ação estão associados a conflitos políticos dentro dos movimentos - - que devem ser entendidos não como atores unitários, mas como coletivos unificados, onde negociações internas têm um papel central na definição de políticas contenciosas. Dinâmicas de gênero dentro do Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) são investigadas como um elemento para dar sentido a mudanças táticas e de quadro político nesse movimento social em meados dos anos 2000.

Palavras-chave: Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST); movimentos sociais brasileiros; inovação tática; participação feminina

1. Introduction

8 March 2006, International Woman's Day, 5:30 AM. Approximately two thousand women crossed the gate of a tree nursery owned by the corporation Aracruz, the world's biggest producer of bleached eucalyptus pulp, at Barra do Ribeiro, Rio Grande do Sul, southern Brazil, and destroyed the nurseries. They wore handkerchief masks, T-shirts of rural movements, and carried sickles and hoes. Most of protesters' clothes were either purple or green, respectively colors associated with feminism and Via Campesina (a network of peasant movements from around the world). Women came from several rural movements; members of the Landless Workers' Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, or MST), the largest grass-roots organization in Brazil, led the action. Protesters shouted *mots d'ordres* against social and environmental harms caused by eucalyptus monoculture, what they called 'green desert:' the deterioration of soil, drying up of rivers and expulsion of small farmers from their lands. In a poem-manifesto published some days later, they explained their action: 'Suddenly/ thousands of women gathered/ and shattered in silence/ oppression and deceit// Mutes screamed/ suddenly// and in the sudden course of a moment// bourgeois laughter became disbelief/ bewilderment, bafflement// . . . Suddenly,/ all at once/ thousands of women/ broke down the silence.' According to a press release from the company, more than a million eucalyptus seedlings were torn down. Aracruz estimated its losses in US\$ 250,000. After the protest, women left for Porto Alegre, capital of Rio Grande do Sul, and took part in a march for women's rights.

The Grito das Mudas,² as the action at Aracruz was commonly called, characterized an innovation to the repertoire of contention of rural movements in Brazil, especially the MST. Repertoires of contention comprise the forms of protest that movements use to advance their claims (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, McAdam et al. 2001, Tilly 1995). The MST's traditional repertoire consisted of non-violent actions, such as land occupations, rallies and pickets in front of public buildings,³ and its main goal was pressuring the government to invest in agrarian reform. Repertoires of contention often change, but most of these changes are not innovations. Movements improvise their traditional contentious action when they interact with authorities (Imig and Tarrow 2001, Tilly 1993). Protest improvisations are not fundamental changes in the set of collective actions, but adaptations of the traditional repertoire to new circumstances. For instance, when the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso forbade projects of agrarian reforms *in* properties controlled by the landless, the response of the MST was to organize provisory occupations *in front of* the lands it considered suitable for agrarian reform, thus improvising in accordance to Cardoso's new rules. In contrast, to call the Scream of the Mutes an improvisation of repertoire appears not to be sufficient: here, the landless moved from non-violent protests to confrontational actions, purposively violent. Some protests organized formerly by the MST were disruptive, but were not planned to be. Women were the exclusive promoters of the protest against Aracruz, whereas the MST's traditional protests were conducted only by men or

² In Portuguese, this phrase means either 'Scream of the Mutes' or 'Scream of the Seedlings.'

³ These actions were contentious, in the sense that they expressed discontent and disrupted normal activities of society, but did not involve inflicting damages in a coordinated manner, which remains a definitional aspect of violent protests (Tilly 2000).

by entire families, including children. Moreover, the women's action had a parallel to anti-globalization tactics that had not been present in previous protests. The use of handkerchief masks and the destruction of corporate sites are features of what is commonly called 'Seattle Tactics.' The action at Barra do Ribeiro did not intend to initiate any negotiation on agrarian reform with the government, which remained largely out of the scope of the protesters. As they declared in their poem-manifesto, they targeted the ruling class, the source of the 'bourgeois laughter.' Since 2007, peasant women have organized similarly violent protests against other corporations, including Cargill, Syngenta, Monsanto, Companhia Vale do Rio Doce, and Votorantim.

Shifts in repertoires of contention remain an under-researched topic in the study of social movements, and such a lack of study justifies a closer investigation of the Scream of the Mutes. Most theories of repertoire innovation fail to combine structural accounts with internal politics and a gender lens as a specific locus of internal conflict to analyze tactical innovation, and therefore remain unable to explain in what circumstances mature organizations adopt new tactics and what new tactics they choose to adopt, whether more or less radical than the traditional repertoire. In the literature, two pieces have dealt more directly with shifts in repertoire of contention, with different arguments around the causes of such shifts. McAdam (1983) claims that political-opportunity structure (POS) and organizational readiness are necessary prerequisites to tactical innovation. In contrast, McCammon (2003) argues that the combination of organizational readiness and POS stimulates tactical inertia, and that in a context of political defeat (instead of opportunity) some structural characteristics—organizational diversity and decentralization, and conflict in the movement organizational field—may set off new forms of protest. In this paper, I show that the seemingly contradictory arguments on internal dynamics of these theories are actually complimentary, that is, tactical innovations suppose internal conflict and coordination. I do not focus in this piece so much on the arguments on how the external environment shape political action, except for a broad assumption that different groups and individuals within social movements respond differently to stimuli from the same environment.

I argue that in mature organizations repertoire shifts might express an internal transformative process, a choice of the leaders to transform their political action as a means of guaranteeing the continuity of the organization. Thus, I claim that tactical innovation remains a visible feature of an internal transformation, that may also have effects on other aspects of social movements, including political orientation, leadership, organizational structure and system of relationships between the organization and other political actors, either adversaries or allies. In a context of internal conflicts, the transformation appears to be a way of setting an agreement between leaders and powerful challengers. The combination of the empowerment of challengers and their access to resources previously unavailable might stir tactical innovations. The type of innovation depends on the direction of the challenge, either more or less radical than the traditional set of protests—it is worth mentioning that this piece looks at a case of radicalization. Because of the costs associated with internal transformative changes (Minkoff 1999), that can be risky for the survival of the organization, changes in repertoire are rare phenomena.

To investigate the circumstances in which mature organizations renew their tactics, I focus on the internal dynamics of the MST and the struggle within Brazilian social movements across

the gender line. Tactical innovation in this case remains largely unexplained by looking only at structural factors. The evolution of the Workers' Party *Partido dos Trabalhadores*, or PT) pushed social movements toward increasing institutionalization and decreasing combativeness, especially since 2002. The landless were not immune to this broad tendency that the PT pushed, but the outcome was different: in 2006, they decided to radicalize.

2. Context: institutional temptations

The radicalization of the MST and of the landless in general appears to be both an unexpected and a countercurrent process amongst major social movements in Brazil. In 2002, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, from the PT, was elected president, and his government pushed social movements, such as the Central Union of Workers (*Central Única dos Trabalhadores*, or CUT) and the Students' National Organization (*União Nacional dos Estudantes*, or UNE), toward increasing institutionalization and decreasing combativeness.⁴ The PT deployed resources to institutionalize the MST. These resources were threefold. I refer to the first as *historical loyalty*: the shared origin of the PT and the landless movement was a means of aligning the MST leaders with the government. Indications that federal repression of the MST would stop strengthened this alignment. Lula himself was a key player in this process. The second resource was the *offering of positions* in the government to close allies and members of the MST. The PT also invited leaders of the landless to take part of the Council for Economic and Social Development, a social institution to orient the economic and social policies of the government. The increase of *federal funds* to formal entities associated with the MST accounts for the third set of resources.

The PT's deployment of resources to institutionalize the MST integrated the overall electoral and political strategy of the party. Launched in 1980 as an alternative of economic and political power, aiming to dismantle the foundations of exploitation and foster popular movements as a means of governing Brazil (Löwy 1987),⁵ the PT modified its original character by shaping its political orientation and organization towards winning the presidential election (Oliveira 2003, 2006, Sader 2005, Bianchi and Braga 2005). The shift of the PT fundamentally affected major Brazilian social movements. According to Oliveira (2006), a leading Brazilian sociologist and a founder of the party who left it in 2003, Lula promoted a dismantling of the CUT by empowering an 'upper strata of workers' leaders,' a 'new class' whose political task became 'to

⁴ I define institutionalization as the shrinkage of collective action frames to more reformist agendas and the adoption of less disruptive forms of contention in the context of increasing access to policymakers. Radicalization remains the opposite: more extreme agendas, and more disruptive actions (McAdam et al. 2001).

⁵ Brazilian and foreign activists and leftist intellectuals did not disguise euphoric views on the creation of the PT. Löwy (1987,454) synthesizes these views: 'The founding of the PT in 1979 marks the opening of a new chapter in the history of the workers' movement in Brazil: the building of a mass party that expresses the political independence of the working class and working people; a democratic, pluralist, militant party, free of all ties to the dominant classes and their state, with a clearly anticapitalist program; a party in solidarity with workers' struggles throughout the world yet independent of the politics of any particular postrevolutionary state (USSR, China, etc.).' Löwy later became more critical toward the party.

press for redundancies, sell-offs and shut-downs, in pursuit of high returns on their investments,' while disorganizing the unions' base.

The MST was not immune to the institutional temptations that the PT and Lula promoted. Along with other social movements, the MST promoted an understanding that the government was 'under dispute' in the first years of Lula's mandate, which meant according to the landless that both conservative and progressive forces were disputing the direction of the new presidency, and that progressive forces had to engage in the struggle for leading the government. In 2002, the MST released a 'Letter to the Brazilian People and to President Lula,' stating that it would not oppose the new government, which it considered a means of achieving major political and social transformations. The document stated:

The MST has struggled against neoliberalism during the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and because of that was chased and attacked. We have paid a high price for our protest: massacres, imprisonments, lies and humiliation of landless families. [...] Now, we feel proud and victorious for having elected President Lula. [...] We are sure that it is possible to break down the *latifúndio* through people's organization and the political willingness of the new government. For us the enemy is the *latifúndio*, and Lula's government will be fundamental to democratize the land property in Brazil.

The shared origin of the PT and MST was used as a resource to get both the alignment of the landless with the government and to push toward the institutionalization of the social movement. Both organizations were built at the end of the military dictatorship, relying on the influence of the same Catholic progressive groups⁶, and had been close allies during presidencies that preceded Lula's, especially Cardoso's government (Pereira 2003). Activism in the MST and PT often overlapped. Lula's government indicated that it would not cut off this historical loyalty. Lula himself symbolized this attitude: in a meeting with leaders of the landless in 2003, he consented to wear the MST cap. The landless reproduced the scene in posters, distributed all over the country, thus indicating that kinship was mutual.

The attempt to institutionalize the MST was furthered by the offering of positions to the landless and some of their close allies in the ministerial cabinet and federal institutions, such as the Ministry of Agrarian Development, the Aquiculture and Fishing Secretary and the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform. The government also invited leaders of the MST to take part in the Council for Economic and Social Development. Institutional positions held by the landless were kept marginal in the decision-making process of the government: they received a very small budget, and did not influence policies.⁷

⁶ Carter (2010) provides an account on how the MST emerged from the democratization process of Brazil and how it has contributed to strengthening Brazilian democracy.

⁷ The case of the Council for Economic and Social Development expresses the marginalization of the MST. Half of its ninety members were representatives of industries, service companies and banks; 20% were members of cultural and religious

The government of the PT raised funds to NGOs that the MST created. During Lula's first mandate (2003-2006), the National Association of Agricultural Cooperation (ANCA), the Confederation of Agrarian Reform Cooperatives (CONCRAB), and the Technical Institute for the Enhancement of Agrarian Reform Research (ITERRA), that the landless held, received from the government around US\$ 19 million. In the last mandate of Cardoso (1999-2002), who preceded Lula, these organizations received 50.5% of this amount (Oliveira 2007, 61). Governmental funds became vital to the functioning of the MST.

The government deployed resources to institutionalize the MST, and in such a scenario social movements are unlikely to pursue actions that go against the interest of their sponsors (McAdam 1982). As McAdam claims (1982, 55): 'the establishment of external support linkages threatens to tame the movement by encouraging insurgents to pursue only those goals acceptable to external sponsors. The latter course of action may ensure the survival of the movement --or at least of its organizational offshoots --but only at the cost of reducing its effectiveness as a force of social change.' In a context of increasing institutionalization, one would expect decreasing combativeness. The CUT and other movements followed the script; nevertheless, conversely to predictions the landless radicalized their tactics, and gender divides were a key factor motivating this radicalization.

3. Theoretical background: mechanisms of innovation in mature movements

Social movements⁸ appear generally in periods of widespread social agitation, stirred by a political structure that remains vulnerable to protesters' claims. According to the political process/resource mobilization approaches to social movement research, three intertwined factors influence the generation of contentious actions: the structure of political opportunities, the internal organizational resources, and the construction of meanings for action (Tarrow 1994, McAdam 1982). The core premise of the first factor is that shifts in dimensions of the political environment provide resources to mobilization, by increasing the share of political power of challengers in contrast to authorities and elites.⁹ Resources available for challengers account for

organizations, not related to workers' movements; 16% were influential personalities, mainly scholars, with no direct relation to social movements; and only 14% were representatives of social movements, most of them tied to the pro-government CUT (Vizeu and Bin 2008; Kowarick 2003). In such a hostile environment, the MST remained actionless: most policies endorsed by the Council were conservative.

⁸ I rely on Tilly (1999, 257)'s definition: a social movement consists of 'a sustained challenge to power holders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those power holders by means of repeated public displays of that population's worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment.'

⁹ Many studies have sharpened the definition and operationalization of the structure of political opportunity, considering that the concept has become a catch-all explanation (see especially Meyer and Minkoff 2004; McAdam 1996). Tarrow (1994:76) highlights five dimensions of the political environment that might stir collective action: 'the opening of access to participation for new actors; the evidence of political realignment within the polity, the appearance of influential allies; emerging splits within the elite; and a decline in the state's capacity or will to repress.'

the second factor.¹⁰ The construction of meanings for action characterizes a modification in the way people perceive grievances, which go from tolerable to unfair and unacceptable. The combination of these factors creates an extraordinary scenario in which insurgency diffuses, generating a situation that Tarrow (1994, 145) calls cycle of protests: 'What is most distinctive about such periods is not that entire societies 'rise' in the same direction at the same time (they seldom do), or that particular population groups act in the same way over and over, but that the demonstration effect of collective action on the part of a group of early risers triggers a variety of processes of diffusion, extension, imitation, and reaction among groups that are normally more quiescent and have fewer resources to engage in collective action.'

Cycles of protest are short-lived, and social movements have to sustain their capacity to protest in a scenario of no widespread insurgency and of new alignments within the structure of power. Their survival rests upon the building of formal organizations to maintain political leverage acquired during their creation.¹¹ I call mature movements contentious collective actors that survive the exhaustion of the extraordinary periods in which they appeared. In mature movements, the organization becomes the condition sine qua non of collective action, and the continuity of the social movement remains strongly related to the survival of the organization. The collective action depends on the success of the organizational setting—and the organizational functioning becomes progressively a major goal for the insurgents. The building of formal organization is risky to the continuity of insurgency, as McAdam (1982, 56) claims: 'Although necessary, if the movement is to attain a degree of permanence, this transformation is nonetheless likely to set in motion several processes ultimately destructive of insurgency. Specifically, the creation of formal organizations renders the movement increasingly vulnerable to the destructive forces of oligarchization, co-optation, and the dissolution of indigenous support.' These 'destructive forces' are likely to shape the evolution of social movements, but this is not the necessary outcome of social-movement organizations.

Not to become conservative remains a challenge to mature movements, nevertheless some grow more radical (Minkoff 1999, McCammon 2003) or in the specific case of labor unions even revitalize after becoming conservative (Voss and Sherman 2000).¹² One measure of radicalism is the use of more disruptive protests. McAdam (1982, 1983) accounts for tactical shifts as responses of insurgents to a combination of factors that stir innovation: the same set of factors that generate social movements, plus the decision of insurgents to initiate innovation. According to him, their decision rests upon an assessment of the resources available, the power of the

¹⁰ Refer to Davis et al. (2005) to a substantial analysis of the relation between organizational resources and insurgency. McAdam (1982) identifies four resources available to challengers: members, interpersonal rewards to force participation, communication networks, and leaders

¹¹ Combining the views of McAdam (1982), Zald and McCarthy (1987), and Tarrow (1994), I define social-movement organizations as formal sets of interactions and connective structures which are built to implement goals originated during the generation of the social movement.

¹² Voss and Sherman (2000)'s conclusions remain very close to the ones I present in this piece. Yet, the case they look onto—labor unions—has some peculiarities that make it distinct from other forms of collective actions, especially social movements. I choose not to draw too much on their nonetheless very important research not to having to engage with differences between unions and social movements and how these differences might have impacts on internal dynamics.

challengers and the process of interaction with opponents. According to McAdam's model, in favorable circumstances (high levels of opportunity, resources and political leverage) leaders will decide to innovate. Yet, this is a problematic conclusion to the extent that the model does not take into consideration risks and costs involved with innovating. At the end, why would the social-movement leadership change tactics in a context in which they are successful the way they have acted so far?

McCammon (2003) pinpoints the problem of McAdam's model, and suggests that in favorable circumstances leaders will prefer to rely on tactics to which they are used rather than experimenting unknown tactics that might jeopardize the success of their action. She provides an alternative model, based on organizational characteristics that foster impetuses for tactical change: 'a movement that is organizationally diverse, decentralized, or factionalized will be likely to experience tactical change. A richness of resources, while useful in launching a new strategy, does not itself provide the spark that alters a movement's strategic approach' (McCammon 2003, 797). According to this perspective, basic internal disagreements generate different views on how to have success, and tactical changes are more likely to occur when movements face political defeats, which foster criticisms to previous forms of protest and stimulate the generation of new repertoires. McCammon's model is sound, nonetheless, the combination of internal conflict and political defeat might not generate novelty, but rather, the disintegration of the organization. The coexistence of different groups within the same movement might be impossible in contexts of political defeat or strong fragmentation, thus generating splits. Moreover, the lack of confidence among internal groups might not stimulate them to gather resources or experiment with new tactics.

An explanatory model of tactical shifts must take into account both internal diversity and coordination. The former is absent from McAdam's theory, which treats social movements as unitary actors. The latter remains out of McCammon's scope, which does not explain why diverse and conflictive groups have an interest in staying together in contexts of political defeat. Relying on the work by Laver (1999) on political parties, I consider mature movements as unified collectivities, in the sense that they gather diversified groups that interact and negotiate their interaction in order to sustain unity. From this perspective, an explanatory model of repertoire changes must investigate the internal dynamics of groups within the movement, and thus rely on the mechanisms that lead to innovations in repertoire, linking favorable circumstances and tactical shifts.

Organizational changes appear to influence tactical shifts. New forms of protest might be seen as a visible manifestation of internal modifications. Studies have paid attention to conflicts among organizations, and how they shape the trajectory of collective actions (Olzak and Rao 2007, Minkoff and McCarthy 2005, Meyer and Minkoff 2004, Tarrow 1988). Less attention has been paid to internal dynamics in organizations. As other organizations (Davis *et al.* 2005, Morrill *et al.* 2003), mature movements are loci of internal political conflicts, and act as unified actors only when they manage to solve major internal disagreements. Such conflicts may vary in degree, intensity, type, and motivation.

4. Research design and data

The core assumption of this article is that social movements are a collectivity of groups, which are diverse and interact, and which respond differently to the same internal and external processes. In order to continue and act contentiously, movements have to achieve some level of unity, by lessening the influence of potentially destructive internal conflicts. This unity is even more indispensable to collective actors whose activities rely fundamentally on the functioning of their organizations, such as mature movements. Tactical shifts are likely to happen when movement groups achieve a new type of internal relationship and reconfigure the organizational setting, so this piece claims.

In this article, I trace the evolution of the MST's organization as a proxy for understanding changes in tactics from landless groups in general. I rely on two sources of data. Firstly, data that describe numerically the composition of the most important decision-making board of the movement of the landless—the National Directorate (*Direção Nacional*, or DN)—from 1988 to 2006. The MST was created officially in 1984;¹³ nonetheless, it inaugurated the DN only in 1988, as a means of creating organizational autonomy from the Church and solving internal conflicts. The data were obtained by creating a database from attendance lists of DN meetings from 1988 to 2006. During that period 124 leaders passed through the decision-making board. Nominations for the board occurred every other year; leaders' mandates started in even years.¹⁴ Changes in the composition of the board in odd years were usually due to deaths or withdrawals—although these are rare cases. I trace changes of leadership in the board, as a means of identifying moments in which internal reconfigurations occurred. The use of quantitative data in this article remains descriptive.

The second source of data comprises in-depth interviews with leaders of the MST. The interviews were done after the collection of the quantitative data, but none of the leaders had access to the data before the interviews. Based on the data, I discovered that the major internal conflict of the MST from 1988 to 2006 was related to gender: until 2006, women had been systematically marginalized from the most important decision-making board of the MST. In 2006, the picture changed, and women gathered almost half of the spots of the DN, and thus evidenced an organizational reconfiguration. I chose the interviewees in order to have subjective perspectives on the reconfiguration. Firstly, I interviewed original leaders, who were part of the MST since its

¹³ Wolford (2003) explains the dynamics that led to the creation of the MST: in a context of dismantling of the military regime, Church activism, and agricultural collapse, she focuses on the symbolic and material relationships between peasants that fostered contention. Her approach brings back agency to the study of formation of social movements, and thus remains related to the perspective proposed by Jasper (2004). My own investigation, which focuses on internal dynamics, examines how movements choose to apply new tactics, so has parallel to Wolford's approach.

¹⁴ The nomination of leaders in the MST is a complex process, mixing geographical and sectorial biases. Every state in which the landless movement is present has to indicate at least one representative, and each sector of the movement has also at least one representation. Education, Health, Communication, International Relations are among those sectors. Important leaders have influence in the choice of representatives. To get more details on those mechanisms, refer to Branford and Rocha (2002).

origin, and that I identified with the dominant group of the movement and had held continuously important positions in the movement. Then, I interviewed woman leaders who were integrated into the DN in periods before 2006. My goal was to understand how some women managed to get to the board in a context of organizational sexism, and how they felt about the discrepancy between the representation of men and women. Their view in general was that they had to be on the board to contest what they perceived as the dominant group and to advance organizational changes that led to increasing the representation of women.¹⁵ Lastly, I interviewed new leaders: men and women who held spots at the DN in 2006, and who had never held any position at the board prior to that date. My goal was to understand how these new leaders felt about the organization, and how they experienced the reconfiguration.

In the next section, I analyze the organizational dynamics of the MST, tracing the circumstances that stirred the tactical shift. My findings suggest that models by McAdam (1983), that relates repertoire changes to organizational readiness, and by McCammon (2003), that emphasizes organizational characteristics, such as heterogeneity, decentralization and internal conflicts, are complimentary.

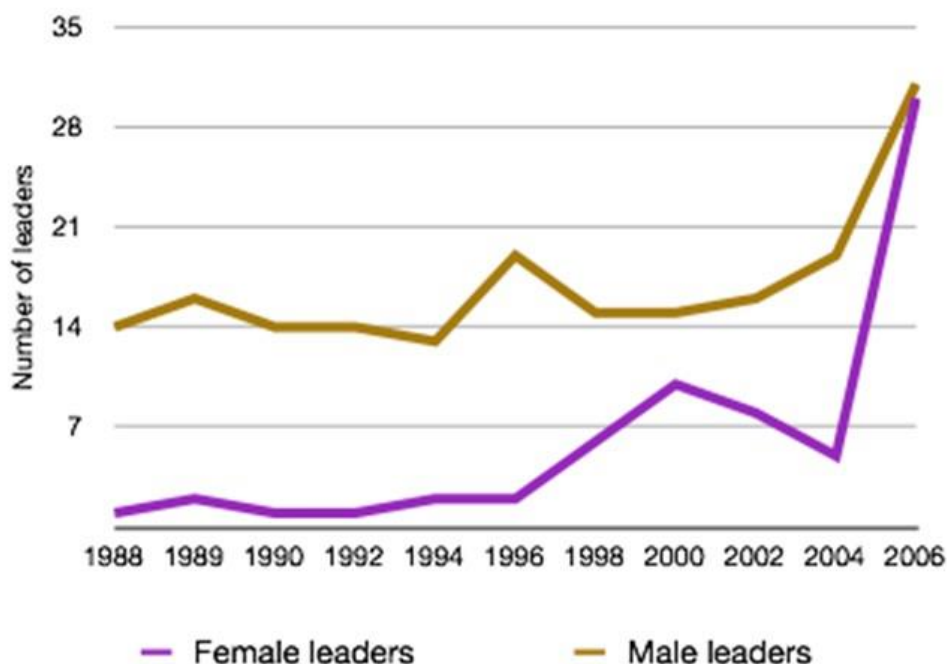
It is worth noticing gender dynamics in peasant movements in Brazil, including the MST, has been a topic of research in recent Social Sciences, and this article does not intend to provide a full account of these dynamics. Relevant studies include Tarlau (2019) and Rute (2009).

5. Findings: the process of internal change

Figure 1 reveals that the MST has historically had a bias against women in its most important decision-making body, the National Directorate. Until 1997, more than 85% of the MST leaders were men; the disproportionate representation of male leaders went down the following years, but still reached 79% in 2004. That is, in the most important decision-making body of the MST, responsible for holding negotiations with the federal government, women were marginalized, sometimes holding just one spot.

¹⁵ Both eventually left the MST.

Figure 1. Number of Female and Male Leaders at the National Direction of the Landless Workers' Movement, from 1988 to 2006.



Source: Research Data

The overrepresentation of men is broadly related to sexism and gender biases in peasant communities and in the specific case of the MST to the influence of sectors of the Catholic Church in the origin of the movement (Peschanski 2008). Since most leaders of the MST were previously involved in Catholic activism, especially in priest seminars that are predominantly if not exclusively male, the leadership of the MST became mostly male. This overrepresentation has had major consequences in the overall silencing of a directly-woman and feminist agenda within the MST, such as abortion, gender roles and contraception.

This is not to say that women were not part of the struggle for agrarian reform in Brazil; conversely, peasant women had been involved in the struggles of the landless since the origin of the MST and strove for more female representation in decision-making bodies. They were at the forefront of the first land occupations in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and eventually national conferences of peasant women in the 1990s led to the creation of a Gender Sector within the MST in 2000. Yet, women were never able to transform their activism into national leadership positions.

In 1995—a period of extreme male control over the National Directorate—women organized a meeting, called the National Articulation of Peasant Women, to create a strategic plan to overcome organizational sexism in the MST. Yet, this attempt was paused in the next years, due to high level of repression facing the movement. In the mid-1990s, on average more than 100 members of the MST were assassinated by the police and landowners' militias every year. In a

context in which the MST faced high levels of repression, the landless women's agenda had little room to surface. Nevertheless, in the late 1990s, landless women leaders continually brought up the need to have more women as leaders. They organized 'silence moments' during meetings of the MST as a means of protesting the male overrepresentation at the DN; in 1999, the National Directorate agreed on a rule that would give at least 40% of its spots to women. In the following years, due mostly to the lack of commitment of male leaders to this rule, the gender disequilibrium persisted.

In 2006, as Figure 1 shows, the MST reshaped its organization, and women got 30 out of 61 spots at the National Directorate. According to an interview with a male leader, a traditional leader of the MST who had held decision-making positions since the 1980s, 'The MST was growing and remained with the same number of leaders. Instead of removing those who were already there, we enlarged the space. We put more chairs around the table, and those were basically given to women. They reached the spots without competing or defeating the men. They occupied the spots to which they were entitled.' From his perspective, the opening of the DN was almost natural, and even more importantly, the action came from male leaders who 'gave' the spots to women. In his explanation, women were not an active subject, a view that is reinforced by his use of the passive voice. His explanation fails to explain why the MST opened its national board in 2006, and not before.

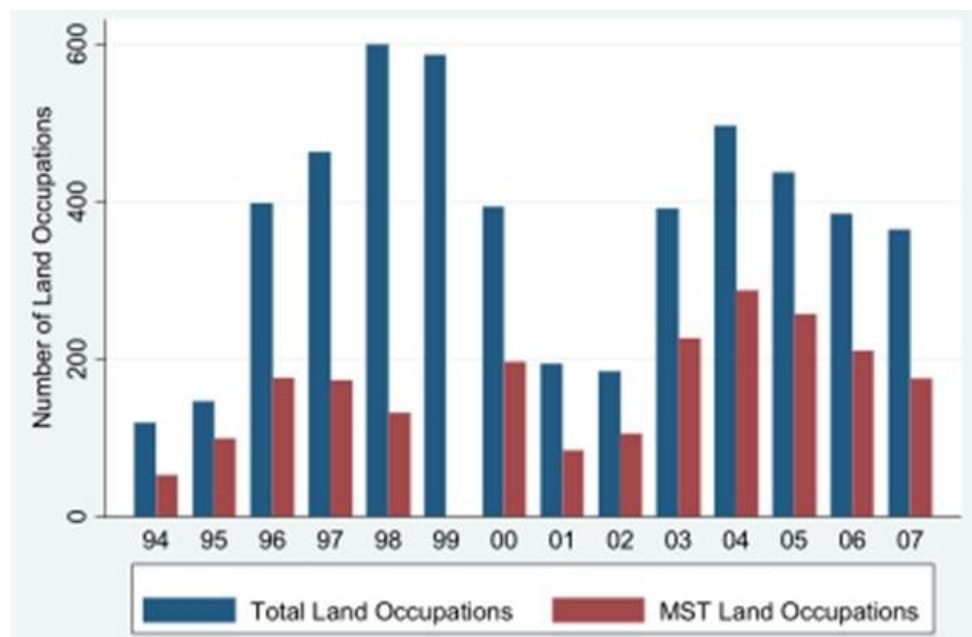
Women expressed discontentment about the domination of the DN by men during this period. 'We felt unable to reach [decision-making positions] through the normal structure. There's a lot of sexism in the Movement. Women's agenda was systematically marginalized, as if it were marginal to the political struggle. But it's the heart of the struggle. We did it our way. We redid the struggle,' claimed an MST female leader who gained a spot in the DN in 2006. She considered the political structure of the MST to be too sexist to allow for gender parity without a fight. More interestingly, she referred to a split within the MST agenda, by contrasting the MST's own political struggle and a new form of struggle, whose 'heart' would be the women's struggle. This idea was reinforced when she said that women 'redid' the struggle, that is, they built an alternative to what they perceived as an unacceptable decision-making structure. It is worth mentioning that in the last sentence of her quote, the world struggle ('a luta,' in Portuguese) is often used as a synonym of social movement by activists; thus, to some extent, she claims that women redid the MST.

The 'redoing' of the MST was dependent on the empowerment of female activists. According to the interviews, landless-peasant women organized a network to advance woman-specific claims related to rural struggles in 1995, which began to grow in the coming years. The network strongly associated the agendas of feminism and peasant mobilization, including women activists even beyond the MST. The main characteristics of this network were at least fourfold. First, people who were involved in it were generally active in local communities, often having important functions as local leaders. This was partially related to the historical marginalization of women from national decision-making structures: by being denied access to the higher-level leadership, they remained active where they could, the local leadership, mainly within their communities. Second, they remained more autonomous from the National Direction, with which they had conflict—one of the interviewees said that the DN was 'antagonistic to women's agenda.'

Third, peasant-women leaders had close ties to Brazilian feminist organizations, especially the World March of Women (*Marcha Mundial das Mulheres*, or MMM). These groups had been very active in struggling against what they considered to be the pernicious effects of globalization, and this led to a strong connection between landless women and the anti-globalization agenda. Fourth, female leaders were less tied to the Workers' Party than male leaders. The four characteristics impacted the women's mobilization, including the Scream of the Mutes.

Because of their unequal access to the DN, throughout the MST history, male and female leaders went through different trajectories, and these differences led to conflict during Lula's government. Male leaders in general went along with the institutionalization and pushed for declining mobilization throughout the country—as can be seen in Figure 2—, giving a sort of truce to the government, even though there was no indication that the new government would advance the MST's agenda. I will not develop the reasoning behind the declining number of MST land occupations, that follows the tendency of land occupations organized by other social movements and is directly connected to the changing opportunity structure, as showed by Ondetti (2008); my goal here is to look at the changing quality of protests of the MST, that the mere look at frequency of protests is not sufficient to reveal.

Figure 2. Total and MST Land Occupations from 1994 to 2007.



Source: Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT), 'Conflitos no campo'

The tendency of declining mobilization was pushed in part by increasing financial support the MST was able to negotiate with the government, which reached unprecedented levels. This support was not bribery or corruption; the federal government sent financial support to rural

schools that the MST organized, to small-farmer cooperatives and to impoverished families within landless communities. The support the MST received was part of a general policy of Lula's government to strengthen civil-society organizations, as can be seen in Figure 3, which compares levels of financial support to the MST, the student organization UNE and all non-profits; data is publicly available. Declining support to the MST since 2006 was a direct consequence of media pressure on the government and its financial support to social movements, especially after radical protests that female landless organized.

Table 1. Federal Government Expenditure with Two Social Movements and with Non-Profit Social Organizations from 2001 to 2008 (in millions of Reais).

	MST	UNE	NP Org.
2001	.	.	1,550
2002	2.17	1.03	1,966
2003	7.55	0.6	1,573
2004	12.58	0.59	1,955
2005	9.53	1.27	2,486
2006	8.45	0.85	2,874
2007	1.98	2	2,886
2008	1.48	.	2,869

Source: Contas Abertas, SIAFI

Female leaders saw Lula's coming to power as an opportunity; according to an interviewee: 'Before Lula, the MST had to stay strongly cohesive, because we were facing [constant repression]. Women continued to disagree with sexism, with sexism in the organization. But we needed to survive first. To survive we needed to be together, even if we disagreed with a lot of what was going on in the DN, in the other stances [of decision-making]. [...] When Lula was elected, we knew repression would stop. [...] Men were busy negotiating in Brasília, and we had the organization on the ground. We were working with people, daily, and it gave us the strength to change things.' Nevertheless, according to the interviewees, male leaders were initially resistant to the opening of the DN to the female leadership. This male resistance pushed female leaders to consider a gender-based split in the MST. In 2003, they created the MMC, the Peasant Women Movement, a social movement that would advance the agenda of female landless as a whole. The MMC had a structure of decision-making, autonomous from the MST.

The creation of the MMC is described as 'shock' (in Portuguese, 'ducha de água fria,' literally a cold shower) by a male interviewee. 'There had been other movements of peasant

women. But something, you know, was different with the MMC. It was not created to resist male domination in general; it was created to resist male domination from within, from within the peasant movement, and especially the MST. This was a shock,' he said. Indeed, in the early 1980s, almost at the same time in which the MST and other social movements that emerged against the military dictatorship, peasant women created the Movement of Women in Agriculture (MMA). Even though members of the MMC claimed that the MMA was a predecessor to their organization, there was little direct connection between these two organizations: the general organizational structure of the MMC relied directly on the structure of the MST, which has also been replicated in several other movements that are part of Via Campesina. The 'shock' around the creation of the MMC was not so much about the creation of an alternative landless movement; splits had occurred before in the MST, but in this case the split could endanger the continuity of the movement, since the MMC was appealing for all female members of the MST, thus potentially half of its constituents.

The fear of a split of the MST across the gender-line was a factor that motivated changes in the internal structure of the MST, including the DN. Men did not want the split due to the impact to the image of the movement which promoted itself as a 'family movement', and because women had a strong influence in local communities. Women did not want to continue the split, as long as they could remain active in the MST and their new movement, the MMC. In 2006, the DN was enlarged, going from 24 leaders in 2004 to 61 in 2006. The internal system to nominate candidates to decision-making spots was changed, giving more influence to local communities, a rule established that women would always hold at least 50% of the decision-making spots, local communities were given more autonomy in deciding what protest tactics to use. As a consequence, traditional male leaders became a minority, even though men still held 50% of the spots at the DN. More importantly the MST began to embrace the women's agenda, even going against some of its strong historical allies, such as progressive Catholic groups, in the case of the defense of the use of birth control and the right of abortion.

The MST also embraced more strongly the anti-globalization discourse, which had been fundamental to the landless-peasant feminism. The importance of the anti-globalization discourse remained a consequence of the connection of landless feminism to Marcha Mundial das Mulheres. The MMM is a global network of feminists that was created in 2000 and since its beginning aligned to the anti-globalization movement, being a founding element of the World Social Forum. An important claim of the MMM is that gender disparities are related to market economy failures, including the big-corporation model that has been associated with increasing male domination—of which the Mexican *maquilas* remained a strong example— and that feminism can be a proxy to alternative economies.

The Scream of the Mutes was, so I claim, a visible expression of these structural changes within the MST and the organizing of the landless in general. Several female leaders of the restructured DN came from local communities in Bahia, Espírito Santo, Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais, where they faced the ecological and social impacts of eucalyptus monoculture, especially from Aracruz Celulose. The setting of the protest was done autonomously from the National Direction—a male interviewee who was at the DN at the time said he only found out about

the protest after it had happened and because he had no reliable information on it dismissed journalists who tried to interview him about it. It is worth mentioning that Aracruz had become the target of a global campaign against corporations, in which the Marcha Mundial das Mulheres had been directly involved, that eventually led to the holding of a social-movement trial in which Aracruz Celulose was found guilty of crimes against humanity. Female members of the MST and MMC took part of this global trial against the company. In Brazil, so the landless women claimed in interviews, an important impact of Aracruz plantations was the drying up of rivers and the erosion of the land, forcing small rural workers out of the land and into the city. This exodus was in general primarily male—women, children and elderly remained in the rural areas, highly impoverished, waiting for the possibility of moving themselves to the city. The choosing of Aracruz as a first target of this new phase of the MST and the way the protest was held—as I said, with several elements that can be defined as Seattle Tactics—can be traced to the specific experience of landless women in Brazil, that around 2006 were able to gain access to decision-making positions within the MST and thus pushed forward their agenda.

The Scream of the Mutes also expressed a new equilibrium within the landless in Brazil. The protest was officially called by Via Campesina, a network in which the MST and MMC participate. The MMC was not dismantled after the reconfiguration of the MST, serving as a sort of external institution of 'checks and balances,' that 'keeps the MST on the right track,' as an interviewee put it. On that, the interviewee appears to be saying that the possibility of a gender-based migration from the MST to the MMC might still happen, if the MST is not 'on the right track.' To mobilize through Via Campesina, as in the case of the Scream of the Mutes, the first important protest after the changes in the MST leadership, became a way of preventing conflicts between the MST and MMC leadership on whom is leading.

6. Conclusion

The case of the landless of Brazil highlights the importance of opening the internal box of social movements. Theories about political opportunity structure have come to dominate the literature on contentious politics, emphasizing too strongly external factors to explain both the origin and evolving of collective actions. Internal dynamics remain fundamental to have a more precise sense of how changes happen within social movements.

My findings indicate that theories that relate tactical innovation to organizational readiness and internal conflict are, despite being written in opposition to each other, complimentary. The arguments of these two bodies of literature, as I showed, can be seen as two phases of a broader process: first, a disruption of the capacity of the organization to act as a unified collectivity; and second the reaching of a new base of unification, related to internal changes that have impacts on visible aspects of the social movement. These two dimensions might be necessary not only for tactical innovation but also the continuity of the collective action.

The case of the landless in Brazil is also relevant as depicting a situation in which diverse types of motivation to be part of a movement interact and shape political organizing. In Brazil, to be a landless and to be a woman were translated into a collective discourse, a new type of political activity, which reshaped the struggle of the landless. The gender lens appears to be critical to understanding social movements, and, even though this might be an obvious point, it has not been taken seriously by most of the mainstream literature on social movements.

Finally, this case also provided an understanding of the peculiar dilemmas that social movements faced with the election of Lula. Even though repression against peasant mobilizations declined sharply since 2003, the overall scenario for the landless was not clear, and different groups within the same movement reacted differently to the new context. Women pushed the MST to not follow the same path of other organizations, that institutionalized and demobilized. The agreement that men and women within the MST had reached was still tentative when I ended my research, and even though it had managed to keep the MST away from a massive split at that point its success in keeping the general cohesiveness of the movement remained uncertain.

Furthermore, the organizational readiness of the MST was challenged in recent years not only during the governments of the Workers' Party but also during the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and the election of President Jair Bolsonaro. How internal dynamics played out to explain the response of the landless to these two key political processes remains an open question.

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