MARGRIET BETSIE GORIS

# EMANCIPATION OF YOUNG AGROECOLOGICAL PEASANTS IN ZONA DA MATA, MINAS GERAIS, BRAZIL: AN IDENTITY IN-THE-MAKING

Thesis submitted to the Rural Extension Graduate Program of the Universidade Federal de Viçosa in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of *Doctor Scientiae*.

Adviser: Ivonete da Silva Lopes

Co-advisers: Esther Turnhout
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Assent:

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# ABSTRACT


GORIS, Margriet Betsie, D.Sc., Universidade Federal de Viçosa, November, 2020. **Emancipation of young agroecological peasants in Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais, Brazil: an identity in-the-making**. Adviser: Ivonete da Silva Lopes. Co-advisers: Esther Turnhout, Jelle Hendrik Behagel, Gerard Marinus Verschoor and Leonardo van den Berg.

Intergovernmental organizations and researchers point to agroecology as a pathway to preserve biodiversity, address climate change and achieve the sustainable development goals. Little is known about how young people become engaged in agroecology. Literature shows that autonomy is decisive for young people to start farming. The thesis shows how young people build and alter their relationships with peers, with family, and with nature and culture in popular education on agroecology, and how they, through those relationships, co-produce a form of relational autonomy. This relational autonomy is emancipatory because it enables young people to resignify agroecology as a movement of repeasantization that reworks local culture so that it is more inclusive of different populations, generations and genders, and that fosters an appreciation of co-production and the interconnectedness of humans and nature. By alternating periods of school time and farm time in popular education both students and their parents become engaged in agroecological transformations. The assignments they have to do during the farm time enhance dialogues and practices.



Keywords**:** Agroecology. Youth. Emancipation.

**RESUMO**

GORIS, Margriet Betsie, D.Sc., Universidade Federal de Viçosa, novembro de 2020. **Emancipation of young agroecological peasants in Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais, Brazil: an identity in-the-making**. Orientadora: Ivonete da Silva Lopes. Coorientadores: Esther Turnhout, Jelle Hendrik Behagel, Gerard MarinusVerschoor e Leonardo van den Berg.

Organizações intergovernamentais e pesquisadores apontam a agroecologia como um caminho para preservar a biodiversidade, enfrentar as mudanças climáticas e atingir as metas de desenvolvimento sustentável. Pouco se sabe sobre como os jovens se engajam na agroecologia. A literatura mostra que a autonomia é decisiva para os jovens iniciarem a agricultura. A tese mostra como os jovens constroem e alteram suas relações com os pares, com a família, com a natureza e a cultura na educação popular em agroecologia e como eles, por meio dessas relações, co-produzem uma forma de autonomia relacional. Essa autonomia relacional é emancipatória porque possibilita aos jovens ressignificar a agroecologia como um movimento de campesinização que retrabalha a cultura local para que seja mais inclusiva de diferentes populações, gerações e gêneros, e que promove uma apreciação da coprodução e da interconexão entre os humanos e a natureza. Ao alternar os períodos escolar e agrícola na educação popular, tanto os alunos quanto seus pais se envolvem em transformações agroecológicas. As tarefas que eles têm que fazer durante o tempo da fazenda aprimoram os diálogos e as práticas.

Palavras-chave: Agroecologia. Juventude. Emancipação.

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# CHAPTER 1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Agroecology as a science, practice and movement

Since the 1990s, agroecology has increasingly been recognised by farmers, researchers, and policymakers as a way to counter unsustainable agricultural practices (Petersen et al. 2012). In 2018, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) stated that agroecology can make significant contributions to a transformative change in the way that we produce and consume food (FAO 2019). As such, agroecology today represents a globally recognised approach to food system sustainability that is socially inclusive and ecologically responsible (Gliessman 2018).

A distinct feature of agroecology is that it tries to mimic ecological processes for agricultural purposes (Schutter de 2010; Pimbert 2015). While the principles and practices that inform agroecology have a long history as part of traditional and Indigenous forms of food production, agroecology as a science first emerged in the 1930s from a combination of ecology and agronomy (Wezel et al. 2009). Pioneers within agroecology increasingly recognised the value of peasant knowledge, their local taxonomies, and the ecological and experimental knowledge embedded in their farming practices (Pimbert 2015). During the 1990s, the focus of agroecological science was extended from change at farm-level to encompass food system transformation (Gliessman 2016). Around that time, social movements and peasant organisations working on sustainable agriculture, family-based diversified farming, low-input farming, among others, came to include agroecology within their discourses and practices (Holt-Giménez 2009; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012). Agroecology is now recognised as a science, a practice, and a movement (Wezel et al. 2009), with all three dimensions considered to be intertwined (Rivera-Ferre 2018). These three dimensions are not exhaustive but point at the main components of agroecology.

Scientific publications on agroecology as a science have remained scarce since the theoretical inception of agroecology in the 1930s. It was not until the end of the 1990s that the number of publications on agroecology increased (Wezel et al. 2009). Since then, agroecological research, curricula, and conferences have been and continue to be organised worldwide. Over time, agroecology as a science has become

increasingly interdisciplinary, with research topics varying from the use of functional biodiversity within agroecology to pedagogies and varying forms of peasant-to-peasant learning. In the past five years, there has been a surge of publications on the socio-political dimension of agroecology, indicating an increased understanding of and interest in these aspects of agroecology among academics.

There is a wide variety of agroecological practices, both agronomic and social in nature, such as natural pest control, the free exchange of working days, conservation of forests, soils and water, homeopathy, agroforestry, combinations with renewable energy generation, gender equality in food production, and so on. Academia and peasant organisations have identified a series of agroecological principles that shape these practices, including resource efficiency, recycling, cultural-biodiversity, synergies, culture and food traditions, cocreation and sharing of knowledge, circular and solidarity economy, and so on. Some authors have discussed these principles as levels in the transformation of food systems (Gliessman 2015), whereas others (Nyéléni Declaration 2015; CIDSE 2018) have classified these principles in different dimensions of sustainability, that is, environmental, social-cultural, economic and political dimensions. Similarly, the FAO (2018) identifies 10 interconnected principles of agroecology which include technical, social and political aspects.

Beyond its principles, agroecology is deeply rooted in the practice and perspectives of rural social movements, including in Brazil. Many social movements and peasant organisations see agroecology as being inextricably linked to food sovereignty (La Via Campesina 2015; Pimbert 2015) as a form of social emancipation. The concept of food sovereignty includes but goes beyond food security and food justice, pointing at the need to democratise, decolonise and decentralise the food system. Food sovereignty is about the right of people to define their own food and agricultural systems and to produce sustainable, healthy and culturally appropriate food (Holt-Giménez 2009). Today, agroecology in Brazil is institutionalised in education, research, rural extension services and public policies (Petersen et al. 2012).

In Zona da Mata Mineira in Brazil, the research site of this PhD thesis, agroecological practices emerged in the early 1990s as an alternative to what has become known as the 'green revolution' style of farming, i.e. mechanised, chemical and export-led agriculture. Agroecological practices have since been strengthened through peasant solidarity networks and social learning practices in collaboration with labour

unions, technical and research institutes and religious groups (Cardoso and Mendes 2015; Botelho et al. 2016). The vibrant agroecological movement that exists in Zona da Mata today, moreover, places a strong emphasis on the engagement of youth to further strengthen agroecology as a science, movement, and practice.

This thesis addresses the engagement of youth in agroecology, and their understanding and use of emancipatory practices. The thesis starts from an understanding of emancipatory practices as actions by peasants through which the meaning of the peasantry is being changed so as to enhance the recognition and representation of peasants in society. A society in which their access to and coproduction with nature is secured and/or strengthened. The thesis contributes to scientific and societal debates on agroecology by interrogating the construction of emancipatory practices in agroecology. It shows both how emancipation is enacted through agroecological practices and how different emancipatory practices interrelate. In this manner this thesis also contributes to broader discussions of what emancipation entails.

## 1.2 The increased visibility of peasants and peasant women and youth

Peasant agriculture, in parallel with agroecology, is also increasingly recognised for its important role in food security and food sovereignty. This is evidenced by the UN's declaration of 2014 as the United Nations (UN) Year of Family Farming and the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas in December 2018. Peasant farming is responsible for at least 70% of food production in the Global South and 55% globally (Samberg et al. 2016). Brazilian statistics on agricultural production show that peasant farming significantly contributes to the production of beans (69.9%), manioc (83.2%), paddy rice (33.1 %) and corn (45.6%) (França et al. 2009; Hoffmann 2014; de Castro 2016a). There are various communities whose practices can be considered forms of peasant farming, including Indigenous Peoples and Quilombola farmers (descendants of enslaved people of African origin). Some of these communities self-identify as peasants and almost all engage in some form of agroecology.

Intergovernmental organisations, national governments, as well as scientists have been calling for more attention to the role of women and youth in farming, including how they are visible and valued in farming practice (Walsum van 2013). Increased consideration for the work of peasant women and youth visualised diversified farming such as in horticulture or orchards combined with livestock, and the care for local seed varieties and local breeds (Oliver 2016), next to the tending of cash crops. Studies of women and youth in farming value the relative autonomy of peasant farmers (both men and women) through their networks, as they provide themselves with their own care and household responsibilities, (part of) their own seeds and seedlings, a substantial part of their food for home consumption, food and other products for the local market, and crops for national and export markets. To some extent, peasant farmers can maintain independence from capitalist systems as they are the owners of their own work force and knowledge for agricultural production (Garcia Júnior 1989; Woortmann and Woortmann 1997).

The increasing interest for family and peasant farming has shed light on the unequal distribution of income among rural men and women and youth, as well as the absence of rural men in care and household responsibilities. The attention for gendered and generational realities resulted in a strong feminist dimension to the agroecological movement in Latin America, which claims that *"Sem feminism não há Agroecologia!"* (without feminism there's no agroecology!) (Sánchez et al. 2018). More recently, this feminist part of the movement is placing an emphasis on youth as protagonists of agroecology.

From 2005 to 2015, during the Brazilian administrations of presidents Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2011) and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), the national government implemented public policies to support youth. De Castro (2016, p.99) states that "the strengthening of identity and organisational spaces of youth in social movements, networks and in formal spaces of social participation in the federal government, may have promoted an organisational structure that can be difficult to dissolve, even by arbitrary and authoritarian acts such as those we are already experiencing in Brazil." In addition, social movements have started to emphasise diversity, strengthening the position of (young) Black and Indigenous farmers, reflected in the slogan "*Se há racismo, não é agroecologia*"(if there's racism, it is not agroecology) (Sánchez et al. 2018).

The increased recognition of family and peasant farming, and the greater visibility of female and young farmers, has not resulted in a proportional increase of scientific literature on the role and position of women and youth in the peasantry and in agroecology. Few studies (Fernandes et al. 2009; de Castro 2016b; Santos and Zimmermann 2019) address the diversity among women and youth and how they deal with the multiple, interconnected oppression due to their gender, race, age, class, sexual orientation and peasant identity. Similarly, few academic studies (Mendonça et al. 2013; de Castro 2016; Moura and Ferrari 2016) analyse the multiple work arrangements of many (young) peasants that include being simultaneously a peasant, a rural worker *and* an employer. In order to secure their livelihoods, many peasants in Brazil are engaged in such a combination of occupations. To be recognised as a family farmer in Brazil and to benefit from public policies, it is important that the majority of one's work time is dedicated to farm work (Lopes 2017). The Brazilian Law 11.326/2006 on family farming states that the majority of the family income ought to come from economic activities linked to the farm (Brazil 2006). The latter is especially difficult for young farmers who initially cannot derive a full income from the farm. This is the case for instance with coffee growers, as only after five years does the coffee plant produces enough to make an income. Schneider[23] notes the rising inequality this law generates between rural and urban people, as urban families do not have to justify being engaged in multiple jobs in the same way.

In summary, various studies link peasant farming to emancipation by exploring how peasant practices and movements provide alternative modes of social life and organisational structures (Morena 2015; Van der Ploeg 2017; Scoones et al. 2018). Less is known, however, about the discursive and symbolic struggles that form the basis of such emancipatory practices and movements, or about the reasons why young people are at the forefront of change.

## 1.3 Problem definition and knowledge gaps

This thesis explores the role of youth in peasant and agroecological agriculture with a specific focus on how youth contribute to emancipatory practices that enhance the

recognition of peasants and agroecology in society. In so doing, this thesis contributes to three main debates. First, it explores the understanding of who young peasants are and what activities they engage in (1.3.1). Second, this thesis engages with debate about how emancipatory practices connect to approaches to popular education (1.3.2). Third, it explores debates on how youth engage in social movements and connect to political dynamics more broadly (1.3.3).

### 1.3.1 Young peasants

It is important to start with a clear understanding of the concept of 'youth'. The government of Brazil defines youth as persons between 15 and 29, as laid down in Law 12.852 (Brazil 2013). The notion of *who* is youth is a social construct (de Castro 2016a; Silva 2019), which has changed over the years. In this thesis, I designate those as youth who define themselves as such. Most young rural people define youth as persons who have not achieved financial autonomy or those who are starting their own farm. This means that some young people are regarded as 'young adults' at a young age, around 15 years old – the age when they inherit land or start to work their own plot. Other 'young' people, however, must wait for many years to gain access to land, e.g. via credit programmes. Taking for example into account that the Zona da Mata is a coffee region, that coffee plants need four to five years to produce enough beans to generate an income, and that access to land via credit programmes can take more than 8 years, people over 30 years of age may still identify as 'young farmers'. Moreover, the period of rural youth is getting prolonged, because young people increasingly attend school for longer, marry later in life, and start to work at a later age (White 2012; Mendonça et al. 2013).

Youth play an important role in depeasantisation and repeasantisation. Depeasantisation occurs worldwide and entails forcing peasants to abandon their land-based livelihood strategies. Land-grabbing, green revolution technologies, globalisation, and neo-liberalisation (and associated shifts in the international division of agricultural production) promoted by public policies are all to blame for depeasantisation (Araghi 1995; Wanderley, De Nazareth Baudel 1996; Ploeg, van der 2012; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012). In Brazil, patriarchal values have

strengthened this trend. Studies carried out by Brumer (2008), Moura and Ferrari (2016) and Jurna (2018) indicate several factors for depeasantisation among youth related to these patriarchal values. The invisibility of female work, a lack of dialogue within the rural family on issues such as succession or the affective relationships among young people, and the need for financial autonomy are some of the most important factors of young peasants not wanting to take over the farm. This is especially true for young female peasants. A lack of access to land, the de-skilling of the youth, a lack of rural infrastructure, and existing prejudice against farming (and in particular against small-scale peasant farming) are also identified as major obstacles to choosing a peasant life (White 2012; Moura and Ferrari 2016).

Many studies on youth in agriculture focus on depeasantisation, following concerns regarding food security and food sovereignty (Garcia Júnior 1989; White 2012). These studies find that peasant farming not only constitutes a substantial part of the food production worldwide, but is also a major source of employment (Schutter de 2010; White 2012). However, they also find that the neo-liberal food regime extends into many branches of society and negatively affects young peasants' willingness to take up farming (Otero 2012; McMichael 2016). Importantly, the food regime is strongly informed by narratives of peasants being culturally backwards and socio-economically inefficient. This is evident in daily conversations, schoolbooks, paintings, science, and the mass media. How this persistent narrative affects rural youth is poorly understood. The responses of young people, and the ways they resist these and 'resignify' the peasantry, is especially relevant in light of questions about succession. Resignification can be understood as the ability to articulate meanings in new ways that are often counterhegemonic, i.e., that challenge existing interpretations of concepts in both a social *and* a political way. This can be considered an emancipatory practice.

A primary focus on labour for food production in the context of depeasantisation may have hidden other issues important to rural youth and that relate to social and cultural reproduction intertwined with production in agriculture. Young peasants are a heterogeneous group with backgrounds like Indigenous, Quilombola, settlers, or otherwise. Their diversity is characterised by many aspects (Castro 2016a; Silva 2019) that are generally not explicitly recognised in studies on rural youth and the interest of youth in peasant farming. Moreover, Scoones et al. (2018) and Honwana and de Boeck (2005) point at the youth as a political group at the forefront of social change and

repeasantization. Specifically, young people may be considered the vanguard of the 'new peasantry' (Milone and Ventura, 2019). They earn this title thanks to their responsiveness and ability to manage scarce resources (such as capital and land) but also due to their creativity, innovation and ability to collaborate (Milone and Ventura 2019). Accordingly, an important research lacuna to address would be to understand how young peasants identify themselves and acknowledge their own diversity, as well as how they bring that diversity to bear on what it means to be a peasant or to engage in agroecology.

### 1.3.2 Popular education

Informal and formal educational settings that construct emancipatory practices are studied with the Latin American concept of popular education. Popular education is an umbrella term that entails a radical pedagogy of place and includes transformative and transgressive learning, among others (Brazil 2014; Brandão 2006). It is place-based because it centres on the negotiating, transmitting and performing of context-specific knowledge, meanings and values (Stewart et al. 2013). In addition, it is transformative because it strengthens individual and collective agency. Popular education includes methods of transgressive learning. According to hooks (1994), what makes education emancipatory is to transgress oppressive, white, middle-class, and patriarchal norms. Peters and Wals (2016) discuss transgressive learning as transforming states of domination in dynamic and reversible power relations. Emancipation can thus take place through transgressive learning, by "exposing marginalisation, exploitation, dehumanisation and other forms of systemic unsustainability, and disrupting the powers and structures that work toward maintaining it" (Peters and Wals 2016, p.185).

Like transgressive learning, a 'radical pedagogy of place' (Ruitenberg 2005) embraces diversity as a productive force (Chaves et al. 2017) and adds place as an axe toward a critical pedagogy. Place-based education is based on and prepares students for the cultural and ecological realities people live in. This is important in rural contexts where education is mostly directed toward work and life in the cities, loosening young people's ties with their territories. Freire (Brazil 2014) and Krogh and Jolly (2012) point

at the relevance of building affective and meaningful relationships as a ground for dialogue and to preserve biodiversity.

Few studies have been done specifically on the social pedagogies and methods that support the emancipation of young peasants in popular education. Popular education practices in agroecology are ample, however, little is known about the specific attributes (and constraints) of these practices and how they are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Comparisons between different formal and informal educational approaches toward agroecology are scarce among the studies on the topic, which focus on one particular pedagogical practice, e.g. peasant-to-peasant meetings or high schools offering field education (Moura and Ferrari 2016; Silva et al. 2017). There are only a few studies (Zanelli 2015; Silva and Santos 2016) that look at the constellation of the different educational practices within a given agroecological territory. In addition, some practices are hardly analysed, such as the learning practices organised by youth organisations. The emancipatory character of these learning practices is a major gap in the literature.

### 1.3.3 Social and political movements

Public policies involving repeasantisation support farmers and motivate them to rely on local resources and thereby seem to push rural populations in the opposite direction of depeasantisation (Wanderley, De Nazareth Baudel 1996; Woortmann and Woortmann 1997; Van der Ploeg 2008; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012). Garcia Júnior (1989) first discussed repeasantisation while describing how sharecroppers who migrated from the North to the South of Brazil have used their earnings to buy land. More recent studies (Van der Ploeg 2008; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012) discuss repeasantisation as a process wherein human activity and natural processes mix to enhance peasant livelihoods. The agroecological movement is a prime example of this (Van der Ploeg 2014; Pahnke 2015).

There are only few studies that look at the role of young people in agroecological farming and rural movements and that focus specifically on practices and arrangements that expand the room for manoeuvre for young people to continue with farming

(Ghimire 2002; de Castro 2016a). While most research is focused on what keeps young people from choosing farming as a livelihood, little is known about how young people and peasant associations organise both socially and politically to counter tendencies of rural youth leaving the countryside. At the same time, there is a clear research need to understand such dynamics, as is highlighted by findings in recent studies (Van der Ploeg 2008; Cacho et al. 2018) that point at the important role of young people in scaling out and advancing agroecology.

Scholars in the field of agroecology consider the peasantry to be the cultural and ecological base of agroecology (Gliessman et al. 1981; Toledo and Barrera-Bassols 2008; Altieri and Nicholls 2017); specifically, as it is shaped by local knowledge of living with nonhuman nature. Through this knowledge, complex farming systems that do not depend on chemical fertilisers, pesticides or other technologies of modern agriculture are adapted to local conditions (Altieri and Nicholls 2017), moreover, without relying on import markets for domestic food consumption. These farming systems in turn constitute an ecological base to ensure nutrient cycling and genetic diversity, among other things. Van der Ploeg (2012) notes that repeasantisation is time- and place-bound and can take place simultaneously with depeasantisation in other localities (van den Berg et al. 2018). In other words, the cultural and social organisation of peasants supports the ability of these peasants to become more ecologically responsible. However, the role of youth in the cultural and social organisation remains under-researched.

Focusing more on the political domain, women play a major role in developing, organising and defending agroecological territories, as well as in the resignification of agroecology. Specifically, ‘Peasant and popular feminism’ is a Latin American movement that emerged in peasant organisations working with agroecology (Calaça et al. 2018). Like agroecology, feminism is a science, movement and practice and little is known about how the two interrelate. Women engaged in ‘peasant and popular feminism’ cocreate autonomy through the peasant mode of production and by enacting ideas of feminist theory (Boni 2013). There is little to no research on how young people with some involvement in the agroecology movement enact these ideas to address multiple, interconnected forms of oppression related to their gender, race, age, class, sexual identity and peasant identity.

Scoones et al. (2018) explore the construction of emancipatory practices in rural areas that challenge the rise of neoliberal and authoritarian populist governments. Authoritarian populist governments are known for 'othering', in the name of the population excluding minorities, while emancipation embraces 'diversity'. The authors state that much is unknown about the emerge of emancipatory practices, and ask: "*How are such alternatives being organised in rural areas, and by whom?*" (Scoones et al. 2018, p. 11) To study emancipatory practices in the context of neoliberal and authoritarian populist governments is particularly relevant considering the impacts of the recent austerity measures of neoliberal governments, such as the budget cuts on rural education and the consequences on the succession of peasant farms as addressed by McCune et al. (2017).

### 1.4 Objective and research questions

Given the above discussion, this thesis explores the role of young peasants in enhancing the recognition and representation of peasants in society via emancipatory practices. These emancipatory practices are explored in three dimensions. First, I explore how practices of self-identification of young peasants and resignification of agroecology contribute to expanding the diversity of identities and practices that are part of agroecology. Second, I focus on the role of popular education to understand how a range of popular education practices support emancipation and to identify the mechanisms and relations at work here. Third, I consider various emancipatory practices that are connected to social movements and discuss these in relation to the political contexts in which they are situated. Together, they inform the main objective of this thesis, which is:

*To understand emancipatory practices among young peasants in Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais, Brazil.*

To achieve this objective, the following research questions are articulated:

1. How do young peasants resignify agroecology?
2. How does popular education create emancipatory practices for and by young peasants?

3. How do young peasants connect with and engage in social political movements in times of authoritarian governments?

## 1.5 Theoretical framework

The thesis draws on feminist, post-structuralist, and peasant studies to analyse and understand the various emancipatory practices in which young peasants engage. These literatures allow me to offer different insights into the structural background of emancipation as well as the different understandings of emancipation. They moreover highlight the relevance of relationality and resignification in young people's engagement with peasant agroecology in times of authoritarian governments. In addition, peasant studies offer their own insight into emancipation that connects it with the concept of the lived reality of peasant agroecology. Below, I first explain how these literatures inform my understanding of emancipation as political and as relational, as well as the specific role emancipation plays in peasant agroecology. After that, I briefly discuss the concepts that have informed the analytical strategies of each of the empirical chapters of this thesis: 'resignification and framing strategies', 'popular education and affect, 'peasant and popular feminism and relational autonomy' and 'resistance and existence'.

### 1.5.1 Emancipation as political

Because social structures are political, feminist studies consider emancipation to be political as well (Ferguson 2017). Feminist theory acknowledges the importance of different modes of thinking, such as non-dualistic reasoning, considering imbricated processes and transnational thinking, to reveal specific connectivities between social phenomena as political rather than accidental (Sato 2014; Ferguson 2017). These different modes of thinking moreover lead to the problematising of categories such as the category 'human', and allow for a questioning of people's domination over other species, among others. Feminist theorists thus work with tools such as intersectionality, interdisciplinarity, and scholar-activism to address questions on subjectivity, narratives, materiality, neoliberalism and climate change as political questions rather than (merely) technical ones (Ferguson 2017).

Considering emancipation as political also requires engaging with issues of redistribution (and thus also concerns with class, social difference and inequality), recognition (and so identity and identification) and representation (and so democracy, community, belonging and citizenship) (Dahl et al. 2004; Scoones et al. 2018). Moreover, it exposes the domination by the neoliberal system and other axes of domination (i.e. paternalism) of a group of privileged actors over others. Fraser (2012) states that expanding our understanding of the political means "[...] *exposing illegitimate power beyond the usual precincts of the state and economy – in sexuality and subjectivity, in domesticity and social services, in academia and commodified leisure, in the social practices of everyday life* (p.14)"

### 1.5.2 Emancipation as relational

The term emancipation derives from a Roman Law, where it referred to the freeing of a son or wife from the legal authority of the *pater famílias* – the father of the family (Biesta 2010). More literally, emancipation means to give away ownership: *ex*: away, *mancipum*: ownership. The original meaning of the word emancipation is thus to emerge from a relation of dependence to achieve a relation of equality and freedom (Rancière 2009). Laclau (1992) argues that the notion of emancipation points to incompatible logical claims. Either emancipation is radical, and in that case it has to be its own ground; or there is a deeper ground which establishes the rational connections between the pre-emancipatory order, the new 'emancipated' one and the conversion between both – in which case emancipation cannot be considered as a true radical foundation. Connected to this, both Freire (1968) and Laclau (1992) note that the identity of the oppressive forces has to be in some way inscribed in the identity searching for emancipation. In other words, emancipatory practices are still connected to the structures and identities from which they are also considered to be broken free.

Authors working with feminist theory explicitly explore the ambivalence inherent in the concept of emancipation (Steinberg and Kincheloe 2010; Allen 2015). According to them, "*no one is ever completely emancipated from the socio-political context that has produced him or her*" (Steinberg and Kincheloe 2010, p.143). Allen (2015) therefore argues that emancipation is more about transforming states of domination in dynamic and reversible power relations instead of working toward a

power-free utopia. Understood in this way, emancipation represents a non-dualistic point of view that allows for a better grasp of societies' complexity, where gender subordination is meshed with class, race, sexuality, and empire. In this understanding, class is a more than the people's economic situation: "*it shaped values, attitudes, social relationships, and the biases that informed the way knowledge would be given and received.*" (hooks 1994, p.178) Equally, race is about the recognition of the different histories and situations of people of colour. Finally, sexuality also refers to the dismantling of patriarchal, heterosexist and gender-non-conforming oppression (Butler 1993; Allen 2015).

Following the idea of emancipation as relational, as outlined above, collective action is not only about claiming equality but also about acting as an agent equal to others (Rancière 2009, Butler 2015). Biesta (2010) explains how emancipation and pedagogy should therefore not build on the logic of dependency, distrust and inequality between the emancipator and the one to be emancipated. Instead, emancipation is based on the transgressive will to act as if intellectual equality were indeed real and effectual (Biesta 2010), thus overcoming established roles. Doing so, people can create new social bonds in which the freedom to act is cocreated by all involved (Rancière 2009, Butler 2015). One can even state that without these relationships no freedom can be produced.

### 1.5.3 Peasant agroecology and emancipation

Contemporary peasant studies and the diverse agroecological movements indicate that the connection between the peasantry and emancipation is a political one. According to van der Ploeg (2016), peasant agriculture allows for emancipation by ensuring a self-controlled resource base. Rosset and Martínez-Torres (2012) state that agroecology in particular helps peasants to build autonomy from unfavourable markets, to restore degraded soils, and to create social processes. To produce political freedom, the focus of peasant studies is therefore on becoming autonomous by working with nature. Tsikata (2009) for example, points at peasants who keep away from modernization processes by building a community-controlled resource base. Tsikata does note that these peasants may achieve economic emancipation without ensuring social or political emancipation and emphasises the need to enhance the conceptual tools for understanding economic and social emancipation.

More recent debates in peasant studies (Paulilo 2004; Scott et al. 2010) highlight the relational dimension of emancipation by pointing out the intertwining of productive and reproductive work (unpaid care and domestic work) in producing freedom for all agents in agriculture: nature, men, women, youth, and rural workers, among others. These studies are in line with the work of Rancière on emancipation, as they argue that if peasants act contrary to the power structure(s), they don't position themselves as dependent. In line with this, Rosset and Martínez-Torres (2012) as well as van der Ploeg (2016) stress the importance of social movements practices for emancipation and scaling out and up. Scoones et al. (2018) argue that when communities are involved in a wider process of political transformation, questions of class, race, gender and identity might also be addressed.

### 1.5.4 Analytical strategies used in the empirical chapters

The empirical chapters 2 to 5 are all written in the form of journal articles and each uses a set of concepts to inform the analysis of the chapter. These concepts are briefly introduced below. The chapter themselves elaborate further on them.

*Resignification and framing strategies (Chapter 2)*

This thesis focusses on social movements and framing by looking at framing strategies as they appear in practice. As Ferguson (2017, p.278) states, 'what we "find" is not a clear story waiting to be told but an emergent process of making, that the finding is part of the making and vice versa'. Resignification is a practice and the ability to resignify depends on the situation. In practice this results in 'found stories', hidden existing stories and 'made stories', the constitution of new stories (Ferguson 2017). Benford & Snow (2000) write about the importance of cultural resonance of the storylines of social movements. The different framing strategies that social movements use are thus studied in this thesis to explore how social frames – e.g. the specific ways in which people understand reality – shape practices and how these frames are actively changed by the youth. Van Dijk (2017) urges us to research the knowledge building practices in social movements that help construct the ability to resignify, that is, the ability to articulate meanings in new ways that are often counter hegemony. To do so,

this thesis looks at practices of resignification and the role of affect in popular education initiated by social movements.

*Popular education and affect (Chapter 3)*

Popular education in Brazil, initiated and/or supported by rural social movements, builds on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy and methods, which are designed to help people themselves to develop the potential to critically assess the world they find themselves in; that is, they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in transformation (Freire 1968). Popular education emerged from a wish to do things differently, to develop education that enhances the situated abilities to build a more socially and environmentally just society (Caldart 2012). The term ‘popular’ refers to the main actors involved -- oppressed societal groups such as rural and urban workers, settlers of agrarian reform, Indigenous and Quilombola farmers among others, and the focus on systematising, producing and articulating their different knowledges and practices. The concept of affect refers to different affective modes of being that alters bodies capacities to act (Deleuze and Guattari 2005) and as such is connected to emancipation as relation. Affect is thus used to understand how young people develop and improve relationships in popular education.

*Peasant and popular feminism and relational autonomy (Chapter 4)*

Emancipatory practices of agroecology are linked to the academic and societal debates about feminism. First, to the debate on new materiality by Fraser (2012), who warns about feminism and marketisation and emphasises the need for a new one, ‘between “emancipation” and “social protection”’(Fraser 2012, p.4). Second, to debates among ecofeminists, who in particular look at how gender and other power dynamics shape humans relationships with nature (i.e. access to it, use and benefit from it, care and responsibility for it and property of it) (Sato and Alarcón 2019). This thesis explores whether feminist norms are extended to the future generation of farmers, including young men. The concept of relational autonomy helps us to understand how women and youth collectively address oppressive norms (Moura and Ferrari 2016). The concept fits with the post-structural research approach of this PhD thesis as it assigns agency to both people and other entities. It highlights the interdependency of people and emphasises that autonomy is also coproduced in relationships with nature (Van der Ploeg 2008; Sato and Alarcón 2019).

*Resistance and Existence in agroecological territories (Chapter 5)*

Peasant movements have created agroecological territories: geographical and socio-material spaces based on peasant values (Escobar 2010; Camacho and Cubas 2011). Most studies on peasant territories are examined from the perspective of 'territories from resistance' – territories that are built in reaction to the neo-liberal food regime (Fernandes 2008; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012). Escobar (2010) argues that peasant territories are also build from the perspective of 'existence', namely the intention to build territories that allow for different ways of life. This is especially relevant for studying emancipatory alternatives that create space for new relationships and identities. Identifying resistance and existence strategies of peasants helps to understand how peasant territories are constructed and defended in present times of right-wing populism, authoritarianism and neoliberalism, and how this affects the territory as an emancipatory base.

## 1.6 Methodological design

### 1.6.1 Research strategy and methodologies

This research is part of FOREFRONT, an interdisciplinary research programme that takes place in Brazil and Mexico and is about complex social-ecological systems in agro-forest frontier areas. In Brazil, the research takes place in the region Zona da Mata in Minas Gerais connecting three municipalities, Araponga, Divino and Espera Feliz. These municipalities harbour the potential for being an ecological corridor between the National Park of Caparaó and the State Park Serra do Brigadeiro (Teixeira et al. 2018, Fig.1). Teixeira (2020) shows that agroecological management at farms in these municipalities increases plant diversity and thereby builds up the ecological corridor. Departing from a land-sharing approach, the research programme has the ambition to study what enhances or disrupts peasants in this corridor to practice agroecology. Within that larger programme, the focus of this research is to understand emancipatory practices among young peasants in Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

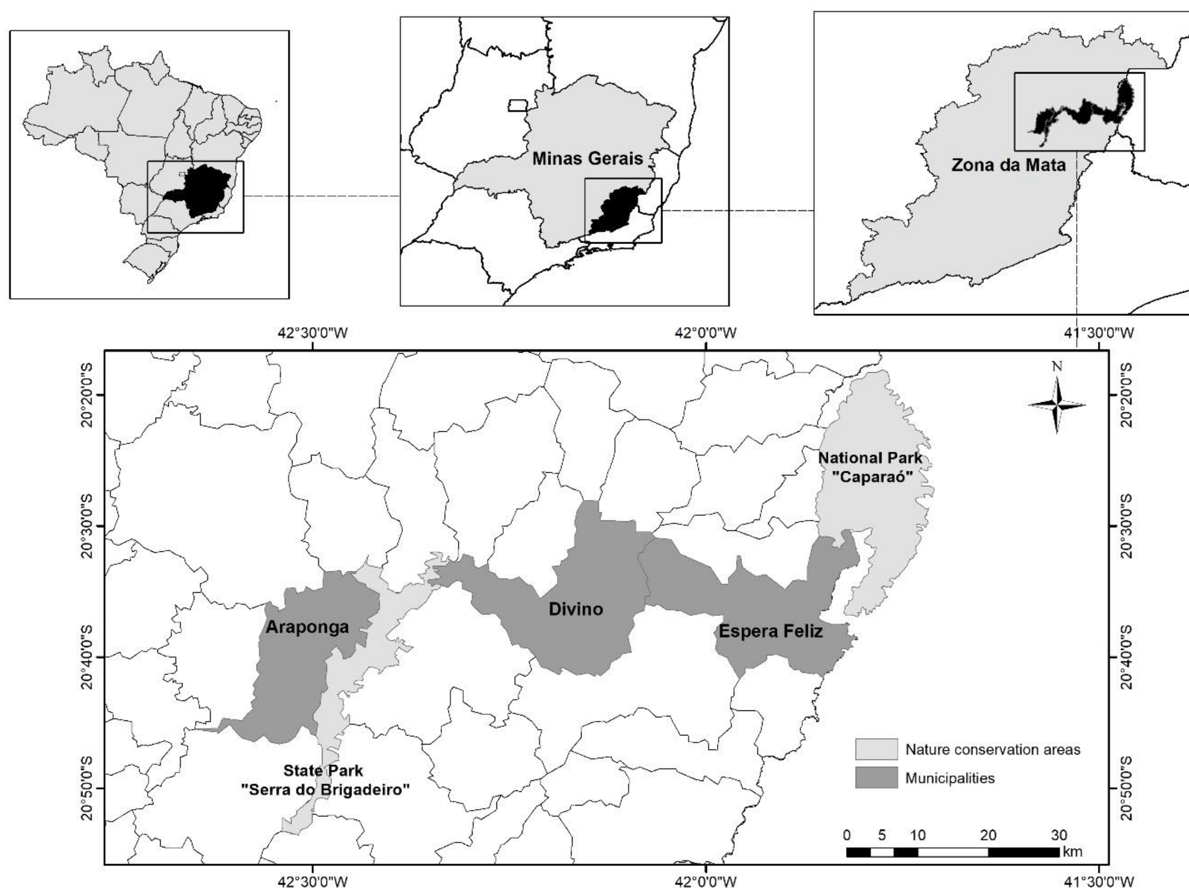


***Figure 1*** *Map of studied municipalities in Zona da Mata and areas of nature conservation (Teixeira et al. 2018, p.45)*

To further decolonise and build more equal relationships between the so-called Global South and Global North, it's also time to do research that is less exploitative. This means research that not merely extracts data from the Global South to process in the Global North – similar to how extractive industries operate (Hoppers 2002; Pink 2013). I therefore participated in an ongoing action research initiated by researchers of the University of Viçosa (UFV), Centre for Alternative Techniques (CTA-ZM) and peasant unions in Zona da Mata. To engage in this action research, I lived in the research area while writing my research proposal and, together with colleagues, I organised inception meetings in which representative bodies such as unions were able to formulate their objectives with this research in the framework of the FOREFRONT programme.

The research strategy I employ is 'Practice as Research' (PaR). Nelson (2013) defines PaR as a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where an artistic practice, in my case film practice, is the main input for the research. PaR

allows one to study different kinds of knowledge-building within the process of making films, the moving images and the viewings. The filmed material enabled me to discuss the representation of the reality with young peasants and other actors, and to generate joint (auto) reflection on the film process and viewings. This research strategy, in this case the making of films by young people, allows us to capture data on practices of resignification. In addition, the research itself becomes emancipatory, e.g. the young people became engaged in self-representative knowledge-sharing, which ensures a more equal playing field among the diverse knowledge holders in the action research (Orbach et al. 2015) and produces films that manifest the differences that they aspire to capture.

The two main research methodologies used are ethnovideography and action research. Ethnographic research using film and photo has a long history of collaborative research projects that are beneficial to both participants and researchers (Pink 2013). This research uses different ethnovideographic research techniques, such as participatory film, film viewings with participants and filmed sequences by the researcher. The entire thesis can be considered a multi-sited ethnography (Leonard 2009). I have lived two years with my family – my husband and three children - in Zona da Mata, the research site, and have carried out my research in different municipalities in this region. This allowed me to unlearn, to learn, to observe and engage in the agroecological movement. I participated in a variety of activities, e.g. union meetings, farmer markets, harvesting, workshops, youth gatherings and more. These were not all directly related to my fieldwork but all indirectly informed my research and contributed to the overall objective of advancing social and environmental justice. Most fieldwork was carried out in the four municipalities of Araponga, Divino, Espera Feliz and Viçosa. By looking across sites and over time at the relations between the sites, similarities, contradictions and connections became visible.

As previously indicated, this research is part of a long-term action research that started 30 years ago in Zona da Mata. As such, it builds on previous research carried out by students and researchers of the UFV, and, equally importantly, builds on previous relationships of researchers and students with peasants and peasant organisations. This enabled me to do this research and to feed research outcomes in an ongoing learning process among researchers, peasants, technicians and other actors in this region. The research team of FOREFRONT Brazil started with inception meetings with peasant unions and other partner organisations such as cooperatives and youth organisations. At

these meetings everybody introduced themselves and shared research interests. In literature on action research this is referred to by the dialectic principle, “*a collaborative process that reflects a plurality of perspectives*” (Feldman 2007, p.28). What was particularly crucial to my research was the space within the FOREFRONT programme to write a research proposal that would match local and personal needs, ideas and abilities. The action research has been an iterative process, co-defined with Brazilian colleagues involved in the programme FOREFRONT. Through the collective planning and carrying out of research activities and other activities to support the work of the agroecological movement, as well as the ongoing reflection process among and with partners, action research became a more meaningful concept that entailed jointly formulating research demands, discussing research activities and outcomes with peasant unions, youth organisations and the family farming high school in Araponga. I introduce the research site in the following section.

### 1.6.2 Zona da Mata, the research site

The research site Zona da Mata lies in the state Minas Gerais, and is part of the Mata Atlântica biome, the tropical Atlantic coastal rainforest. Mata refers to the dense forest once present in this region, but the colonialisation of this region resulted in deforestation and the displacement of the Indigenous people for the purpose of planting cash crops, mainly coffee, and extracting minerals. In 2000 Myers et al. warned that the tropical Atlantic coastal rainforest, one of the most biodiverse ecosystems, was at risk of disappearing. In 2020 Gomes showed that in the period 1986-2015 the forest areas in Zona da Mata increased from 18% to 24%, simultaneously with an increase of coffee production and a decrease of pastures.

Zona da Mata is also called ‘sea of mountains’; the steep hills in combination with the deforestation for coffee and pastures are what led to the erosion of the land over the years. Degradation of land is also the result of government policies that extended green revolution policies, e.g. the promotion of monoculture and the use of agrochemicals, toward small-holders. This process was countered by the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s when farmers started to question their situation in their religious groups, Grassroots Ecclesial Communities (CEBs). The CEBs emerged with the liberation theology movements of the Catholic Church. The conversation in

these religious groups bolstered the farmers' care for their land and their sense of responsibility to improve their own livelihoods.

The farmers established rural workers' unions to organise themselves and they started to cooperate with an NGO focused on sustainable agriculture, Centre for Alternative Techniques (CTA-ZM), as well as several researchers from the University of Viçosa (UFV). The sharing of knowledge among the different knowledge holders, in horizontal learning processes, on soil restoration without chemical fertilisers, agroforestry and other aspects of diversified farming, has strengthened the agroecological movement, practice and science in this region and increased the agrobiodiversity (Teixeira 2020).

### 1.6.3 Research activities

In the first meetings with the peasant unions in the three municipalities, the (young) peasants expressed interest in film-workshops when they heard that I was a researcher and a film-maker. They foresaw the possibilities of using film for social change. This resulted in 13 film workshops, organised and facilitated collectively. Table 2, p.46 in Chapter 2 shows the locations and the attendance of female and male participants. Some of the participants are counted twice, as they participated in multiple workshops. The 85 films made by the young participants in these film workshops, participatory observations of the making-of these films and in-depth interviews with the film-makers allowed me to answer the research question on resignification. The different kind of data, the films made by the youth, the in-depth interviews with the film-makers and the participatory observation of the making-of the films ensured data triangulation.

In the inception meetings with the peasant unions, farmers also expressed concerns on how to engage youth in agroecological farming and in social movement work. This concern resulted in the research question on popular education. To answer this question, I observed and filmed sequences of popular education practices related to agroecology. All practices are filmed as they took place and are not staged. In the three municipalities, youth become familiar with agroecology and social movements in distinct ways. I collaborated with a family farming high school in Araponga, *Escola Família Agrícola (EFA – Puris)*, *Pastoral da Juventude Rural (PJR) & Ecojovem* in

Divino and with the union school in Espera Feliz. The family farming high school, EFA-Puris in Araponga has about 60 students and works with the pedagogy of alternation, where students spend 15 days living and studying at school, and 15 days living and studying in their communities. The youth organisation PJR is part of a national movement of agrarian Catholic youth and Ecojovem is a formation school of the peasant union SINTRAF; together, they engage about 100 young people in Divino each year. The union school of SINTRAF in Espera Feliz engages and educates about 30 young people on a biannual basis.

The clips I filmed also constituted part of the action research. I was approached several times by peasant unions and NGOs with the request to film them. This resulted in 11 clips edited, and upon the request of the initiators and film actors, disseminated online. All clips are transcribed and add to the data set of my thesis. The clips are important data that support the analysis of the fourth chapter on the engagement of youth in social political movements.

With the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, the takeover by president Temer in 2016 (and after the period of fieldwork, the election of the president Jair Bolsonaro on 28$^{th}$ of October 2018) Brazil entered a period of excluding and marginalising subordinate groups. To understand the contemporary context, and to support a reflection process on the changing political context among the different actors in the agroecological movement, a chapter was written on how agroecological peasant territories are constructed and defended in a context of authoritarian populism. For this chapter Leonardo van den Berg and I jointly conducted 25 interviews, engaged in participatory observations, and organised three focus group meetings with peasant unions to understand what agents contribute to the agroecological territories and to reflect with them upon the contemporary situation. Table 1 displays an overview of the interviews, participatory observations and focus group meetings for the entire study.

| Municipality | Women Interviewed | Men interviewed | Total Interviewed | Focus Group Meetings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Araponga** | 5 | 7 | 12 | 2 |
| **Divino** | 5 | 6 | 11 | 2 |
| **Espera Feliz** | 7 | 3 | 10 | 2 |
| **Viçosa** | 2 | 1 | 3 | |
| **Other** | 3 | 2 | 5 | |
| **Total** | 21 | 16 | 41 | 6 |

***Table 1*** *Interviews and focus group meetings*

### 1.6.4. Data collected and analysis

The data of this multimodal research consists of audio recordings of young peasants' discussions about scripts and edits, film scripts in drawings, filmed material, reactions to the films, focus groups, interviews and notes of participatory observation. Verbal utterings on the films, audio-recordings of the film production and film viewings, and interviews are transcribed in the original language, Brazilian Portuguese.

At the image site, data analysis is focused on the representation of activities, manners, body language, props, settings, and verbal utterings. At the production site, the analysis pays more attention to the practices and specific discourses (Rose 2011). Social semiotics (Rose 2011) is used to analyse how films are interpreted, by whom and why, and how this relates to other data.

The concepts described in the theoretical framework, including the analytical strategies, have been used for coding in the second round of analysis. The resignification practices are disclosed by coding the different framing strategies identified by Benford and Snow (2000). Emancipatory practices in popular education are revealed by coding places and moments that relations are built and enhanced. By coding the cocreation of relational autonomy at farms, movements and bodies and by simultaneously questioning what intersections of oppression young people are dealing with, young people's emancipatory trajectory is visualised. The construction of agroecological peasant territories is coded by identifying the four forms of resistance

and their connection to 'existence' and to 'emancipation'. See Figure 2 for an overview of the methodological design.

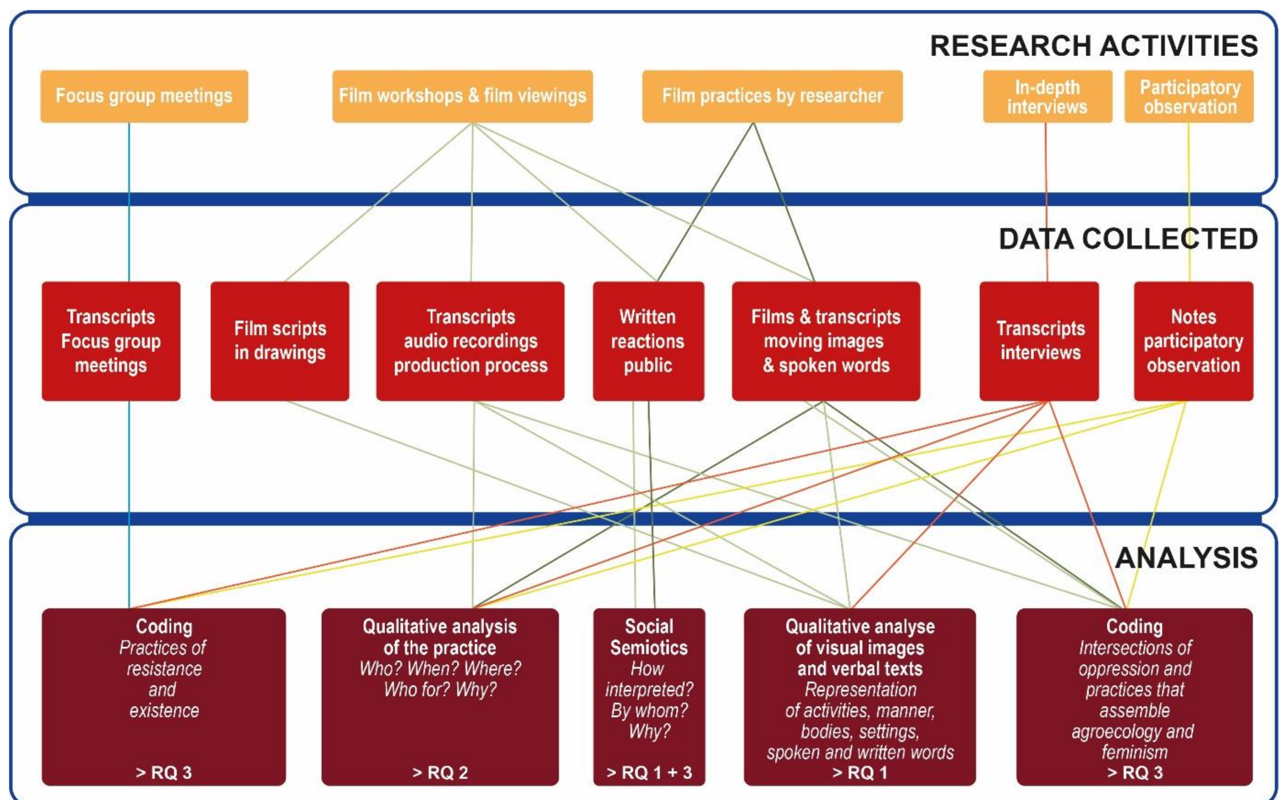


***Figure 2*** *Methodological design of PaR Phd research (Goris, 2017)*

This thesis is written from the perspective of a white farmers' daughter living in the Netherlands, the Global North. I cannot ignore the traces of colonialism in the Dutch culture and this thesis is part of my trajectory of decolonising my mind. My affinity with the research topic arises from my personal history. By getting to know the history of my family, working at the family farm, I became aware of issues of class and gender within farming. Through my engagement with social movements, I became aware of the neo-liberal system and patriarchal culture and environmental issues. During my master studies I experienced a temporary physical paralysis that made me keenly aware of physical and mental diversity among human beings. These experiences engage me in continuous reflection and critical thinking upon any internalised thinking, speech and interaction that values one human being above the other. This work is a result of an intellectual and political exercise: to learn, unlearn, reconstruct with the objective to

contribute to knowledge building and to social and environmental justice. The following section provides an overview of the different chapters of this PhD- thesis.

### 1.7 Thesis outline

This PhD thesis contains four article-style chapters (Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5), the present introduction, and a synthesis and conclusions chapter.

*Chapter 2* addresses the question 'How do young peasants resignify agroecology?' by discussing the framing strategies used by youth to change discourses on agriculture and by showing the (new) meanings that young people attach to agroecology. Resignification practices were observed in 13 film workshops with youth, and a selection of 9 films produced by youth were analysed to disclose new articulations. The chapter argues that youth use different frame strategies to portray their diversity and their diversified farming systems; in doing so, they articulate their wish to do things differently on the basis of their multiple identities, thereby resignifying agroecology as a repeasantisation movement toward biodiversity and cultural diversity.

*Chapter 3* answers the question 'How does popular education create emancipatory practices for and by young peasants?' by identifying affective social pedagogies and methods that construct emancipatory practices. Using a multi-modal and multi-sited methodology made it possible to reveal how youth's capacity to act is altered by building and shifting power in relations. It was found that the pedagogy of alternation alters the power dynamics of relationships, that self-organisation creates discursive spaces to resignify, and that learning about and experimenting with diversified farming systems and livelihoods create the space needed to enact this.

*Chapter 4* and *Chapter 5* in particular answer the question 'How do young peasants connect with and engage in social political movements in times of authoritarian governments?' Chapter 4 works with an intersectional approach to reveal how youth deal with multiple, intersecting forms of oppression by connecting with and engaging in social political movements. In social movement relations they co-create a relational autonomy that has a catalysing effect at the level of farms and at the level of the body. Youth engagement in social and political movements through art, experimenting with

different ways of living and what youth call ‘intentional leisure’, are ways in which they express their sensitivities vis-à-vis issues such as gender equality and authoritarian regimes. Chapter 5 especially shows the shift from ‘rightful resistance’ to ’resistance of the third kind’ and ‘overt resistance’. ’Rightful resistance’, which has proven successful in the past by bringing about numerous laws and policies that support agroecological peasants, is more difficult to enact in times of authoritarian regimes. Through ‘resistance of the third kind’, cultivating, processing new farm products and direct selling, youth co-create relational autonomy; through ‘overt resistance’, e.g. by protesting on the streets, they exercise their democratic rights to denounce unjust practices and to express their wish for policies that support peasant ways of living.

*Chapter 6* links the questions from the different chapters with the overall research objective of this thesis. It further discusses what my research adds to existing debates on young peasants and their activities, emancipatory practices and popular education, and social movements and political dynamics. Finally, the findings are discussed by reflecting on the research and methodological approach.

# CHAPTER 2 RESIGNIFICATION PRACTICES OF YOUTH IN ZONA DA MATA, BRAZIL IN THE TRANSFORMATION TOWARD AGROECOLOGY

**Abstract**

Youth play an important role in the transformation toward agroecology through practices of resignification. This article discusses how young people resignify agroecology by taking part in education initiatives that originate from social movements, and that aim to strengthen young peoples' abilities to reflect on their practices and realities. We used action research to create films with young agroecologists in the region of Zona da Mata Mineira, Brazil. Our analysis draws on films, interviews and participatory observations made during thirteen workshops to visualize the agroecological practices and visions of youth. We explore how social frames—e.g., the specific ways in which people understand reality—shape practices and how these frames are actively changed by youth. The findings show how frames are changed during (1) frame amplification by building on existing local values; (2) frame bridging by linking with other social movements; (3) frame extension by inclusion of new frames; and (4) frame transformation by altering the meaning of agroecology. We find that young people who engage with agroecology contribute to processes of repeasantization that rework local culture to be more inclusive of different populations, generations and genders, and that they foster an appreciation of the interconnectedness of humans and nature.

This chapter was adapted from:

**Goris, M.**, van den Berg, L., Lopes, I. da S., Behagel, J., Verschoor, G., Turnhout, E., 2019. Resignification practices of youth in Zona da Mata, Brazil in the transition toward agroecology. *Sustainability* 11(1), 197; https://doi.org/10.3390/su11010197

## 2.1. Introduction

Increasingly, actors who are working for a transformative change toward sustainable food systems do so under the banner of agroecology (Gliessman 2018b). What agroecology stands for is disputed among and between scientists and social movements. Rivera-Ferre (2018) shows that different narratives on agroecology of national and international actors in the political arena have a "different focus in terms of scale (from farm to the food system) and dimensions of agroecology (ecological and techno-productive, socio-economic, socio-political and cultural) (Rivera-Ferre 2018, p.679)." In addition, several authors (Pimbert 2015; Wezel et al. 2018) highlight a risk of co-optation of the term by agribusiness for greenwashing of their activities. This article explores a grassroots' perspective of how young farmers contribute to this debate. It does so by visualizing how youth identify with agroecology and resignify it through various practices. We understand resignification as the ability to articulate meanings in new ways that are often counter hegemony, i.e., that challenge existing interpretations of concepts both in a social and political way.

In Zona da Mata Mineira, Brazil—which is the geographical focus of this article—agroecology is a result of a process of repeasantization wherein farm workers and rural laborers have (collectively) bought land and replaced external resources with local, ecological resources (Van den Berg et al. 2018). Repeasantization is considered a quantitative process of (young) people moving from non-agricultural occupations to peasant farming. Repeasantisation also describes a qualitative shift from a more entrepreneurial toward a more peasant-like way of farming. This entails engaging in practices that (re)ground productive activities in local and natural resources and thereby allow farmers to increase their autonomy vis a vis external knowledge and global markets (Van der Ploeg 2008, p. 28). The cultural and knowledge base of the peasantry is shaped in interaction with living nature. Through this interaction, complex farming systems have been created that are: adapted to local conditions; do not depend on chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or other technologies of modern agricultural science (Altieri and Nicholls 2017); and, do not rely on import markets for food consumption. Garcia Júnior (1989) explains that peasant production can be connected to markets without being (fully) capitalist. The ownership of knowledge about agricultural production and the possibility of consuming and selling their own produce limits the commodification of peasants' labor.

Few studies discuss how and why young people engage in agroecological farming, how they resignify agroecology in education and/or movement practices, and what space they have for change (Moura and Ferrari 2016; Londres et al. 2017; McCune, Rosset, Salazar, et al. 2017; Cacho et al. 2018). Studies on de- and repeasantization describe the space of rural youth to re-signify agroecology, but leave substantial room for more detailed exploration. Araghi (1995), Rosset and Martinez-Torres (2013), and Van der Ploeg (2008) discuss depeasantization as driven by state-interventions, land-grabbing, green revolution technologies, and ongoing processes of globalization and economic liberalization, but say little about specific constraints that young people face if they wish to become peasants. Moura and Ferrari (2016), Jurna (2018), Londres et al. (2017) and Brumer (2008) highlight the discrimination of peasants, the invisibility of female work, a need for financial autonomy, a lack of dialogue within the family upon issues of succession, income, and affective relationships among youth as other factors of depeasantization, but they say less about how young people handle these constraints. Accordingly, Botelho et al. (2016) notes that issues of diversity, like gender and generational conflicts, need more reflection by agroecological farmers and scientists, among others.

Rural youth have played an important role in social movements in the global south. Ghimire (2002) offers multiple explanations for this. First, as youth are at bottom of the socio-economic ladder and are often confronted with systemic exploitation, they have to find resources to start farming or to ensure access to work and dignified working conditions. Second, increased access to education, communication, and transport in the countryside has facilitated the participation of rural youth in social movements. Third, many environmental and social problems, such as pollution of water from mining or land-grabbing by agribusiness, have limited access to land for the next generation of farmers (Ghimire 2002). To explain the transformative role of youth in agroecology, some authors point to a period of personal and societal reflection that young people undergo during their transition from youth to adulthood (Turner 1964; Ryan 2007). This in-between phase is what Turner calls a *liminal* phase, when one's social position is not yet evident, and one has the potential to generate new thoughts and customs.

In Brazil, opportunities for young people to engage with agroecological practices and social movements opened with the emergence of *Educação do Campo*, which include a range of critical place-based education, and the emergence of political platforms for and by youth at levels ranging from the local to the national (Rossato

2008; de Castro 2016a). *Educação do Campo* was demanded by social movements such as the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) and the National Conference of Bishops in Brazil (CNBB) (Santos 2017). After the end of the dictatorship in Brazil in 1985, public debates drew on ideals from Freirean pedagogy (Freire 2011), arguing that education should respect the diversity and needs of different populations. As a result, the department for Continual Learning, Literacy, and Diversity (Secad) was founded within the ministry of Education in 2004. Several policies were established to support *Educação do Campo.* One of the policies established is *Procampo,* a policy that promotes particular training for teachers for *Educação do Campo*. This vocational training for teachers is called *Licenciatura em Educação do Campo* (*LICENA).* These policies were based on specific aspects of Freire's pedagogical work, such as the emphasis on local cultures and knowledges, and the necessity of engaging learners in a process to perceive reality not as something static but as something which is constantly in transformation, thus also recognizing learning as a political activity (Freire 2011). The emerge of political platforms for and by youth in peasant organizations is also a result of social movement work, which emphasized the role of youth, 'youth as protagonists' (Howarth 1997; Moura and Ferrari 2016).

Processes through which subjects become political by valorizing local culture and exposing marginalization have been studied across the globe. Rossato (2008) describes how social movement activities by the Movement of Dam Affected People (MAB) in Brazil enabled young activists to learn to appreciate their local culture and gain an understanding of how social systems work. This process enabled young people to engage in a process of transformation of the social system. Howarth (1997) describes how Bantu Stephen Biko of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa initiated a similar process. Biko made a call to valorize African ideas and traditions in order to infuse Black people with pride and dignity and enhance their understanding of the broader social system. In this process, African ideas are also re-worked: "*the movement of Africanization is checked by the specifically 'modern' context in which the ideology of Black Consciousness was compelled to function* (Howarth 1997, p.70)." In the Zona da Mata Mineira, agroecology has been understood to result from solidarity networks and social learning "*among farmers—based on kinship, friendship and religious movements—and with NGOs and other institutional and political actors* (Cardoso and Mendes 2015, p.84)." The region hosts various critical place-based education initiatives in agroecology and offers political platforms for and by youth.

This article aims to answer the question of how young people contribute to the agroecological movement through resignification practices. In the following section we elaborate on the concepts of resignification and framing strategies by social movements. Next, we describe how action research and ethno-videography were used as a research strategy. In the results section we present framing strategies that resignify agroecology by drawing on nine films made by young agroecologists. We then discuss the role of youth in resignification practices. We conclude that the youth are bringing new energy to and raising new issues within agroecology as a social movement.

### 2.2. Resignification and Framing Strategies of Social Movements

Resignification can be considered part of a political project. According to Lloyd (2018) and Butler (1993), "the politics of resignifications is about politics apprehended (in part) as the capacity to recite language oppositionally so that hegemonic terms take on alternative, counter-hegemonic meanings (Lloyd 2018)". In other words, processes of resignification can become political if they rearticulate existing knowledge, ideas, and norms from dominant discourses (for example about farming) in new ways. According to Butler (1993), resignification of norms is a means to re-work *the weakness* (emphasis by Butler) in the norm. She refers to the ambiguity of concepts and the possibility to link them to new practices, localities, and/or activities. In doing so, these concepts take on new meanings and create space for new forms of political action.

In order to understanding the role of youth in repeasantization, it is important to understand the process of resignification. Repeasantization involves resignification when new meanings are attached to peasanthood by re-working existing peasant knowledge and values to fit contemporary needs and beliefs. Furthermore, the multiplication of places where youths can articulate their newly-acquired peasant identity also presupposes resignification processes—especially in light of the new peasantry's (precarious) place in society and the youngsters' life phase. Van der Ploeg (2008, 2016) states that, in particular, young successors of conventional farms engage in a qualitative movement of repeasantization by diversifying their farm practices and moving toward more peasant-like agriculture.

Since knowledge and spaces in resignification processes are entwined, Lloyd (2018) suggests distinguishing between the 'what', the actual creating of new spaces and activities, and the 'how', the processes that open up discursive spaces and make

them possible. To study the ‘how’, Benford and Snow's (2000) work on social movements is especially helpful. They describe how social movements use framing strategies to expand themselves in terms of both actors and resources. Van Dijk (2017) notes that most of the frames derive from social movements’ knowledges and ideologies.

Benford and Snow (2000) identified four types of strategies in which meaning is purposefully altered for strategic reasons: (1) frame bridging, (2) frame amplification, (3) frame extension, and (4) frame transformation [31]. Each strategy is explained below.

First, *frame bridging* refers to linking frames that are similar in ideology but unconnected in practice, with regard to a specific issue. Benford and Snow (2000) indicate that frame bridging is one of the most important framing strategies. Rosset and Martinez-Torres (2013) and Holt-Giménez (2009) noticed how rural social movements, members of *La* Via *Campesina* (LVC) working on alternative agriculture, sustainable agriculture or low-input farming, all incorporated agroecology within their discourse and practice. This is an example of frame bridging. These (LVC) rural social movements were connected ideologically, but they used different concepts to denote similar practices. By re-signifying alternative agriculture, low-input farming, family based diversified farming, ecological farming, and so on, they expanded the meaning of the concept agroecology. This resignification includes a set of practices converging in a new political discourse of agroecology (Lloyd 2018). Dapia (2000) explains the political advantage of frame bridging via building equivalent chains (so-termed by Laclau and Mouffe): the longer the chain of equivalences set up between the demands of various groups, the more difficult it is to neutralize struggles (Dapia 2000).

Second, *frame amplification* refers to the strengthening or expansion of existing values. This strategy is frequently used by social movements to ensure that specific discursive frames resonate with many people (Benford and Snow 2000). Howarth (1997) and Rossato (2008) note that social movements use this strategy for transgressive learning by explicitly highlighting and appreciating people’s own local culture, they may become empowered to understand and question the dominant system. For example, Botelho et al. (2016) described how agroecological farmers have revitalized an emotional relationship with nature. These agroecological farmers not only build on traditional knowledge but also on traditional relationships with nature such as local values about how to live with nature. The requirements for farmers who wanted to join

the *Conquista da terra*, Joint Land Acquisition Movement in Araponga, Zona da Mata Mineira (Alves 2006; Van den Berg, Hebinck, et al. 2018) also built on local values, such as the commandments to use the force of animals for collective labor or to participate in *mutirões*, the exchange of working days without money.

Third, *frame extension* refers to the extension of an idea to include issues that are important to new groups. By 'emptying out' a concept such as agroecology of its concrete content, it can be made applicable to an increased number of practices and purposes (Griggs and Howarth 2008). For example, Shanley et al. (2011) describe how the Amazonian social movement, the National Council of Extractivist Populations (CNS), previously a male dominated social movement, let go of its concrete masculine associations and established the Secretariat of Women Extractivists to recruit forest-reliant women. In order to ensure a political discourse responsive to women's needs, the secretariat succeeded in changing the composition of movement leaders to include 30% women. In another example, the International Forum for Agroecology in Nyéléni, Mali (Nyéléni Declaration 2015), declared support for urban and peri-urban agroecological production, in order to include urban farmers in their movement. Frame extensions can, however, backfire when the lack of concrete content of a leading concept leads to contestations over the 'real' meaning and objectives of a social movement such as agroecology.

Finally, *frame transformation* refers to changing old meanings and generating new ones. This strategy usually includes aspects of the first three framing strategies, but is characterized by the strong resignification of a concept. A good example from political science is when the suffragette movement in the early 20th century claimed voting rights based on the idea of 'universal' suffrage, where 'universal' in first instance was only intended to mean 'all men'. Pimbert (2015) notes that agroecology is used within Climate-smart Agriculture (CSA) to refer to a few agroecological practices in combination with industrial farming. This *frame transformation* of agroecology leaves out the political transformative character of agroecology and resignifies it as a technology. This example shows that it is not only social movements that use framing strategies and that the meanings of agroecology are continuously subject to resignification.

This article uses frame analysis to explore how young farmers resignify agroecology. These practices of resignification differ from place to place based on the 'situated abilities' of the youth (Howarth et al. 2016), even within the study area. As

resignification strongly depends on the places where it happens and the role that youth has in society, discursive framings were studied as ‘in situ’ as possible, as explained below.

### 2.3. Action Research and Ethno-Videography

This research is part of an international transdisciplinary research program called FOREFRONT which aims to explore actor strategies, functional biodiversity, and ecosystem services in agro-forest areas. In FOREFRONT, local universities draw on action research to collaborate with peasant unions in the region to define research demands and activities, and to discuss research outcomes. Action research refers here to the co-creation of knowledge through local activities defined by the demands and creativity of all participants and which contributes to the community and capacity building of all participants. The researcher takes an active role in this process (Reason and Bradbury 2008; Leroy et al. 2009). In this research this was done by engaging rural youth in film workshops that were organized and taught by the first author.

In Zona da Mata Mineira, Brasil several peasant unions expressed concerns with regard to the permanence of youth in the countryside. The idea of engaging rural youth in film workshops was seen by them as an opportunity to connect youth to agroecological movement activities. The first film workshops were co-organized with the peasant unions. After that, the first author—who is also a professional filmmaker—was approached by youth organizations to give new or follow-up film-workshops. In total, thirteen film workshops took place from 2017 to 2018, producing 85 films. The majority of the participants in the film workshops come from farms that are agroecological or that are in transformation toward agroecology. Most had attended various social movements activities and/or are enrolled in critical place-based education that is directed toward agroecology, such as *Educação do Campo* and/or *LICENA*. Participants are thus defined as young agroecologists.

Table 1 shows the municipalities where workshops and film screenings were held and the number of female and male participants that attended each workshop. In the first three municipalities, Araponga, Divino, and Espera Feliz, the film workshops were co-organized with peasant unions. The films made by the young people in Divino were screened at a youth event in Espera Feliz, organized by the youth organizations from Divino and Espera Feliz. The researcher was also approached to give film workshops

in Viçosa and Goianá. In Goianá, there was no time during the event for a public screening. The organizers invited the young people to participate via their network. They introduced the film workshop to the young people as a means to share information on cultural and political events, farming practices, and so on, and generate social change. Participants were asked for their prior and informed consent to use their films and recordings of the production process for this research.

| Municipality | Number of Film Workshops | Women | Men | Total Participants of Film Workshops | Number of Screenings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Araponga** | 2 | 14 | 38 | 52 | 1 |
| **Divino** | 4 | 29 | 9 | 38 | |
| **Espera Feliz** | 4 | 19 | 13 | 32 | 2 |
| **Goianá** | 1 | 5 | 3 | 8 | |
| **Viçosa** | 4 | 66 | 56 | 122 | 1 |
| **Total** | 13 | 133 | 119 | 252 | 4 |

**Table 2** Participants of the film workshops in Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

This research employed ethno-videography, which is an established methodology of using video in anthropological research. In various research disciplines video is increasingly used as data (Heath et al. 2010). Video can disclose different aspects of (inter)action, it allows data to be obtained through repeated observation and it supports transdisciplinary analysis after the original recording. Participatory film in particular allows the capture of unique framing by community members (Goris et al. 2015). This enables self-representative knowledge-sharing which contributes to an equal playing field of diverse knowledge holders (Orbach et al. 2015). Moreover, analyzing moving images and frames ensures rich data in terms of signs, words, and images and it also gives an in-depth look at practices of resignification.

In the film workshops that were part of this action research, the participants shared their experiences of film-making and acquired new knowledge of story-telling, film genres, film techniques, editing, and film dissemination. During the workshops, the young people formed pairs or small groups to visually draw a script, shoot, and edit films using their mobile phones. All decisions about the script, music, film title, and so on, were made by the filmmakers. Depending on the wishes of the youth organization or school, the young people were either given a specific issue to film (either audio-

visual memories, aspirations to be (or not) an agroecological farmer and discourse about agriculture) or were left free to choose a topic themselves. Where possible and allowed, the researcher recorded the audio of conversations during the filmmaking and the public screenings of their films.

The transcripts of these audio recordings, the moving images, notes of participatory observation, and ten in-depth interviews provide a more complete picture of why the participants made these films. The films allow for multiple interpretations, but transcripts of the audio recordings during the making-of and interviews with the filmmakers also disclose the intentions of the filmmakers. The filmed material triggered the young agroecologists to discuss self-representations among themselves. The 85 films made by the young agroecologists were first analyzed in terms of main themes, diversity of topics, and active participants/filmmakers. Second, nine films were selected for an in-depth analysis to further identify the role of different framing strategies and to identify practices of resignification. We focused on representations of practices and people in the films and cross-verified our findings with data on the film production process and with the interpretations of the filmmakers. This was done to reflect a broad spectrum of resignification practices found with the youth in the study region.

## 2.4. Results

### *2.4.1. Film Descriptions (Selection of Nine Films)*

#### 2.4.1.1. Film 'Produção de Farina/Making of Flour'

The film *'Produção de farinha/Making of flour*' (Video S1) was made by a male student of *Licenciatura em Educação do Campo (LICENA)* in Viçosa, Minas Gerais, a vocational training for teachers for place-based education, initiated by social movements, such as the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) and unions, such as the Federation of Workers in Family Farming (FETRAF). Teachers at this vocational training aim to promote agroecology. The film was made during '*tempo de alternância*', the school period that students spent in their own community. The student who made this film is descendent of the Indigenous group Tapuio who live in the municipality Coração de Jesus.

The film shows the entire cassava flour production process (Figure 3 and Figure 4). Cassava is a native plant from Brazil, and is a typical Indigenous food that became a

traditional Brazilian food. The scenes show the production of cassava flour as a collective process and visualize all actors involved: women, men, and elderly and young people. The filmmaker explains in an interview that they make the flour with the support of their family. They do this in a process called *mutirão*, the exchange of working days without money. The flour is used for their own consumption and to sell in nearby villages. His father sells the flour. He and his brothers and sisters and mother have to ask for money if they want to buy something. This is fine for him:

"*when it comes to the need to buy something for someone, you take and buy.*"

***Figure 3*** *Frame from 'Produção de Farinho/Making of Flour'.*

***Figure 4*** *Frame from 'Produção de Farinho/Making of Flour'.*

2.4.1.2. Film 'Carneiro Hidráulico/Water Pump'

Another male student from *LICENA*, a son of farmers in Rio Piracicaba, made an instructional film (Video S2) about a self-made water pump. The film demonstrates how the pump moves the water from one area to another area (Figures 5 and 6). The student explains in the film how the pump functions and why he designed and made the pump:

> "*I am using it here to oxygenate the water for the fish and to keep more water in the area. This makes that we have different carp, lambari. It is essential to keep this carneiro, ram working because the spring here has dried up, so the only oxygen which is here for these fishes is through the water pumped down there.*"

Figure 6 shows a fish swimming to the surface for oxygen. Figure 5 demonstrates a pump made of recycled materials and other local resources available. The student, who works part-time as mechanic, states in an interview that he made the pump himself because they did not want to rely on expensive electric pumps. His statement is in line with peasant values of autonomy and relying on local sources. He made the pump five years ago to restore the water level without any ambition to use this water for irrigation. Only after an excursion of *LICENA* to an agroforestry system did he see options to transform his parents' eucalyptus farm to an agroforestry system. After their retirement, he intends to use the water to irrigate the seedlings for the agroforestry system.

***Figure 5*** *Frame from 'Carneiro Hidráulico/Water Pump'.*

***Figure 6*** *Frame from 'Carneiro Hidráulico/Water Pump'.*

2.4.1.3. Film 'Plantas Medicinais/Medicinal Plants'

The film *'Plantas Medicinais/Medicinal* Plants' consists of two videos (Video S3). Both videos were made by a female student from *LICENA* and her grandmother. Together they wrote a script (Figure 7) which indicates the content of the two videos. The first video is about the past use of medicinal plants:

"*People sought healing, through popular knowledge and existing plants in their midst, benefiting from the natural resources of their region".*

In the first video the woman states:

"At that time, people had very little resources in the community. People got sick, people had plants, right?"

The second video shows that despite the emergence of local health centers, people continue to use medicinal plants in the region. The film shows how knowledge is passed over to the next generation, orally and via books (Figure 8). The grandmother, *benzedeira*, a specialist in alternative medicines, learned it from her family and by following a course at the university.

***Figure 7*** *Script from 'Plantas Medicinais/Medicinal Plants'.*

***Figure 8*** *Frame from 'Plantas Medicinais/Medicinal Plants'.*

2.4.1.4. Film 'Flores Para Viver/Flowers to Live"

In the first film workshop in Espera Feliz, which took place on an agroecological farm, one of the girls proposed to make a film about flowers. All participants agreed and they made the film '*Flores para viver/Flowers to Live*' about the different connections they have with flowers: esthetic purposes, promotion of well-being, and for use as food and medicine. In follow-up meetings young people also stressed the importance of flowers to attract bees for the pollination of their crops.

The film starts with a girl singing about flowers. Then, one by one, the filmmakers present a flower and show their affinity with and knowledge about the presented flower. Remarkably, the person is always presented on an equal level with the plant. If the plant grows low on the ground the person kneels, if the plant becomes very large the person stands next to the flower (Figures 9 and 10). Figure 9 depicts a girl caressing the plant with her hand, showing her affection for the plants.

***Figure 9*** *Frame from 'Flores para viver/Flowers to Live'.*

***Figure 10*** *Frame from 'Flores para viver/Flowers to Live'.*

2.4.1.5. Film 'Sem Agricultura Não Existe Juventude/Without Agriculture There Is No Youth'

The reportage '*Sem Agricultura Não Existe Juventude/Without Agriculture There Is No Youth*' is filmed by female and male youth from urban and rural areas in and around Divino. The film was recorded at a youth weekend organized by Pastoral Juventude Rural (PJR) and ECOJOVEM, a youth organization in Divino. Both organizations are linked to the agroecological movement and organize activities for young people from both rural and urban areas in Divino. They consider agroecology to be for both groups of youth without division. The main theme of the weekend was gender, but the program consisted of a variety of workshops. One of the filmmakers stated that this was appealing to him:

> "*being an agroecological farmer, you are not alone working on your farm, you have these meetings*."

The images in the film show the mixture of workshops with traditional practices and innovative practices. For example, local dances were combined with a training on climbing with ropes (Figure 11 and Figure 12), both for sport in nature and to gain experience in safe climbing. Confidence in climbing is important because pruning high

trees is a returning farm practice within agroforestry (an agroecological technique) and farmers have mentioned their fear of climbing high trees in informal talks.

***Figure 11*** *Frame from 'Sem Agricultura Não Existe Juventude/Without Agriculture There Is No Youth'.*

***Figure 12*** *Frame from 'Sem Agricultura Não Existe Juventude/Without Agriculture There Is No Youth'.*

2.4.1.6. Film at Quilombola Macaúbas Palmito Without Title

The film (Video S4) at the Quilombo Macaúbas Palmito, a traditional community of descendants of Black enslaved people, was made by a female *LICENA* student during the school period she spends in her community. Like other films, frames (Figure 13 and Figure 14) and spoken words visualize and valorize the variety of products made by farmers: "Here is our exhibition of handicrafts, carpets, blouses." With the support of a municipal public youth program, Bocaiúva young people and women learned to make this handicraft to achieve some financial autonomy.

The main theme of the film is the commemoration of the Black Consciousness Day. Various popular artworks filmed emphasize the message of this day, such as the poster (Figure 15) with the text: "*Inside we are all the same color.*" The young child in Figure 16, is introduced with the words: "*We have here our princess*". It is an appreciation (of the beauty) of African women, used to emphasize that Black is beautiful (in contrast to the perceived dominant narrative that only white can be beautiful). The filmmaker states that with the formal recognition of the Quilombo Macaúbas Palmito in 2016,

community members started to engage in the national movement of Black rural Quilombolas. Since then, they commemorate this day and started to valorize their African traditions. The filmmaker gives as an example in the interview about the film:

> "*They began to cultivate African culture, their hair looser, to accept that they have curly hair, those things that once were all smoothed and pulled, not now, they are accepting more.*"

***Figure 13*** *Frame from film at Quilombola Macaúbas Palmito without title.*

***Figure 14*** *Frame from 'Ipês de Várias Cores/Ipês in Various Colors'.*

***Figure 15*** *Frame from film at Quilombola Macaúbas Palmito without title.*

***Figure 16*** *Frame from film at Quilombola Macaúbas Palmito without title.*

2.4.1.7. Film 'Ipês de Várias Cores/Ipês in Various Colors'

The film 'Ipês de vários cores/Ipês in Various Colors' was made by a young woman of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) at the MST settlement 'Denis Gonçalves' in Goianá. In the film, the issues of gender and racialized bodies are connected. The film title is symbolic for what the filmmaker wants to bring across with her film.

Contrary to the title, the film portrays no images of the native Ipê trees with blossoms in different colors. The film does portray a diverse group of women (Figure 17) who all had to 'conquer' land for farming. There are images of broken chains and locks (Figure 18) symbolizing Afro-Brazilian women with a history of enslaved families and images of female peasants who used to be rural workers or sharecroppers. One of the women in the film shares her aspiration:

> "*Today we try to unite the women without land.*"

***Figure 17*** *Frame from 'Ipês de Várias Cores/Ipês in Various Colors'.*

***Figure 18*** *Frame from 'Ipês de Várias Cores/Ipês in Various Colors'.*

2.4.1.8. Film 'Preconceitos em Dois Atos/Prejudices in Two Acts'

The film '*Preconceitos em Dois* Atos/Prejudices in Two Acts' is made by sons and daughters of farmers that are member of the peasant union in Espera Feliz. Audio recordings of the script-making of this film, made by a mixed group of young female and male peasants, reveal that they wanted to make a docu-soap and, in line with this format, the film had to have a happy end.

Filmmaker 1: *"I have an idea (...) In this case, I can sell—Let's assume that I am selling the corn to another person and with this money I can go to the faculty."*

Filmmaker 2: "*Incredible, you are already thinking about the future.*"

Notably, the young woman thinks that she needs to pay for follow-up education. She is thinking of enrolling in a private university rather than a public university. Public universities are free in Brazil but it is more difficult get accepted. The possibility of obtaining a grant to pay your daily expenses and enrolling in a public university seems to be out of her scope. Although public policies in Brazil establish a quota and try to democratize access to public universities, many people continue to think that public universities are not for them.

The movie starts with two young persons who laugh at a young female peasant at work. The young female peasant is crying and another person passing by is comforting her: "Don't cry, one day you will succeed to study." Later on in the film we see the young female peasant selling her products (Figure 19) and entering the university. Contrary to the daily reality of many young women in this region as described by the literature on the problems young female peasants face (Moura and Ferrari 2016, Jurna 2017, Brumer 2008), the woman in the film achieved financial

autonomy. In the second part of the film, made by a different group of female and male young peasants, a young female peasant goes to school and at the same time works at the farm. In between the two parts of the film the editors (both groups of young peasants) included the text: “Even with prejudices, many women are proud of what they do”. The second act shows the double workload of the young women; making it visible and appreciating their work. This part ends with a scene in which the main character (Figure 20) is playing football with her brothers, again breaking with presumed gender roles that football is for men. In the second part of the film the narrator of the film is a young Black woman (Figure 21), just like in other films made by the youth. This is noteworthy, as most presenters in the mainstream media in Brazil have a light skin tone.

***Figure 19*** *Frame from ‘Preconceitos em Dois Atos/Prejudices in Two Acts’.*

***Figure 20*** *Frame from ‘Preconceitos em Dois Atos/Prejudices in Two Acts’.*

***Figure 21*** *Frame from ‘Preconceitos em Dois Atos/Prejudices in Two Acts’.*

2.4.1.9. Film ‘Dois Amigos/Two Friends’

The docu-soap “*Dois amigos, Two friends*” is made by young students of the *Escola Família Agrícola,*-EFA Puris, a critical place-based high school in Araponga, directed toward agroecology and initiated by Puri (Indigenous) farmers. The film tells

the story of two friends and the use of pesticides (Figure 22 and Figure 23). One of them is a conventional farmer and the other one is an agroecological farmer. Their different viewpoints become evident in the following conversation in the film:

Conventional farmer: "*If you use this remedy in your cultures, I assure you that you will be surprised, everything stays green.*"
Agroecological farmer: "*But it is not a remedy, is it*?"
Conventional farmer: "*It is*."
Agroecological farmer: "*It is a poison*."

At the end of the film the conventional farmer becomes sick due to the use of pesticides and dies. The film reveals how the lives of agroecological farmers are intertwined with the lives of conventional farmers, representing the reality of the young filmmakers at the school EFA-Puris, who come from both agroecological and conventional farms. The two friends in the film do not have the same ideology but are friends, building on local values of solidarity.

Conventional farmer: "*If you need help, just look for me*".

Agroecological farmer: "*If you need help also...*"

Later in the film the agroecological farmer is there when the conventional farmer becomes sick and dies. The film is reaching out to conventional farmers, trying to build ties with those conventional farmers who care about their own health.

***Figure 22** Frame from 'Dois Amigos/Two Friends'.*

***Figure 23*** *Frame from 'Dois Amigos/Two Friends'.*

*2.4.2. Resignifying Agroecology*

The nine films discussed above all include examples of framing strategies. Three films (Table 3) specifically illustrate *frame bridging* (i.e., linking different societal groups with a similar ideology). These three films mirror Brazilian society which is culturally heterogeneous and moreover has immense social inequality. (Rural) social movements emerged to fight for land reform and social equality and the young agroecologist filmmakers stress the urgency of these issues. To recognize and enhance the diversity of people as well as to grow the agroecological movement, bridges are created with social movements that share the same ideology.

In the film 'Without agriculture there is no youth' one of the interviewed female peasants stresses that agroecology is more than co-production of human activities with natural processes:

> "*Agroecology for me is a way of treating people, animals, especially on the land that we take care of with love. Knowing how to treat the land, knowing that it has life, that it is not only something that we use and throw away, it is about knowing how to care, take this meeting today, this also shows the diversity of people, how these people interact, for me this is agroecology.*"

The young woman makes an analogy between the diversity of the ecosystem and care for land and recognizing the diversity of people and care for people. She is thus resignifying 'care for land' to 'care for land and people'. A follow-up interview with a young peasant who participates in the youth group of *Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia*, (ANA) builds on this idea:

> "*This group is very important because our agroecology today needs more young people, more women and I would say, she needs also more colors. She needs to have people of all ethnicities, she needs all people together, because at the end of the story, agroecology is about diversity*."

In their eyes agroecology is not only about working with biodiversity but also about appreciating cultural diversity.

| Movies | Social Movements | Frames |
|---|---|---|
| *Without agriculture there is no youth* | Various social movements | *"…the diversity of people, how these people interact, for me this is agroecology."* |
| *Film at Quilombola Macaúbas Palmito without title* | Movement of Black rural Quilombolas | "*Inside we are all the same color*" |
| *Ipês in various colors* | Landless Workers' Movement | "*Today we try to unite the women without land.*" |

**Table 3** Frame bridging

The most frequent framing strategy identified in the movies is *frame amplification* (Table 4), in which local values and beliefs are emphasized. *Frame amplification* ensures that frames resonate with potentially interested people (Benford and Snow 2000). Additionally, it is important that processes of transgressive learning start in social movement practices that valorize local culture (Howarth 1997; Rossato 2008).

By re-establishing ancient relationships with nature, suppressed by modernity and the green revolution (Botelho et al. 2016), the meaning of agroecology in the film 'Flowers to live' is resignified from 'co-production with nature' to 'co-production and interconnectedness of humans and nature'. The spoken words in the film and follow-up interviews reveal how people talk about agroecological farming and movement practices in terms of personal relationships. In the film 'Flowers to Live' one of the male characters states:

> "*Because she is a flower… her color is not common in this region and because she is a flower of a very tasteful fruit, you can even make a farofa (typical Brazilian*

*dish of baked cassava flour mixed with other ingredients), there are diverse forms you can feed yourself with her.*"

The film shows how affinity with local nature and culture are interwoven.

The way local practices are filmed, showing complete production processes, close-ups of tools, all people involved, no visual effects, the pure esthetics of these practices (see Figures 3 and 4 from the film 'Making of Flour') reveal how these practices are appreciated by the young filmmakers. The way they filmed it, shows that they are aware of their role of (re)producers of local knowledge on production, and of culture. The filmmaker of 'Making of flour' notes that he wants to continue with making flour, candies and rapadura (candy made from sugar cane). With the new knowledge acquired at *LICENA* he resignified various farming practices at home. For example, he changed from the single cropping of beans to intercropping beans with corn and pumpkin and from using pesticides to using homemade liquids for natural pest management.

| ***Movies*** | **Frames** |
|---|---|
| *Making of Flour* | Collective work to produce flour, *mutirões* |
| *Film at Quilombola Macaúbas*<br>*Palmito without title* | Natural afro hair style without chemical treatment |
| *Medicinal Plants* | Traditional knowledge on healing people with medicinal plants |
| *Flowers to live* | Affective relationships with nature |
| *Without Agriculture There is No Youth* | Traditional farming practices without pesticides |
| *Two Friends* | Solidarity |

**Table 4** Frame amplification.

*Frame extension* (Table 5) is often a result of alignments between social movements which share a similar ideology but emphasizing different issues. The film '*Prejudice in Two Acts*' adds an image of a young female peasant receiving money for her work. The signification of 'peasant autonomy' (Garcia Júnior 1989) is extended to mean 'peasant autonomy for male and female peasants' on their workforce. This type of alignment with the feminist movement present in the local family farmers union is essential for young female peasants. Literature on depeasantization in Zona da Mata

(Moura and Ferrari 2016) shows that if gender issues are not tackled, depeasantization may take place, especially among young female peasants.

Frame extension of agroecology to include feminism was seen to be enhanced by social movement building. In the municipalities where women are organized and embrace feminist ideology, the gender issue is more prominent in the films made by young people. One of the mothers of a young filmmaker, who received an award from former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff for her agroecological work with women in Zona da Mata, explains how the last decade they have been organizing women in Zona da Mata Mineira together with the Centre for Alternative Farming, CTA. She notes that the women came together to talk about violence against women, including structural violence:

> "*Look, the women also have the right to speak, to participate when the money comes in from the production, because many times the women don't participate, they harvest the coffee, they just work, but they don't have their own money, they work in order for other people to have money, this is violence*."

The young people visualize this perspective and bring it into the spotlight. This is less the case in municipalities where women are not organized, as the film *'Dois Amigos/Two Friends'* shows. In this film, women have a passive role and men literally fill up the place (Figures 22 and 23).

| **Movies** | **Frames** |
|---|---|
| *Film at Quilombola Macaúbas Palmito without title* | Image of a young Black actress playing a princess emphasizing that Black is beautiful and symbolizing the struggle against racism |
| *Ipês in Various Colors* | Image of MST flag with broken chains and locks symbolizing the struggle against racism and the fight for land reform |
| *Prejudice in Two Acts* | Young female peasant receives money for her work |

**Table 5** Frame extension.

*Frame transformation* (Table 6) happens when old meanings are significantly re-signified. In the film 'Two Friends' the word 'remedy' for pesticides (the word used by the conventional farmer) is transformed to the word 'poison' for pesticides (the word

used by the agroecological farmer). This type of resignification of farming practices is meaningful. The filmmakers, students from conventional and agroecological farms, note that the transformation toward agroecology started at their farms with using less pesticides, often because of health issues. The students are the first generation within their families who study at *Educação do Campo,* and parents of the students ask, as one of the filmmakers notes:

> "*you are studying at the EFA, so you can explain to me about the ideal practices for planting*".

Others are more reluctant as one of the female students of EFA notes. Yet, students from conventional farms stated in interviews that one of the first things they succeeded at, was to convince their parents to use less or no pesticides. Afterwards they introduced various other agroecological practices into their homes, such as crop diversification, natural pest management and so on. This critical place based education, '*Educação do Campo*' and the teachers vocational training for this type of education, *LICENA* explains partly the observation of (Cacho et al. 2018) that young people have a more agroecological vision than the previous generation in the region.

Notably, young farmers also used the word resignify (resignificar) in the interviews. As another student from LICENA stated in an interview:

> "*what made the difference, to be at peasant to peasant meetings, to go to another community and to see that it works there, let's bring it to our place, but let's resignify, some things, a syrup for natural pest management, sometimes the ingredients, the resources we had were not the same as at the place of the meeting, lately we don't talk about resources but about the kindness of nature.*"

To talk about the kindness of nature instead of nature as resources is also an example of frame transformation, the meaning significantly changed to express the interconnectedness of humans and nature.

| Movies | Frames |
|---|---|
| *Flowers to live* | *"there are diverse forms you can feed yourself with her"* |
| *Two friends* | Conventional farmer: "*If you use this remedy in your cultures, I assure you that you will be surprised, everything stays green.*"<br>Agroecological farmer: "*But it is not a remedy, is it*?"<br>Conventional farmer: "*It is*."<br>Agroecological farmer: "*It is poison*." |

**Table 6** Frame transformation.

*2.4.3. Reflecting on Resignification*

Equivalent chains, as described by (Laclau and Mouffe 2001), can be identified in many of the 85 films. There are equivalent chains made with conventional farmers who care about their health and with traditional farmers who already work with a set of agroecological practices. As one of the interviewed woman in the film 'Without Agriculture There Is No Youth' stated:

> "*Persons, without knowing what agroecology is, know how to manage the land without agro-toxics as this has been passed on from generation to generation*."

A specific contribution of the youth is that they put a spotlight on young, female, Black and LGBT farmers who are also making the transformation to agroecology. By bridging the agroecological movement with the feminist and Black movement, social differences among farmers are equated: they are all agroecological farmers.

Many films made by the young people show that agroecology is not only about producing healthy food, but also about producing other natural based products such as medicinal plants. The filmmaker of 'medicinal plants' and the women from the local women's group she initiated are starting to produce clothes, popular art and biodegradable cleaning, and body products. The agroecological peasants are producing non-food end products which usually tend to be processed in urban areas. For these young peasants, agroecology is not only about producing food, but also about producing all kinds of nature based products which have been made in co-production with nature and with people in the community.

Several of the young peasants explained in the interviews why mostly young and female peasants are involved in processing and selling food and non-food raw materials. These groups often do not have their own land to make a living, so they explore options in the processing of natural materials:

> "*Young people sold some handicraft, cleaning products, soap, some fruit and vegetables. The young people because they aren't yet the owners of the land, they don't have a guaranteed production.*"

In addition to the financial autonomy these women and youth thus achieve, they have the affinity, knowledge, and skills to produce these things which used to pertain to peasantry. The filmmaker of 'medicinal plants' explains that the idea to start a production collective of women emerged during an excursion of *LICENA* to another women's organization in the region.

Multiple framing strategies were often depicted in a single film and thus clearly form a topic of relevance for the young filmmakers. For example, the film 'Medicinal Plants' is an example of the simultaneous use of *frame amplification*, *frame extension* and *frame transformation*. *Frame amplification,* because the women make products which used to pertain to peasantry. *Frame extension*, as agroecological products are more than food and, as such, the meaning of agroecology *transforms* from the ecology of the food system to the ecology of the system of natural products.

Images of production were emphasized in many of the films. This can be explained as a strategy for dealing with existing prejudices locally and in the mass media against women, peasants, African descendants, and MST. As a young filmmaker in Espera Feliz states:

> "*I don't care much but when it's too much I say, "Everything comes from the fields, the rice you eat comes from the countryside, the beans that you eat, nothing comes from the industry. It might come from food industry but it is first produced at the farm."* And: "*When you have to present, they ask what's your name, where do you come from? My name is.., I'm from Vargem Grande (neighborhood at the countryside), so everyone starts like this "he is from the countryside", and everyone keeps repeating this*."

One of the interviewed males in the film ‘Without agriculture there is no youth’ refers to prejudices against farmers in the film:

“*My message to youth is to not be ashamed for being at the countryside, too make dirty your hands in the earth, to sweat the entire day, to do hard work because the entire society depends on us, without us nobody eats, wears clothes, there’s no other way.*”

The variety of natural products shown in the films is not only *frame extension*: Agroecology entails more than producing sustainable food: it is also a strategy to *transform* the negative connotation of peasantry into a positive connotation.

The filmmaking process created many moments of reflection for the young farmers themselves, some of which were fed into and transformed peasant and social movement organizations. One of girls noted during the editing of another film about prejudices:

> “*We do not like to talk about it. It’s difficult to say, for example, in a school environment, when you have a lecture about pride, about racism, this person is practically speaking alone, it’s very difficult for somebody to express themselves about these issues, even for fear of repression by their colleagues.*”

In the course of the production of the film ‘Prejudices in Two Acts’ discussions on gender, racialized bodies and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) (farmers) popped up without intervention from the researcher. A young peasant who participates in the youth group of ANA and is descendant of the Indigenous group Puri explains that it are the young people who put issues such as cultural diversity on the agenda of ANA:

> “*Look, what we already put on the agenda is the participation.. a higher participation of Black people, Indigenous people, the traditional populations, this was the claim we put there. Also the participation of LGBTs (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgenders), this was also stressed. These are demands that come from the youth, but also from other groups.*”

At the regional preparation meetings in Zona da Mata for the national meeting on agroecology, the IV ENA in May 2018, it were also the young people who were publicly stating that feminism, the struggle against racism and homophobia are an essential part

of agroecology. Through these actions the youth reaffirmed themselves as protagonists (Howarth 1997; Moura and Ferrari 2016) in social movement organizations and broadened the social and environmental justice spectrum in which these organizations work.

*Educação do Campo* and *LICENA*, critical place-based education based on the work of (Freire 2011) played a significant role in the recognition of local sustainable farming practices as agroecology. This type of education acknowledges and valorizes local knowledge on agroecological farming and the diversity among agroecological farmers. Students of this education are engaged to re-work local knowledge and experiment in their community via a 'personal professional project'. The filmmaker of the 'Film at Quilombola Macaúbas Palmito without title' explains that she learned at LICENA that their farming practices are agroecological practices:

"*The community didn't know the term agroecology but those who have access to school and outsiders recognized the agroecological practices*."

In the same interview another student from the same Quilombola states that she wants to start an agroforestry system after the excursion of *LICENA* to an agroforestry system:

> *"In relation to the community I have the desire to become an ecologist, I have to be able to buy a bigger piece of land and to make a PP area, which is an area of Permanent Preservation within my property*".

Finally, the music of the movies was carefully selected by the filmmakers. The film 'Flowers to Live' starts and ends with a song about flowers. In the song references are made to spiritual experiences: "*I am a little flower of Jesus, I am a little flower of Jesus, open your mouth to sing…*" The flowers are a metaphor to express people's place on earth. Comparisons with nature are used for expression of local culture, in which spiritual references are also used to articulate their relation with nature. The music of the film 'Making of Flour', called '*Pausada de Boiadeiro*' of Tião Carreiro e Pardinho underlines the importance of memories "*I remember this of my childhood*", and of culture "*the guitar becomes the compass of my heart"*. At the union's school for rural youth in Espera Feliz a young female filmmaker noted that instruments such as guitar and accordion are characteristic for their culture. The music is in line with the content

and images of the film, such as the images of the *mutirão* which show the use of frame amplification, the building on local culture. The song in the film 'Medicinal Plants', (Brandão) affirms the interconnectedness of humans and nature: *"It is mother nature who ensures that we are going to be cured."*

**2.5. Discussion**

The ongoing request for film workshops indicates that social movements, organizations linked to the agroecological movement, and education in agroecology in Zona da Mata Mineira, Brazil are interested in exploring new affordable techniques, such as films made on smartphones, to share their knowledge, ideas, and values. Calvet-Mir et al. (2018) indicate that digital means can indeed be very promising for sharing what they call Traditional Agroecological Knowledge (TAeK). The nine films analyzed in this paper and the broader reflection on all films and the workshops reveal that young agroecologists recognize the value of traditional knowledge, culture and social struggles, and at the same time play an important role in resignifying farming practices. They show, as (Gohn 2011) also points out, that the development of new knowledge involves new forms of communication and networks of articulation.

An additional value of the film-making is that some of the "docu-soaps" reveal taboos and the struggle to overcome values that marginalize others. The majority of young people involved in this research recognize patriarchal and racist values in their communities and try to replace these values. In a few cases young people admitted to having previously displayed some of this behavior and showed feelings of shame. The soap-genre allows them to discuss issues they do not want to speak about in their own name. During the making of the films and interviews, the young people also talked about sensitive issues such as homosexuality. The fact that these young people discuss taboos can be explained through the liminal phase concept: during this phase the youth are engaged and united in a period of reflection. This phase is also enhanced by practices of social movements, including the film-workshops and critical place-based education which creates moments of reflection on their own realities and enhances students' capacities to articulate themselves.

Interestingly, the young agroecologists who identify themselves as sons and daughters of farmers, young peasants, students, and activists themselves use the word

'resignificar' for agroecological farming practices they and/or their parents appropriated. These young people are conscious of the politics of resignification as described by Lloyd (2018) and Butler (1993). Young people acquired the abilities for these resignification practices at critical place-based education initiatives by social movements. By resignifying farming practices toward social-ecological sustainability, the youth contribute to sustainable agro-forest landscapes. This indicates that resignification processes are an essential part of the social system within the social-ecological system approach. Indeed, the films themselves can be understood as examples of framing strategies that others can learn from.

The social-economic situation of these young peasants partly explains the frame transformation of agroecology to the ecology of the system of natural products. The processing of food, wood, popular art, medicinal plants, clothes, biodegradable cleaning and body products among other natural products without the use of chemicals and other external inputs characterizes repeasantization as a transformation pathway toward agroecology. Subsequently, young peasants and female farmers foresee possibilities in producing a variety of products to achieve financial autonomy as noted during the interviews. The films underline that this diversification relies on the co-production (sharing of knowledge, skills, affinity and workforce) among populations, generations, and gender in addition to co-production of humans and living nature as described by Van der Ploeg (2008, p. 35).

Critical place-based education and social movement practices in Zona da Mata are directed toward valorizing peasant culture to engage young and traditional—and conventional—farmers in a process of valorizing traditional knowledge on sustainable farming practices such as intercropping, and understanding their place in society. The first focus of this type of education is repeasantization, in the quantitative and qualitative meaning of the word, without making explicit use of the word 'repeasantization'. Agroecology is only introduced after some time when the young people from conventional farms acknowledge the legacy of the peasantry and naturally encounter the term agroecology at various occasions. Statements of the filmmakers indicate that by following *Educação do Campo* and/or *LICENA*, critical place-based education, they recognize existing agroecological farming practices at their homes and start new agroecological farming practices, such as an agroforestry system or a women's production collective. It is the use of Freire's (2011) pedagogy, which

emphasizes the diversity among students and the value of local culture, that distinguishes this type of education from other agricultural education.

It is important to highlight the positive affirmation of agroecology that can result from resignifying a broad range of practices by young people. Young people do not refer to the dominant discourse which is about young people leaving the countryside. Their films, for example 'Flowers to live' reveal what attracts them, their values and beliefs, their affect with nature and with local culture, and how both are intertwined. While 'green revolution' techniques were only partially adopted due to the high costs involved (Botelho et al. 2016), values and beliefs around nature were amplified in the films the young people made. More generally, farmers' engagement in agroecology and in transformative learning processes in the past three decades in Zona da Mata have led to a revival of traditional knowledge and a strengthening of farmers' relationships with nature and local culture (Botelho et al. 2016).

## 2.6. Conclusions

The films and interviews show that the rise of critical place-based education in Brazil has been essential for repeasantization. Repeasantization as both a quantitative movement of especially youth returning or starting to farm and as a qualitative movement that involves co-production between humans and nature to strengthen peasant livelihoods. The pedagogy of Freire, used in critical place-based education in Brazil, engaged youth in a process of valorizing and re-working peasant knowledge and values. The young people build on the frames they already have to resignify such values and, thus, to help redefine agroecology (Van Dijk 2017). The making of films, which includes selecting film scenes, characters, titles, and so on, is a meaningful tool in this process.

This study shows how space for young agroecologists to re-signify agroecology can be constituted and extended. Next to critical place-based education, the social-economic situation of these young peasants and the liminal phase ensured the capacities of young agroecologists, their so called "situated ability" (Howarth et al. 2016), to refine their notion of agroecology and engage in framing strategies. These framing strategies includes bridging with social movements and building on peasant values. Strategies to resignify are on the one hand applied to resignify existing sustainable farming practices of women, traditional farmers, Indigenous farmers, Black farmers at Quilombolas as

agroecological practices and, on the other hand to existing unsustainable farming practices at their homes and communities by transforming these to agroecological practices. To do this they build on the legacy of the peasantry.

In conclusion, this study confirms that young people have an important role in the transformation toward agroecology (Moura and Ferrari 2016; Londres et al. 2017; McCune, Rosset, Salazar, et al. 2017; Cacho et al. 2018). By resignifying agroecology as a transformation movement for sociobiodiversity, youngsters are opening up spaces for women, Black, Indigenous, urban, and LGBTs in the agroecological movement. In addition, by following critical place-based education directed toward agroecology, young farmers build on peasant knowledge and contribute to the transformation of farming practices and landscapes by expanding and transforming that knowledge. The transformation toward agroecology itself is thus resignified as a movement of repeasantization that reworks local culture so that it is more inclusive of different populations, generations and genders, and that fosters an appreciation of co-production and the interconnectedness of humans and nature.

# CHAPTER 3 POPULAR EDUCATION, YOUTH AND PEASANT AGROECOLOGY IN BRAZIL


## Abstract

Most young people engaged in agroecology in Zona da Mata Mineira, Brazil, participate in popular education. Popular education is a Latin-American concept that entails transformative learning, among others. Despite the large body of literature on popular education, there is little knowledge about how it supports reflection, enhances situated abilities, and affects relationships between young farmers and nature. This article looks at popular education practices in Zona da Mata in three different places: a family farming high school, a youth organization, and a workers' union school. Each place gives special attention to agroecology. Based on participatory observations, video recordings, films made by youth, interviews and analysis of educational materials this article visualizes how young people become engaged in peasant agroecology through the use of affective experiences, relationship-building, and reflection in popular education. Our findings show that the pedagogic method of alternation used at the family farming high school fosters on-farm learning experiences between young farmers and their parents. At the workers' union school and at the youth organization intentional leisure activities promoted joy, spirituality, activism and peasant culture, with joy becoming an explicit organizing force. We conclude that, in our cases, popular education positively supports, often in unexpected ways, relations young agroecological farmers have with their parents, nature, and youth from conventional farms.



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## 3.1. Introduction

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) state that agroecology is a pathway to address various sustainable development goals (SDGs), to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and to preserve biodiversity (FAO 2018b; Diaz et al. 2019). Agroecology is also an approach toward food sovereignty. It provides a set of principles to enhance relationships among people, farming and nature to ensure the autonomy of farmers and to transform food systems (Anderson et al. 2019). Agroecology is seen by some as simultaneously being a science, an agricultural practice, and a social movement (Wezel et al. 2009).

Various authors state that horizontal pedagogical approaches and transformative learning practices in social movement organizations are key drivers for scaling-out agroecology to increase its uptake among farmers (Schwendler and Thompson 2017; Cacho et al. 2018; Anderson et al. 2019). Transformative learning practices that aim to scale out agroecology in Latin-American are part of what is called "popular education". Popular education, both in schools and in social movement practices, aims to form subjects that can transform their realities so that these become more socially and environmentally just (Freire 1968; Brandão 2006; Caldart 2012; Brazil 2014).

The practices through which popular education specifically enhances relationships among people and between people and nature are important for agroecology. In this article, we argue that such "scaling out" of agroecology is very much about relationality. For the aim of food sovereignty to be combined with environmental objectives more knowledge is needed about how practical relationships among people and between people and nature can become socially and environmentally just through popular education. The article explores how popular education engages young people in peasant agroecology and how practical experiences, including affects, and moments of reflection support the altering of relationships between people and nature. The ability to affect and be affected can alter the capacity to act (Deleuze and Guattari 2005). Reflection is about human beings questioning reality and becoming aware that realities shape them and are shaped by them, and thus can be changed by them. Freire stated that authentic reflection concerns people's relationships with the world (Freire 2016).

Popular education is often initiated by rural social movements, and varies from primary schools to adult courses and university degrees (McCune et al. 2017). Popular education involves the reproduction of a collective historical subject that has the situated abilities to face social and ecological injustice. Moreover, meaningful relationships are known to emerge among students in popular education (McCune, Rosset, Cruz Salazar, et al. 2017). In practice, this means that popular education can ensure the long-term survival of peasant organizations and strengthen collective agency. Social movements and governmental bodies may also share responsibility for popular education on peasant knowledge and values with peasant families and communities. The latter has been the case in Brazil, as we further discuss below.

The focus of this article is on practices of popular education taking place with young people in Zona da Mata, in Minas Gerais, Brazil. It first discusses the history of popular education in Brazil, and places the concept of popular education in direct dialogue with ideas on transformative learning, critical place-based learning, and affect. The study uses a multi-modal (Rose 2011) and multi-sited (Leonard 2009) methodology. The findings highlight how popular education alters relationships in society through affect, joy and reflection. In turn, this supports social movements that champion the cause of agroecology as well as other ideals.

## 3.2. The trajectory of popular education in Brazil, its features, and the role of affect

In Brazil, in the past, the curriculum of formal education was mostly directed toward the future career of a small urban elite. The value of the countryside – including its inhabitants - was, and often still is treated as inferior to that of the city. Prejudices about farmers were reproduced in school curricula and within schools in rural areas. In addition, formal education led to de-skilling as farmers´ skills and other vocational skills were not part of the curriculum (McCune et al. 2017, p.194). The effect of this policy can be seen in the inequality of access to education between rural and urban populations. While 16.7% of the rural population never attended any school, the number is 8.5% for the urban population (IBGE 2013, cited in Braga 2015). This situation was already heavily criticized by Paulo Freire, an educator and philosopher, in his influential book ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ (1970). Freire rejected any form of instrumental literacy process (Freire 1970), and dedicated himself to emancipatory education by

engaging students of all classes of society in a dialogue about the reality they lived and shaped, and which formed the basis of popular education. During dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985) Freire had to live in exile, and his work on the ground was put on hold. Underground however the call for popular education continued.

The call for popular education is about recognizing and valuing the different local cultures, knowledges, livelihoods, social struggles and spiritual beliefs of all those who partake in diverse learning practices. Popular education is committed to 1) dialogue; 2) affect; 3) the protagonism of popular classes; 4) the systematization, production and articulation of different knowledges and practices; 5) participatory research; 6) raising critical consciousness. In popular education, this is always 7) in relation to the reality of the people involved and committed to popular classes (Freire 1968; Brandão 2006; Brazil 2014).

It was within the struggles of *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra* (the Landless Workers Movement - MST) and other social movements that learning practices for rural youth with a focus on *Educação do campo* were constructed following the principles of popular education (Brandão 2006). They stated that rural education, *Educação "no" campo*, (education on the countryside), should be changed in *Educação "do" campo*, (education of the countryside) (Santos 2017, p.212, Caldart p.261). Within social movement organizations, part of popular education efforts became dedicated to the formation of young people. Young people began to identify themselves with the category of youth, and youth associations emerged in rural social movements and unions. The youth organizations and union schools addressed specific issues of young people while at the same time acknowledging the diversity of youth (de Castro 2016b). The work of the *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* (Grassroots Ecclesial Communities - CEBs) of the Catholic Church took place in parallel to that of the MST, and led to the First Family Farming schools for young people, *Escolas Famílias Agrícolas* (EFA's) and Rural Family Houses or *Casas Familiares Rurais* (CFR's) from the 1980s onwards (Ribeiro 2008). The first Family Farming Schools and Rural Family Houses, both considered *Educação do Campo,* thus already started before the end of the dictatorship in Brazil and before public policies on *Educação do Campo* were in place.

With the approval of the constitution in 1988 and the process for re-democratization of Brazil, the space to discuss and institutionalize *Educação do Campo* was expanded. The national law (LDBEN, Lei 9.394/96) for example states that

curriculum and methodology of secondary schools should be of interest to rural youth, and aligned with the agricultural calendar, seasonal conditions and work at the countryside (Brazil 1996). Other public policies to support *Educação do Campo* followed: *Programa Nacional de Educação na Reforma Agrária* (Pronera), a public program to support education at settlements of agrarian reform, and *Programa de Apoio à Formação Superior em Licenciatura em Educação do Campo* (Procampo), a public program to support vocational training for teachers at *Educação do Campo*. Both programs were established and carried out in cooperation with and under the political pressure of social movement organizations (Santos 2017). Specifically, MST ensures that regional and national meetings across movements take place to share experiences with formation processes and to collectively demand policies that support these learning practices.

*Features of popular education*

In popular education, following the method of place-based learning, a student first acquire knowledge of those things most close to him/her and then of things farther and farther away (Sobel 2004). The work of Freire on critical pedagogy already makes references to place by referring to students as beings 'in a situation', meaning the temporal/spatial conditions that form them and that are formed by them (Freire 1968). Sobel explains that place-based learning starts with the food you eat and the place you live and belong to. This engages students simultaneously in a process of feeling of belonging through affective relationships and of reflection. Place-based learning is about learning in the community through hands-on, real-word experiences, and also about preparing students to live in harmony with nature and with each other. To do this, students must know the specific ecology, politics and other characteristics of that place (Woodhouse and Knapp 2000). Schoolbooks for common education do not meet this demand (Sobel 2004).

Pedagogy of alternation is a methodology used in popular education where students learn for a certain period at school, *Tempo Escola,* and another period in the community, *Tempo Comunidade*. This pedagogy has its origins in France in 1935, where parents and young farmers searched for a school system that allows them to learn from their families and in their community, and at schools that recognize and value their lives and work. The pedagogy of alternation enables young people to become familiar with traditional and scientific knowledge (Santos 2017), builds on the work experience

of young people, and prevents that young people's ties with family and territory become less strong (Ribeiro 2008).

Popular education also includes elements of critical pedagogy. The latter draws attention to dynamics of race, power, place, and multi-culturalism: "*Critical pedagogy offers an agenda of cultural decolonization, place-based education leads the way toward ecological re-inhabitation*" (Gruenewald 2003, p. 310). Shumba (2012) and Barbosa (2017) further discuss the heritage of colonialism in education and the need to contextualize education. They propose diversity and a non-European, local lens to look at the world. For hooks (1994), the work of Freire stimulates to look at those subjects most disadvantaged by oppressive forces. Ruitenberg (2005), in turn, states that core concepts such as experience, place and community of popular education need to be discussed. Place and place-making is done by the trans-local acknowledging of the ongoing relationship between the local and the global. Ruitenberg (2005) therefore proposes community as a community-to-come to be inclusive to others outside the community. Chaves et al. (2017) agree and emphasize that popular education is about seeing diversity as a productive force.

Popular education, finally, includes reflective practice. This stimulates students to look to, and systemically connect with their environment, and to face feelings (Davies 2012). Elaborating on Krogh and Jolly (2012), the ability to critically reflect does not necessarily mean that young people have to become engaged in peasant agroecology. However, a positive emotional and meaningful relationship with nature is an important premise for undertaking positive acts for preserving biodiversity. The term 'relationship-based experiential learning' expresses this insight. Sobel (2004; 2019) finds that students must build a relationship with nature for experiential learning to take place, and states that the ties students have with their community and their natural environment are strengthened by place-based education.

*Affect*

Freire discusses affect as dialogical: "*The act of love is in committing to your cause. The cause of liberation. But this commitment, because affective, is dialogical (...). If I don't love the world, if I don't love life, if I don't love men / women, I can't dialogue*" (Freire in Brazil 2014, p. 24). Freire points at affective abilities that are essential for a dialogue. Specifically, humility and hope are two important features in setting and persisting dialogues for reflection and learning. Hope releases positive

energy and humility lets people be open to life experiences in which they both affect and are affected (Freire 2016).

Various affective modes of being are possible and shape the capacity to act: *"Affect is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include "mental" or ideal bodies)"*(Deleuze and Guattari 2005, p.8). Interpretations of Deleuze's work describe the role of affect in education as a connective element that allows for building relationships (Cole 2011; Cole and Mirzaei Rafe 2018). Two roles of affect can be distinguished for the purpose of education: 1) undermining authoritarianism, or 'unmaking', and 2) developing unexpected social-cultural relationships. Popular education entails both the first and the second role of affect. This article in particular investigates the possibilities of multiple relationships that are being constructed and altered by popular education (Cole 2011; Cole and Mirzaei Rafe 2018).

Affect is considered a 'becoming' - the construction of capacities of any kind of body and other material, social and abstract entities (Fox and Alldred 2014). All these entities exist in relation to each other and not by itself. A concrete example of how affect shapes the capacity to act is given by Singh (2013). She describes a process of how villagers in Odisha, India regenerate degraded forest by affective, collective labor, environmental care practices and communication among villagers and with nature. Singh notes that in affective labor "*mind and body, reason and passion, intellect and feeling are all employed together*" (Singh, 2013, p. 189). This indicates that being affected, reflection and embodiment all take place at once.

The work of Sherwood et al. (2018) use the example of the Carcelen's Solidarity & Agroecology fair to show how people's abilities to affect and be affected is situated in a specific place. They also describe how a process of simultaneously being affected, being reflexive, and being embodied can engage a diverse group of people in transgressing boundaries, including rural-urban, peasant-professional and so on. Both Sherwood (2018) and Singh (2013) indicate that the building and strengthening of unexpected relationships in popular education often take place outside formal school settings. In addition, Singh (2013) and also Cole (2011) note that affect and joy are an organizing force. These insights are applied to the cases of three places of learning in Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais, as introduced below.

### 3.3. Methodology

This multi-modal (Rose 2011) and multi-sited (Leonard 2009) ethnographic study was carried out in three municipalities in Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais, Brazil. It includes two years of participatory observations, a selection of 71 audio-visual recordings and 15 audio recordings by the first author. In addition, it analyses 19 films scripted, recorded and edited by youth during film workshops facilitated by the first author, 21 in-depth interviews with educators and students, and a set of educational materials for and by students. The facilitating of film workshops was a request made by the coordinators of the family farming school, youth organizations and rural workers' union to align the research with their interests and to ensure reciprocity between researchers, educators and students. All youth and educators involved in this research provided their informed consent to use the films made by them and to use the audio-visual recordings made by the first author for research purposes. The audio-visual recordings for the films edited by youth were mostly made without the presence of the first-author and facilitator of the film workshops, and disclose issues we may not have witnessed by participatory observations alone (Goris et al. 2015). The audio-visual recordings made by the first author enabled us to review observation data several times (Heath et al. 2010). All audio-visual recordings and films were subjected to a content analysis. A selection of three films made by youth and three audio-visual recordings by the first author are discussed in more detail in this article to illustrate the general findings.

*Agroecology and popular education in Zona da Mata Mineira*

Zona da Mata is situated in the state of Minas Gerais and is part of the Atlantic Forest biome which was historically largely covered by forest. The colonialization of Zona da Mata turned the area into a mining and coffee region. The coffee production grown in monoculture on the hills led to deforestation, deterioration of the soil, lowered water quality and quantity, created dependency on external markets, and led to a loss of food sovereignty (Cardoso et al. 2001; Botelho et al. 2016). From the 1980s onward, a growing group of peasants in Zona da Mata became engaged in transformative changes toward agroecology, previously framed as alternative agriculture. It started with peasants discussing their concerns about social and environmental problems and exchanging experiences on what to do in the CEBs. These CEBs were already

established during the 1960s (Botelho et al. 2016; Berg et al. 2018). The meetings of the CEBs take place on the farm and the whole family (including children and youth) participate in these critical bible readings. Since the beginning, popular education on agroecology takes place at various localities. In this research, three places of learning in Zona da Mata, which center on agroecology and which are specifically for young people, are studied in-depth. These are 1) the EFA-Puris in Araponga, 2) PRJ and Ecojovem in Divino and 3) the union school in Espera Feliz.

*EFA – Puris in Araponga*

Situated in the municipality of Araponga, EFA- Puris is one of 26 *Escolas Famílias Agrícolas (Educação do Campo)* in the state of Minas Gerais (Vieira 2018). The name of the school makes reference to the Purí indigenous group, as the majority of the population of Araponga are Purí descendants (de Campos 2006). It is a high school with about 60 students founded in 2008. EFA-Puris works with the pedagogy of alternation, where students spend 15 days living and studying at school, and 15 days living and studying in their communities. The school has its own curriculum, but shares subjects of the common basic curriculum such as mathematics and English as well as disciplines appropriate to the reality of the region (Vieira 2018). Their disciplines have to be approved by regional, state and national governments. Special about EFA-Puris is the recurring approval for agroecology as a discipline.

*PJR and Ecojovem in Divino*

Since the 1940s, rural youth with a religious identity were organized politically in the Agrarian Catholic Youth (JAC) (Silva 2006; Cerioli 2013). In 1983, the *Pastoral da Juventude Rural* (PJR) was established. PJR is organized in local groups in the countryside and works with the reflection method of Freire, 'see-judge-act', and engages with the international peasant movement la Via Campesina (Cerioli 2013). For PJR, spirituality is seen as the force that moves practice. In the municipality of Divino the youth organization PJR is closely working together with the peasant union *Sindicato dos Trabalhadores na Agricutlura Familiar* (SINTRAF). The formation school is called Ecojovem. The workshops, events, and popular education on peasant agroecology that PJR and Ecojovem organize together every two months are attended by 10 to 100 young people aged 14-35.

*Escolinha Sindical in Espera Feliz*

Every second year the SINTRAF of Espera Feliz organises a union school for young people, an *Escolinha Sindical*. The union school started in the 1990s but changed over time. Previously, the union school was for union leaders, but since 2004 it aims to engage and educate sons and daughters of union members to ensure a future generation of union leaders. Every two months over a period of two years 20 to 40 young people come together for a weekend school. The curriculum of this union school consists of local culture, *mística*[1], *terreiro cultural* (cultural encounters), affectivity and sexuality, gender, public policies and economic analysis, unionism, globalization, agroecology, the role of youth in society, and more. These type of union schools are also organized by SINTRAF and other peasant unions in other places in Brazil. Many of these schools introduce agroecology to participants.

### 3.4. Findings: Affect, relationships, and reflection in popular education practices

*EFA – Puris in Araponga*

The pedagogical instruments of EFA Puris, following the pedagogy of alternation, include a study plan, excursions, internships, keeping a diary, and carrying out a young professional project (personal livelihood plan for the future), among other things (Vieira 2018). These pedagogical instruments align school time with community time. The students have to study their own lives during community time and present and discuss this later at school. The logic of the school subject's content follows the themes derived from the reality of the students and not from the schoolbooks. To follow this logic, the plan of the first year includes: "*Puri roots, my family and their work on the land, native plants and animal species, regional access to land, water supply in our region, regional popular cultural events" (Educational material, study plan 1st year, p1)* The study plan for the second year includes studying (self)organizations that support peasant agroecology, specifically "*the rural social movements and support bodies and organizations for family farming in Brazil." (Educational material, study plan 2nd year, p1)* The plan for the third year includes discussing the role of power agents and public

[1] Mistica is a spiritual encounter that unites Christian (mainly Catholic) and Indigenous and African religious elements to bring energy, focus and harmony to feel love for a cause (Issa 2007; Hammond 2014).

policies, specifically the "*public policies for the countryside."(Educational material, study plan 3rd year, p1)* The content of the study plans are as much as possible integrated in the school subjects for the common basic curriculum such as history or biology and, where necessary, in extra subjects such as agroecology.

The students at EFA Puris come from conventional and agroecological farms, and from rural towns in the region of Araponga. Students that come from conventional farms show that they are affected by popular education. In interviews they state that they want to use less or no pesticides at their farm, thereby altering their relationship with nature, and their parents' relationship with nature:

> "*... and I was thinking about experimenting with agroecological coffee too, as there is a demand for the project here at school. (...) I want to decrease the use of pesticides, trying to have one part with conventional coffee and one part with more agroecological coffee without using agrochemicals." (Mario, student EFA Puris)*

The student refers to the experiments with agroecology, '*project here at school*' which are part of the homework to do during community time. Another student wants to stop the use of pesticides:

> "*Now and then my father uses pesticides in the fields and I want to change that… I will just have technical education here and help him stop using pesticides." (Igor, student EFA Puris)*

Also, relationships among students are built or altered at EFA-Puris. A student from Divino, that graduated at EFA-Puris explains that relationships between students of the same cohort continue via WhatsApp after graduation:

> "*There is a boy, who graduated with me, he works in Araponga and he participates in the issue of organic coffee, so the same as here at home, it is very difficult to grow coffee, so we are always exchanging. For instance, I send them a coffee plant they say what they need, so we are interacting well, it's not just gossip as others say." (Pedro, former student EFA Puris)*

Relationships, in which other entities like plants are a part of, continue even though face-to-face meetings are difficult because of the long distances between the municipalities and costs of transportation.

Patriarchal culture causes problems and conflicts at EFA-Puris. The coordinator states that the female students are still very submissive and she wonders whether this is because of fear or not. A female student refers to machismo by male students and to the role of the educators:

> *"Sometimes boys are more macho: 'no, you may leave it, let us handle it.' Girls don't need to do this but sometimes the monitor says: no, even a little, she has to do it. Because if she doesn't do the practice on the ground, how will they learn? So it depends on the monitor."(Carol, student EFA Puris)*

The attitude toward girls and women is also constraining the girls who want to do field experiments (homework) at their homes during the community time. The student describes how her father talks to her when she wants to convince him to use no pesticides:

> "*…he says: what's this girl? You know nothing, let me use my product here that I know. No, dad, but you will kill the plant. Oh no, that is good for the plant. However, comparing with amount that he used in the past, nowadays he uses a lot less.*" *(Carol, student EFA Puris)*

Words, like 'kill' used by the student reveal affection toward the plant and a process of reflection. On the one hand the example illustrates how patriarchal relations make it more difficult to do agroecological experiments at home. On the other hand enacting affect coupled with reflection engages the parents in a transformation process. The student affirms that her father uses fewer pesticides nowadays. Two relationships are unexpectedly altered. First, the fathers' decreased use of pesticide shows that in practice he does take his daughter's opinion into account, altering the daughter-father relationship. And, second the relationship of the father with nature is altered by more environmentally just farming practices.

Another female student noted that not all boys internalized the household tasks at the school that are equally divided among boys and girls. She refers to her brother who also attends EFA-Puris:

> "*At the EFA he does, he washes the pans, he makes coffee, he washes the dishes, but at home he doesn't do these tasks. (...) it's something that comes from the family and the family also has to put forward this, educate, that the boys can contribute.* " *(Renate, student EFA Puris).*

Patriarchal culture is also visible with regard to LGBTs. A female student noted:

> "*I said: homophobic because I thought he was biased with our friend there (...) I think the school is ready to receive (LGBT students), the students not. (Carol, student EFA Puris)*

The stories of the students show that patriarchal culture is an issue. The students become acquainted with other values at school but at the same time reproduce inequalities at home. Concerning this subject, it is pertinent to align popular education within the families and communities with popular education at schools such as EFA-Puris. One way young people want to align popular education at school and in the community is via intentional leisure activities. A graduate student of EFA-Puris foresees opportunities to talk about agroecology at local soccer competitions that he organizes:

> "*You have to use the means that are more pleasing to youth. Why go to a crowded room just to hear someone passing a lecture? I will personally go, but I do not like it. So this is our proposal, to seek the easiest ways. (Lucas, graduate student EFA Puris)*"

Film-making also appeared to be an easy way to align popular education at school with popular education within the family and community. The films made during the community time create mediated dialogues when viewed during school time. The film *'Nos caminhos da Agroecologia*/In the pathways of agroecology' #1 is made by a group of three female and three male students of EFA-Puris and shows how young people are affected by people's interactions with nature. In the film they are walking at

the farm talking about agroecology. Figure 24 portrays a girl worried when she is talking about the use of agrochemicals in conventional agriculture and figure 25 depicts the hope they have in agroecology. The film ends with five of them yelling 'Agroecology is life' (figure 25). Figure 25 also shows how the making-of the film as part of the curriculum alters the relationships between the students and that they experience hope in the relationships built with peers. The personal stories on agroecology by the young filmmakers of '*Nos caminhos da agroecologia*/In the pathways of agroecology' show the interconnection of affection with nature, for instance when one of them talks about the well-being of nature. '*Bem-estar*/Well-being' is a word mostly used when referred to people but in the film, she uses the word to refer to nature:

> "*Agroecology, she works with ecological management of natural resources prioritizing the diversity among the cultures. Not working with monoculture, that is the planting of a single plant, but doing intercropping, crop rotations, aiming at the* ***well-being*** *of nature and the people who live around because it does not only work with plants, but with society.*"

***Figure 24*** *frames from the film 'Nos caminhos da agroecologia/In the pathways of agroecology' (Film made by youth #1).*

***Figure 25*** *frames from the film 'Nos caminhos da agroecologia/In the pathways of agroecology' (Film made by youth #1).*

Audio-visual recording #14 of a school-presentation on a personal livelihood plan on agroecological coffee shows that fellow students engage each other in a transformative learning process. In the recording, one of the students asks a colleague:

"*do you plan to grow your coffee conventional or organic? Agroecological? Why?*"

Another fellow student asks*:*

> "*But look people, you know that for agroecological coffee you need to diversify but if you see this photo*" (she is pointing at the photo in the power point presentation of her colleague, depicting coffee in a monoculture system)

At one point the educator asks: "*Who benefits from this coffee?*"

During the entire session, the educator sits among the students and most of the time just listens (Figure 26). The educator is the last person on the right. Figure 26 shows that the power balance between educators and students is altered, showing the first role of affect 'undermining authoritarianism' (Cole 2011). Dialogue as a method of popular education is internalized by the students to discuss different understandings of reality. The fact that the students come from conventional and agroecological farms does not stand in between them. Affect and reflection are enacted at the same time.

***Figure 26*** *course setting, educator (mentor at EFA) sits among the students (audio-visual recording made by first author # 14).*

*PJR and Ecojovem in Divino*

Ecojovem is described as a union school. The union school often collaborates with PJR to arrange workshops. A recurring theme in the curriculum of Ecojovem and its activities organized with PJR is peasant culture. One of the coordinators explains how they want to engage and affect young people:

> "*This year we were more focused on the formation in culture, to strenghten the peasant identity, right, of the person being proud of being rural youth, proud to find out about their roots.*" (Geusa, coordinator PJR and Ecojovem)

The workshops PJR and Ecojovem organize often respond to requests from people, varying from making ecological sanitary products to restoration of a spring by bringing and planting seedlings. The workshops provide the young people with experiences that assemble their concerns, needs, and feelings with reflections and joint action among peers.

A national meeting of PJR in Laginha, Minas Gerais, from 14 to 20 January 2018 revealed how young people are affected by exposing them to experiences that involve head, heart and hands that are linked to their realities. The meeting consisted of *mistica's*, church services, presentations and discussions on politics and economics at national and international levels, feminism, political alliances of PJR, workshops varying from making bamboo baskets, massage, cooperatives, medicinal plants and mandalas and the socialization of the workshops, discussion on ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. Religious diversity is an issue. A female organizer of PJR/Ecojovem notes that ecumenism is often interpreted as a dialogue between six (Christian) religions, while this should be about a dialogue between religions, considering Afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda which some of the PJR youth (also) adhere to.

The minutes of the national meeting show the diversity in terms of gender and sexual preference: "*Of the 47 enrolled and accredited 25 were male and 22 female. With regard to sexual orientation 40 declared themselves heterosexual, 1 lesbian and 1 bisexual (5 did not declare sexual orientation)"* (PJR, 2017, p1). Yet the report of the meeting describes machismo during a game at the "cultural evening" and explains how they addressed the problem:

"*However, there were some messages that were very macho, as we realized we started reading and consequently filtering these messages, and warned that messages of this nature would not be read (*PJR, 2017, p 6-7).

The female coordinator of Ecojovem/PJR notes that gender is a difficult topic because the young people hardly received any formation on this matter at home. However, they do not avoid the subject and PJR Divino/Ecojovem organized a weekend on 4-5 March 2017 on gender issues. They combined the weekend with a local soccer competition to prevent competition among the local activities and focused on rural youth, a shared identity. The weekend consisted of *mística'*s, church services, presentations on gender, peasant culture and identity of rural youth, the soccer competition, cultural events and various workshops such as climbing, dancing, and filming. By combining the weekend on gender issues with a local soccer competition and rural culture they engage around 90 youngsters (also from the city and from conventional farms) in a community-to-come of young agroecologists. Also, here (unexpected) relationships emerged, further engaging young people in a process of being affected and reflecting. A report on Facebook, called "leisure with intentionality", summarizes it as follows: "*with our soccer and dodgeball everyone wins, some with soccer shoes, sneakers, ...many barefoot, men and women together, supporting each other, breaking with the circle of individualism and of competition, little gestures to construct the society that we want.*" (Agroecologia em Divino Facebook site, 6/03/2017). This type of popular education, 'intentional leisure', turned out to be an inclusive way to engage young people from conventional farms and rural cities to become acquainted with agroecology.

The film '*De onde vem a comida?*/ Where does food come from?' # 14 made by organizers of PJR and Ecojovem portrays how (unexpected) relationships are built. The film is a docu-soap with cartoon clouds with text. The images in the film depict a young man shaking his head dismissively when his mother is putting oil from the supermarket on his plate (figure 27). The young man starts to reflect (figure 28) and searches for information on the internet. He finds out about the existence of Ecojovem (figure 29). He clearly finds it a bit exciting to join Ecojovem as he is seen to walk very slowly, with some hesitance to a meeting of Ecojovem (figure 30). After joining Ecojovem, you see images of him working in a diversified agricultural system (figure 31). The film ends with images of him and a woman with a food basket in front of the union flag of SINTRAF with their fists clenched, symbolizing the struggle for peasant

agroecology (figure 32). The film shows the constructing and altering of various (unexpected) relationships, the young man's relationship with food, farming and nature, and with the people of PJR and Ecojovem. Figure 10 shows companionship. The film uses moments of being affected, reflection and enacting new relationships to tell its story.

***Figure 27*** *frame of the film 'De onde vem a comida?/Where does food come from?'(Film made by youth #14)*

***Figure 28*** *frame of the film 'De onde vem a comida?/Where does food come from?'(Film made by youth #14)*

***Figure 29*** *frame of the film 'De onde vem a comida?/Where does food come from?'(Film made by youth #14)*

***Figure 30*** *frame of the film 'De onde vem a comida?/Where does food come from?'(Film made by youth #14)*

***Figure 31*** *frame of the film 'De onde vem a comida?/Where does food come from?'(Film made by youth #14)*

***Figure 32*** *frame of the film 'De onde vem a comida?/Where does food come from?'(Film made by youth #14)*

The video recordings #33 and #34 of '*Mostra cultural*' show joy as an organizing force and young people having fun together. They depict a regional youth meeting of PJR, organized by PJR Divino and PJR Espera Feliz, 22-23 April 2017 to celebrate peasant culture and to strengthen the ties among them. The youth took the opportunity to go on the streets of the town of Espera Feliz to make their voices heard. The video recordings show young people wearing t-shirts with political logos, playing instruments and singing songs about young people protesting. The images demonstrate how an organization as PJR/Ecojovem together with other organizations in the region build relationships and collective agency by way of these regional meetings. These are the same people of PJR Minas Gerais, who together with other peasant organizations later that year blocked two highways (BR116 and BR265) in the region against PEC 287 (Constitutional Amendment Proposal to reform the pension system). The young people are affected at local and regional meetings of PJR by popular education, and this simultaneously generates reflection and the capacity to jointly act.

*Escolinha Sindical in Espera Feliz*

A group of students with mixed backgrounds attended the union school of 2018-2020. The group included eight girls and 12 boys, 13 blacks[2], seven Whites. Many of them came from the settlements of agrarian reform '*Padre Jesus'* and '*Boa Vista'*. This group is the result of active mobilisation of youth through home visits and organized transport from the settlements and other remote neighborhood communities to the union school. One of the coordinators of the union school explains why they organized this school:

> "*The purpose of the school is to train leaders to be active in the movement … but also to build awareness.*" (Amanda, coordinator union school)

The union presents the learning process as a rite of passage to become political actors and as the building of relationships with each other and with the union to create collective agency:

> "*The school is meant to involve young people, the children of the (farmer) members (of the union). During training, young people will understand the processes of organizing unions and cooperatives. Just like other themes that will help them. They are in the bloom of youth and they have many questions. So, we work with several themes: equality, affectivity and sexuality, and commitment and responsibility. That will help them at this stage they are in, the transition, from adolescence to youth, to a more mature phase. So this is the process of the school. The idea is that after this formation the young people will understand this process and that they become part of our institutions, the union, the cooperatives, the association.*" (Alessandra, coordinator of the union)

The school starts with a meeting for students and their parents. The students wrote down in small groups their expectations of the union school:

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[2] In Brazil, the racial category "Blacks" is the result of the union of two official racial categories: *preto*/Black (referring to the ancestry from native people of Africa but based on dark colored skin) and *pardo*/Brown (referring to descendants of Black and white people, descendants of Black and Indigenous people, and descendants of Indigenous people with whites) defined by *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE).

> “*This training is a moment that we can disconnect from virtual reality and acquire new knowledge; we hope to have a moment that we can watch movies that have to do with the theme and that we can relax with popcorn. Also we want to sport and have educational games throughout the formation process and cultural nights. The formation of groups for debates is a way that facilitates our interaction because we feel more comfortable to express our opinions.*” (student, audio recording #11)

Their expectations show intentional leisure, i.e. combining leisure activities with reflecting upon various issues. The students are straightforward when they are asked about their future on the countryside. When the educator asks if anyone wants to leave the countryside, except temporarily for a study, all reply at once “*no*”. The educator then emphasizes that they should study so that the can occupy the places that the older generation could not.

The theme of the first weekend of the union school in 2018 was peasant culture, indigenous culture and African culture. The educators recognize the variety of cultures among the youth. Difference within the territory becomes an asset to learn from and aligns with place and diversity as an anchor. The educator for this weekend, Manoel, is a well-known Black musician and storyteller. He is a popular educator who knows a lot about the cultures represented in the group. He knows the families and he makes connections between the general story and their personal stories, valuing the peasant life and work of the students and their families. The following dialogue shows the importance of a local educator, familiar with the local youth to be able to affect young people in ways that value their families, farming and cultures:

> Educator: “*You know how many different kinds of beans your father has?*”
> Student: “*10*?”
> Educator: “*Double it.*”
> Student: “*20?*”
> Educator: “*Double it.*”
> Student: “*40?*”
> Educator: “*Yes, 41 kinds of beans.*”

These kind of interactions in popular education alter the relationship young people have with their parents, food, farming and cultures. To explore their own cultures, the students make presentations in small groups by writing a song, preparing a theatre play, or making drawings. The texts, drawings and performances reveal the process of reflection within the small groups. To illustrate, they wrote the following text by a drawing on a tradition to call for rain after a long discussion:

> "*Our trees are our culture and are part of our traditions*". (text with drawing)

The text shows that the young people reflect on their relationship with nature, thereby challenging the boundary between nature and culture. Another group writes a song when they are asked about how to keep alive the cultural manifestations in their communities:

> *"Celebration of Saint John*
> *Today is the day of Saint John, I'll do my Canjicão, and arrive there.*
> *Come here partying with us.*
> *If you like, at night there will be a camp fire, will have a dance here all night, raising dust. Call your partner and come here to dance.*
> *And when I see, young people are already involved, enjoying, helping, organizing the flags, dancing forró all night with friends." (Song made by students)*

In the song "Celebration of Saint John' the young people couple responsibility for cultural manifestations, e.g. the making of the traditional food 'Canjica' with joy, to dance 'forró'.

Not everyone appreciated the celebration of Saint John at the union school equally. An issue strongly addressed at the weekend evaluation by some of the students is that not all young people participated in the entire cultural event. At the start everybody joined, marched singing with the flag, dancing around the fire, but at one point some of them left the party.

> Student: "*I think the cultural night is for everybody and, let's say, it can be a thing you don't like to do, but the next one will be something that you do like*

> *and other people don't like very much, but all are invited to participate because here we are a collective.*"
> Educator: "*The coordination will review this (...)*"
> Student: "*It is not the coordination, each one, each one should reflect on this! Because I think that we are here to open our mindsets and that can lead you to things to learn and to appropriate."*

This last quote demonstrates how the student affects the relationship educator-student when she says "It is not the coordination, (…) each one should reflect on this". The relationship becomes more horizontal. The students also points at humility, to be open to be affected. Another issue discussed in the weekend evaluation is racism. A female Black educator denounced racism. She is not pointing at a student in particular, but discussing and condemning it in general:

> *"There are two things that can't happen between us and that we expect at the next meeting not to happen. These are 'piadinhas' (jokes) and nicknames. That we, people, are human beings, but we are all different. So the surname is already enough. These kinds of nicknames like 'choquito' (black chocolate), 'mandioquinha' (small cassava - cassava has a brown peel), I'm just giving an example, I'm not saying that anybody called anybody that kind of nickname. (...) We cannot tolerate these types of nicknames. Why? Sometimes a colleague calls me 'de neguinha' (term for Black people perceived as racist), I act naturally because I identify myself as Black. But sometimes my colleague calls Diana 'de neguinha', she won't like it, because she doesn't like, she doesn't like it, she got her name. Right, Diana isn't 'neguinha'."* (Alessandra, coordinator of the union)

The story shows how the Black educators are affected by what happens at the union school, and how this results in sharing their concerns and reflections with the students - thereby making anti-racism part of the curriculum of popular education on agroecology.

At the weekend students also explored and acknowledged the struggles of peasants and peasant agroecology movements in the past. They talked for instance about mining in the region and its consequences. They studied the peasant movements by

holding up a popular political piece of artwork, a large quilt made of different t-shirts of social movements, and were asked to describe what they saw. Subsequently, the educator elaborated on what they saw, and students would add to the story of the educator by sharing their own life experiences, making sense of their common history. Together, in this way educators and students produced knowledge about their histories, and became aware of the important role these movements played and continue to play. The experience deepens the relationships of youth with their union and social movements.

The film without title #18 shows how students deepen their relationship with, and experience of, nature. In their film blog, three girls of the union school are exploring a reforestation of land by their family. One of the girls points at the banana trees present in the forest. The girls are enthusiastic about how crystal clear the water is at the spring and point with a wooden stick at a beautiful little fish in the water (figure 33). They note how cool, literally and metaphorically, it is in the forest.

> "*Look, how cool it is here, do you feel, to the extent that I have it cold. Let's call Sergio to camp here*". (character in the film without title #18)

The film shows how the young girls are affected by the forest.

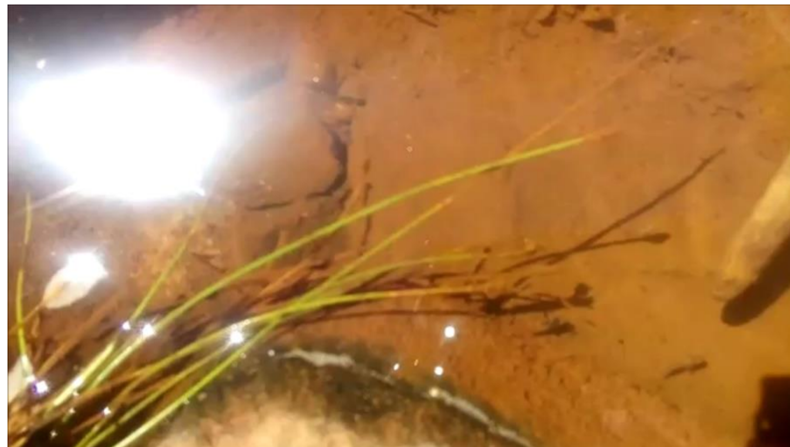

***Figure 33*** *frame from nature film without title #18*

### 3.5. Discussion

The methods of popular education mobilise affect to engage youth and their communities in agroecology. First, the pedagogy of alternation plays an important role

in dispersing affect and altering relationships between students, their parents and community (also see Ribeiro, 2008). The study in the community time and experiments on students' own farms create a space to discuss agroecology with their parents and other family members. This creates affective and situated abilities to discuss farming practices and the relationship with nature within families and communities. Second, the variety of topics addressed at the three learning sites ensure that farm work, community and home life all become part of the curriculum and therefore are all affected. The work of McCune et al. (2017) pointed at the break with the rigorous separation of work and home life. Adding to the work of McCune, attention to household tasks, farm work, health care, sport and cultural activities means a transformation toward equally valuing reproduction and production. It is a transformation toward a shared responsibility for reproduction by men and women. Third, intentional leisure activities can also be identified as a method of popular education that appeals to youth and stimulates affect. In line with the work of Sherwood et al. (2018) and Anderson et al. (2019), it shows that any place can be intentionally used for building relationships and learning, including for example a soccer field. As our work demonstrates, and in agreement with Singh (2013), joy indeed turned out to be an organizing force. An important asset of popular education is thus the coupling of enjoyment with learning.

In this research we systematized the findings on the role of affect in developing expected and unexpected relationships that support the broad uptake, or scaling out, of agroecology. We found that affective relationships, friendships that emerge in peer-to-peer learning, and the alteration of power and language in peer-to-peer learning create a place for dialogue - much in line with the ideas of Freire (2014). Young people who hold different views on agriculture (i.e. youth from agroecological farms, from conventional farms, and from rural towns) have become engaged in dialogues about their reality. Popular education also addresses and alters the human relationship with nature. In the encounter with nature by exploring forests, experimenting with agroecology, and restoring springs, among other things, joy and other positive feelings are mobilised. The magnificence of nature, the pleasant climate it can offer and a feeling of mutual cooperation among living and non-living things are all affects that are mobilised in popular education. Moreover, reflection is employed simultaneously with affect. The film made at the forest shows how the girls are happily surprised and indicate the construction of nature literacy, the reintroduction of "*other inter-related multiple literacies*" (Cole and Mirzaei Rafe 2018, p. 52). Finally, new relationships between

educators and students are constructed that value the knowledges and experiences of the students. Students' knowledge and experiences are included in the learning process and subject to reflection, while educators position themselves as facilitators of dialogue.

The practices of popular education we studied demonstrate that this social pedagogy is an example of an anti-authoritarian pedagogy (Cole and Mirzaei Rafe 2018). This does not mean that these learning practices are a power-free utopia but, rather, that power relations are intentionally changed (hooks 1994). New relationships are constructed to support a community-to-come (Ruitenberg 2005), a community of people that welcomes youth from conventional farms and rural towns and that invites family and the neighborhood to become familiar with peasant agroecology. Even so, other affective modes of being inhibit transformation, such as racist jokes. The principle of 'unlearning in order to learn' (McCune et all, 2017) is thus relevant and calls for reflection to reveal how racism, homophobia, or lack of religious debate may inhibit new relationships and the capacity for action. This exposure and disruption of unjust practices is characteristic for transformative learning (Peters and Wals 2016). Transforming affective relationships is moreover difficult because young people are not only affected at school, in the union school or youth organization, but they are also affected at their homes, at agricultural merchandizing among others. Transformation thus requires time and repetition (Deleuze 2011). For example, the existence of feminist groups in the municipality can make a difference in young people taking up the gender issue (Goris et al. 2019).

This study contributes to the debate on popular education by visualizing the role of affect in the development of expected and unexpected relationships (Cole 2011; Cole and Mirzaei Rafe 2018) by making explicit that these relationships can include people´s relationships with nature, and acknowledging that this role is intertwined with another role of affect that is the undermining of authoritarianism in pedagogy. Learning experiences are often reduced to educators teaching students in a hierarchical setting referred to by the banking model of education as an instrument of oppression (Freire 1968) and by authoritarianism in pedagogy that serves market interests (Cole and Mirzaei Rafe 2018). By experiencing affect in popular education, the ability to affect and to be affected, to augment or diminish abilities, young people become aware of their personal and collective agency to build a more just and sustainable society.

### 3.6. Conclusion

In Brazil, popular education on agroecology at public schools is still the exception, this is further hampered by the current austerity measures (Van den Berg et al. 2019). Even so, EFA-Puris in Araponga, PJR and Ecojovem in Divino and the union school in Espera Feliz each year connect and engage 40 to 120 (young) people in peasant agroecology in the Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais. It is promising that popular education not only engages young people in a transformation process but also their families and communities by building unexpected relationships. Acknowledging that young people are also affected by, and learn from, their family, is a pedagogical method that works both ways.

The focus and strength of EFA-Puris in Araponga is formal education in agroecological farming practices and the common high school curriculum to enable students to continue studying afterwards. PJR and Ecojovem succeed in engaging a large group of young people through experiences that affect them and assemble joy, spirituality, activism and peasant culture; moreover, the focal point of the union school is to ensure successors who coordinate the local union, cooperatives and other agroecological associations in the future. All three learning practices contribute to collective agency. They enhance the situated abilities of students to collectively organize themselves, and to disrupt unjust practices, norms and structures. Part of the situated abilities consist of the relationships built among the young students. Regional and national youth meetings to organize young people within social movement organizations strengthen these relationships. These relationships constitute the base to organize overt and rightful resistance at regional and national level (Van den Berg et al. 2019). Coherence in everyday practices of resistance in the three forms of popular education studied, as well as in regional and national youth meetings, create the repetition that is necessary to set new norms, including for example gender equality.

The three popular education sites presented in this article show that this type of education engages youth in agroecology through affect. Affect ensures the building and altering of relationships between people and between people and nature. This relationality is essential to agroecology as well. Where necessary, injustice is directly exposed in popular education. The main message of popular education for agroecology however is to learn how to do things differently. Creating dialogue between students and parents as well as between different social groups by making space for new relationships and mobilising joy are important ways to get there.

# CHAPTER 4 YOUNG PEASANTS, FEMINISM, AND THE CO-CREATION OF RELATIONAL AUTONOMY


## Abstract

Young peasants face multiple and interconnected oppressions, not simply related to their identity as peasants, but also in relation to gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. This article discusses how young people in peasant agroecology in Brazil build on the ideas of Brazilian feminist movements within agroecological peasant organisations to face these oppressions that restrain or impede them in their farming practices and activities in social movements. The article describes the idea of 'peasant and popular feminism' in Brazil and uses the concept of 'relational autonomy' to analyse how this idea is enacted by youth to exercise control over their lives. The concept of relational autonomy is useful because it foregrounds how autonomy is not just an individual matter but derives from relationships and interactions among people, and between people and nature. Based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork, this article demonstrates how youth engage in processes of agricultural and livelihood diversification and democratisation initiated or strengthened by women. Youth co-create autonomy at farms via the peasant mode of production, i.e. diversifying farm products by working with biodiversity. I also show that mixed youth organisations that involve young women and men play a distinctive role within the agroecology movement because they create a place to experiment with new forms of relationships among peers and support dialogues at farms about redistributing agricultural, domestic and care work. What is unique about youth organisations is the manifold uses of popular art as an aesthetic, imaginative and disruptive force to deal with patriarchal traditions and with racism. These two elements, mixed youth events and popular art, create space for the experimentation and dialogue that supports the creation of relational autonomy by youth at farms, movements and bodies.



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## 4.1. Peasants and popular feminism

Peasant agroecology connects food production, ecological wellbeing and social struggles for food sovereignty on the basis of principles of solidarity, reciprocity and horizontality. As such, peasant agroecology is a field that underscores the importance of social and ecological relations in promoting food sovereignty (van den Berg et al. 2018; Rosset et al. 2019). This relationality is vital because peasants experience oppressions on the basis of gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation as well as on the basis of their peasant identity (Scott et al. 2010; Bassalo 2015; Moura and Ferrari 2016).

In the Brazilian context, these oppressions are very visible and they are cultivated by a strong patriarchal culture and by the heritage of a colonial system that lives on in current neoliberal governments that promote intensive agriculture (Woortmann and Woortmann 1997). Peasants in Brazil face harsh conditions because they work on the properties of big landowners, they have experienced forced resettlements, and they often work in isolated areas with exhausted soils and difficult access to markets. On top of this, they encounter widespread negative stereotypes, including in media, that portray them as inefficient and inferior farmers (Santos 2017).

Despite these harsh conditions, peasants' histories of oppression also have yielded them tools to survive. Wanderley describes how peasants in general have dealt with oppression by using ancestral knowledge that has been transferred to them from generation to generation. This knowledge emphasise the importance of mimicking the natural ecosystem through poly-culture systems, in which multiple crops and/or different types of animals dwell in the same area (Wanderley, De Nazareth Baudel 1996; Van der Ploeg 2008). It has also helped to ensure market integration, achieve self-sustenance, and get access to land. In other words, this knowledge has facilitated the production of autonomy.

The intersecting oppressions of the gendered, social and political identities of peasant women have resulted in the emergence of the 'peasant and popular feminism' movement[3] (Calaça and Seibert 2017; dos Santos and Zimmermann 2019). The term was coined by CLOC (*Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo*) in 2010 and promoted ever since in Latin America. CLOC is the Latin American coordinating body of rural organisations affiliated with the international peasants'

[3] Although initially without the explicit use of the term feminism.

movement La Via Campesina and defines the term as a diversity of movements, including communitarian, Indigenous, Black, ecofeminism and peasant feminism (Calaça et al. 2018).

The two main elements in 'peasant feminism' and 'popular feminism' point to the intersectional background of the movement. The first term 'peasant feminism' originates from the peasant women's movement (MMC – Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas), one of the peasant organisations that promotes agroecology (Calaça et al. 2018). Boni (2013) describes how the MMC was created in 2004 as a result of several movements of rural women that came together in MMC. In MMC, the women, farmers and rural workers presented themselves with the term 'peasants', a term that encompasses a large diversity of women including farmers, rural workers, fisherwomen, and extractivists[4]. The term 'peasant' helped visualise the productive and reproductive work they do for their livelihoods. In Brazil, 'peasant' is considered a political nomination[5] rather than an analytical category (Boni 2013). The MMC participants identify themselves as peasants, which to them means that they produce food for self-sustenance as well as for income, and therefore they consider peasants as a significant part of the national and global market (Boni 2013). The second term, 'popular feminism' criticises the high levels of inequality in access to material and symbolic goods, and departs from a broader critique on neoliberalism and patriarchal culture (Boni 2013; dos Santos and Zimmermann 2019). Popular feminism recognises the diversity among women and the need to recognise racism and discrimination as factors that produce and reproduce social differences and inequalities experienced by Black and Indigenous women in particular (Carneiro 2003). In popular feminist movements, Black and Indigenous women unite to call for land reform and to point at their knowledge systems on environmental caring and farming practices. One highlight of the peasant and popular feminism movement is the massive Marches of the Daisies,

[4] Extractivists in Brazil refers to people who harvest non-timber forest products without felling the trees.

[5] Peasants refers to rural workers and their struggle for land and resources to live with dignity. The term 'family farmer' emerged in the 1990s in Brazil and was institutionalised by law in 2006, defining family farmers as those who live and work on their property and extract income predominantly, albeit not solely, with the use of family labour (Wanderley, De Nazareth Baudel 1996; Schneider 2003; Guanziroli et al. 2013; Lopes 2017).

*Marchas das Margaridas,* organised by female rural workers. It played a crucial role in the development of agroecological policies (PLANAPOs[6]) in Brazil (Niederle et al. 2019).

An emerging topic in this established and explicitly intersectional peasant movement is the political identity of youth. In general, young people face a particular type of oppression in peasant contexts. They are often not included in dialogues about on-farm work, financial autonomy, and access to land (Moura and Ferrari, 2016). Moreover, youth's work is regularly undervalued: "*at the farm, woman, elderly and youth, in general don't 'work'; their activities are defined as 'support'. Only in the private sphere of the house are the activities of the woman considered as work (albeit less valued)*" (Woortmann and Woortmann 1997, p. 134). These issues are even more pressing when multiple identities intersect: young women generally have to deal with both sexism and ageism, leading to a further invisibility of their work as well as a doubling of their workload since they have to combine on-farm and domestic work (Moura and Ferrari 2016; Calaça and Seibert 2017). Overall, these issues point at situations in which youth lack autonomy in the context of farming and peasant wellbeing.

This article analyses how young people deal with lacking autonomy in the context of peasant agroecology in Brazil (Brumer 2008; Moura and Ferrari 2016; Londres et al. 2017; Jurna 2018). I use the concept relational autonomy to understand how young people deal with multiple, interconnected forms of oppression by co-creating autonomy in relations. Based on an ethnographic, multimodal and intersectional research approach, I analyse how relational autonomy is enacted at farms, within social movements, and at the level of bodies. In so doing, I depict the unique ways in which young people co-create and enact relational autonomy and engage in processes of agricultural and livelihood diversification and social inclusion in agriculture.

[6] PLANAPOs, *Planos Nacionais de Agroecologia e Produção Orgânica*, National Plans for Agroecology and Organic Production.

### 4.2. Relational autonomy

Autonomy is often conceptualised as the self-governing of independent and self-determining subjects (Dove et al. 2017). This concept of autonomy has been criticised for neglecting the conditions and capacities necessary for autonomy, for disregarding conflicting values that may impair the autonomy of some, and for ignoring the role of affect (Mackenzie 2008; Westlund 2009; Dove et al. 2017). Feminist scholars in particular have criticised individualistic approaches to autonomy as these tend not to take into account mutual responsibility, cooperation, care relations and capacities necessary for building and enacting autonomy (Mackenzie 2008; Dove et al. 2017). These scholars have therefore proposed the notion of relational autonomy as a response to the traditional individualised concept of autonomy (Herring 2014). According to Butler (2015) and Rancière (2009), relational autonomy refers to freedom in new social bonds and relationships: "*The exercise of freedom is something that does not come from you or from me, but from what is between us, from the bond we make at the moment in which we exercise freedom together, a bond without which there is no freedom at all*" (Butler 2015, p.42). Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000, p.4) regard relational autonomy as an umbrella term for those views that emphasise the social nature of human beings, the situated agency of people, and the relations that make autonomy possible. Within this, there is a particular focus on relationships of care as being crucial in the creation, cultivation and enactment of relational autonomy. In other words, relational autonomy is based on the central idea of interdependence, underscoring the importance of relations between people (Sabsay 2016). While this focus is clearly on human relations, scholars of peasantry in particular have also focussed on the interconnectedness of humans with nature and how this is also a vital component in the creation of autonomy. In this article, I employ a notion of relational autonomy that foregrounds how peasants work with locally available social and material resources and assets instead of relying on fertilisers, pesticides and feed produced for the global market (van der Ploeg 2012). Put differently, I suggest that farmers construct relational autonomy through a peasant mode of production (Williams 2008; van der Ploeg 2012).

Relational autonomy thus arises in the interweaving of relations among people and relations between people and nature. This creation of relational autonomy takes place at different levels within peasant agroecology, including farms, social movements and bodies. At the farm, the peasant mode of production is about co-creating relational

autonomy in relations that include people and nature. In social movements, including feminist movements, relational autonomy is created in pedagogical activities. This role of social movements has also been described in other studies. For instance, the activist farmers of the global justice movement in France create autonomy in social movement relations by local knowledge production and exchange (Williams 2008). Williams indicates that the autonomy created in the global justice movement rubs off on the autonomy at farms and at the level of bodies. At their farms, the activists started to diversify agricultural production, and at the level of bodies they attempted to free their bodies from being entirely subject to goods produced in unjust circumstances. Paulilo (2004) suggests that movements can support relational autonomy of youth at farms by developing statutes for small agrarian production that guarantee an equal distribution of the farm income among all the associates including women and youth for agricultural, domestic and care work.

Next to farms and movements, bodies are a third level where relational autonomy is created. The body is a major site of social control and inequality, especially for girls and women (Seale 2017). Bodily autonomy is relational, as people are "*always situated in relation to someone else rather than simply as an individual with a problem*" (Seale 2017, p. 332). Feminist studies on health care (Mackenzie 2008; Dove et al. 2017; Specker Sullivan and Niker 2018) that incorporate the concept of relational autonomy underscore the importance of recognising the other's fundamental humanity, acknowledging our limitations in understanding others, and embedding these limitations in our worldviews. Bodily autonomy is created in relationships that protect people against violent assaults, that provide a safe space to conform or not conform to gender norms and express their own (sexual) identity, and that enable choice in reproductive matters - among other things.

The enactment and creation of relational autonomy requires essential competences in interpersonal relationships and in relationships with nature, such as care, empathy and cooperation (Mackenzie 2008). Competences to deal with value pluralism are particularly important. Diversity among people who adhere to different values can pose risks since these different values can result in one persons' relational autonomy impairing the relational autonomy of the other (Hardt and Negri in Williams 2008; Seale 2017). In cultures that support relational autonomy, value pluralism may result in opposing values. Therefore, mutual recognition of contrasting values is essential to

ensure that people don't impair the capabilities of other people's relational autonomy (Mackenzie 2008). Westlund (2008) calls this dialogical answerability, to hold oneself answerable to critical perspectives. Relational autonomy is a social and historical phenomenon subject to change (Williams 2008).

Youth's relational autonomy is decisive for their engagement in peasant agroecology (Brumer 2008; Moura and Ferrari 2016; Londres et al. 2017; Jurna 2018). This article demonstrates how young people co-create relational autonomy in interactions at farms, within social movements, and at the level of bodies.

## 4.3. Methods

This study takes an intersectional approach in order to analyse how young people create relational autonomy to deal with multiple, interconnected forms of oppression that withhold or impede them in agroecological farming and movement practices. Crenshaw (1990) pointed at intersectionality, the need to look at intragroup difference and to account for multiple grounds of identity, and the differentiated experiences of discrimination. I analysed and interpreted the data with an intersectional approach, which, in the context of this research, means looking at youth as a diverse group of young people in terms of age, gender, race, sexual orientation and peasant identity, and asking different questions to verify how relational autonomy is enacted at the intersections of all these nuances of their peasant identity.

The research can be considered a multimodal ethnography (Rose 2011): It is based on materials from 85 videos made by youth, 11 videos made by myself at the request of the organisations involved in the research, participatory observations during youth events, and 41 interviews with youth, parents, and organisers of social movements. The young people who made the videos and who were interviewed are a mixed group of young people in terms of gender (women, men, gender-non-conforming), age (18-35), and race (Black, White and Indigenous people). Some of them come from conventional farms, others come from agroecological farms, or farms that are in transition to agroecology, but all have been in contact with the agroecological movement.

Data collection took place between 2017-2018 and the research has been carried out in three municipalities - Araponga, Divino and Espera Feliz - and at national meetings of youth organisations and of the agroecology movement. All three

municipalities are located in Zona da Mata in the state Minas Gerais, Brazil. During colonialisation, this part of Minas Gerais became a coffee and mining region. Coffee production and pastures led to the deforestation of the once dense Atlantic Forest and more recently to the degradation of the soil as a result of government policies that extended green revolution policies such as the promotion of mono-culture and the use of agrochemicals toward family farmers (Cardoso et al. 2001; Botelho et al. 2016). By the end of the 1980s, peasants started to reflect on their situation; they organised themselves, started to exchange knowledge on how to restore soils without chemical inputs and other aspects of diversified farming (Botelho et al. 2016), and started an agroecology movement. Many of the youth organisations, union schools, and family farming high schools that organise the youth events discussed in the results are the fruits of this agroecological movement.

## 4.4. Results

### *The history of 'peasant and popular feminism' in Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais*

The peasant and popular feminist movement in Brazil, MMC - *Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas*) emerged in 2004 from local and national organisations; movements of women of which some already existed for more than twenty years (Boni 2013). In Zona da Mata, women started to organise themselves within the peasant unions in the 1990s. In the search of their rights (reproductive rights, maternity salary, retirement) and recognition for their work, women began initiating women's self-organisations. They learned about the entanglement of capitalism, patriarchism and racism and about their situated agency to address these issues. Female peasants stated that they didn't feel included in or represented by peasant organisations, rural social movements, nor even by the progressive parts of the Catholic Church such as the grassroots ecclesial communities (CEBs – Comunidades Eclesiais de Base). Moreover, specific attention to issues of women was perceived by some people in peasant unions and rural social movements as undermining the general struggle for democracy. To the female peasants of MMC, it was an obvious choice to work closely with popular organisations such as unions, as they foresaw that women's liberation can be only realised by overcoming capitalism, patriarchy and racism (Paulilo 2016; Calaça et al. 2018).

According to these women involved in MMC, the concept ‘peasant and popular feminism’ entails the following issues: recognising the work of women, acknowledging the diversity among women and their histories, promoting women’s self-organisations, addressing violence against women, constructing another society, and catalysing agroecology as a livelihood based on the interconnections and complementarity of people and nature (Calaça et al. 2018). MMC’s understanding of ‘peasant and popular feminism’ is reminiscent of Marxist feminism and ecofeminism because of its popular and socialist basis and its agroecological perspective (Boni 2013).

In the broader Brazilian context, connections between ‘peasant and popular feminism’ and ecofeminism have been observable from the beginning of peasant women organisations (Costa 2017). Since the 1980s, men and women have discussed their relationship with nature, and have criticised the green revolution model that made peasants dependent on chemicals and export markets and that deteriorated their territories and natural resources. In many cases, female peasants were already resisting the green revolution model by working with native seeds and live-stock breeds and by producing vegetables and fruits without pesticides. This had to do with their historic responsibility to ensure healthy and culturally appropriate food for self-sustenance. Often, women were the first to acknowledge that agroecology is a means to strengthen a peasant mode of life (Calaça, 2017). The slogan ‘without feminism, there’s no agroecology’ reflects this history (Costa 2017).

With time, rural feminist groups diversified with the rise of young feminist organisations and Black feminist collectives (Ribeiro, 2016). In addition, rural youth organisations also took up feminist issues. This, together with the increased recognition that young women were underrepresented in women’s organisations (Santos and Zimmermann 2019), and the recognition of youth as an oppressed group of people, resulted in feminist organisations working together with youth organisations. In the last decade, youth organisations such as *Levante Popular da Juventude*, a movement of urban and rural youth, started to participate in Nation- and continent-wide discussions on the meaning of ‘peasant and popular feminism’ (Santos and Zimmermann 2019). How young people build on the ideas of ‘peasant and popular feminism’ becomes evident in the next sections on the co-creation of relational autonomy at farms, within social movements, and at the level of bodies.

***Creating relational autonomy at farms***

Access to land is a gendered issue that intersects with class, race and age. This is also the case in Araponga. There, 90% of the population is descended from the Puris -- the Indigenous people who lost their land during the colonialisation of the region (de Campos 2006). A young woman in Araponga elaborates on the things that are improving for young women in agriculture:

> "*For a lot of people, a woman having her own land with coffee is something that should not exist; there is the idea that women will not be able to do the work. Because in my community there are few women who themselves possess land with coffee. At home, at least my father, plus my mother treat us equally. Like, when my brother wanted to have land for coffee, I could also ask for land and work with coffee."* (Renata, young peasant)

Renata explained that she can use a piece of land contracted by her mother to cultivate her own coffee. With the money she earned by harvesting coffee outside her family, she bought coffee seedlings and fertiliser and she started to plant. In this case, the autonomy of the young female peasant is produced within the mother-daughter relationship: the mother ensured access to land and the daughter provided the means to start producing coffee. Also, the relationships established with the land and the seedlings produce relational autonomy for the daughter. A young peasant indicates that relations between the state and farms mediated by public programmes can at the same time strengthen and impair relational autonomy of young people:

> *"Access to credit for young people is very difficult. Take the issue of credit, they say there is Pronaf Jovem (a credit programme for young farmers), I believe that it's a white elephant*[7] *because to have a Pronaf Jovem, a young person must have a 'Declaração de Aptidão ao Pronaf (DAP)' (declaration of ability). And, how will a young person who lives with his parents get this declaration? If the father accesses a Pronaf (regular credit programme for farmers), compromising all the income of the family, the young person will not be able to access this Pronaf line (for young farmers)."* (Lucas, young peasant in Araponga)

[7] 'A white elephant' signifies something costly that is not very useful.

His story shows the interdependence of youth and parents when they want credit, and how the design of such public programme can impair the creation of relational autonomy between youth and their parents. If a young person wants credit, and this is at the expense of the amount of credit that his/her parents can get, the creation of mutual autonomy in parent-child relationships is hampered.

A young man in Divino explained in an interview that some young people want to continue studying, explore other jobs, or have a part-time job alongside the agricultural work at home. They do this to save money to buy land or because they need(ed) another job during the five-year maturation period of the coffee bushes they planted. In these cases, off-farm work is a strategy to ensure relational autonomy in the longer term. The young man from Divino noted that parents assume that their children don't want to continue with the farm because they are still studying or working elsewhere, whereas they just want to save money, have other work experience, learn more, or combine jobs. His parents started to invest less in the farm, as they assumed that there was no successor whereas he actually wanted to take over the farm after a few years and had planned to combine it with his part-time job as a technical assistant. In this example, the assumptions of the parents and a lack of dialogue about succession seems to have impaired the son's relational autonomy. Another young man from Divino, who identifies himself as a peasant doing craftwork, also indicated that his future ambitions are to combine farm work with other work, in his case as an educator:

> "*I want to continue farming (...) and I intend to be, in the future, a person who can work beyond agriculture, because this is very important, to tell other people about the work that young people do in agriculture, the production of food and other goods that people live from.*" (Igor, young peasant from Divino)

The stories of the young people indicate that they want to have the possibility to have multiple jobs, not only as a strategy to reinvest this money in the farm or to ensure a minimum income, but also because they aspire towards having multiple careers. At the same time, inspired by women engaged in peasant and popular feminism and by popular education, young people envision possibilities to co-create autonomy by earning some money with on-farm diversification, e.g. by horticulture, beekeeping, producing ecological sanitary products and craftwork, and by selling these products at local

markets. These local markets are the result of women demanding a place for women and youth to sell their products and are established with the support of the peasant unions, women's organisations and the local governments:

> *And, we worked on this issue also with regard to the market: the market cannot be just a male-dominated place, so we decided that the market was going to be family-oriented: the wife, husband and children could all work at the market*" (Caroline, peasant involved in the women's group and market collective of Divino)

This example of how a women's group co-creates a market for women's and youth's farm products illustrates the importance of social movements as spaces in which relational autonomy is created.

***Creating relational autonomy within social movements***

In the past, knowledge transfer on a peasant mode of production mainly took place within peasant families and local communities. Over time this has changed and today, knowledge is also produced and exchanged within rural social movements. One of the young peasants elaborates on the things she learned from education organised by social movement organisations:

> "*For example, a different management in the garden, crop rotation, intercropping... to make hedges in the fields right, e.g. by planting banana trees, to make 'caixa seca', square deep holes along the roads to capture floods. If we continue learning here and take it all home, imagine, we will make these natural syrups (homemade pest control) like EM for spraying and try to do it at home.*" (Renata, young peasant)

Smiling, she explained how she tried to make the syrup at home and it was all eaten up by her dog. These on-farm solutions, based on peasant principles that she learned, are about a different way of relating with nature. Enhancing relationships between young peasants and nature can also rub off on parents' relationships with nature; a relational autonomy is produced and both young peasants and their parents become less dependent on externalities such as fertilisers and pesticides. What is special about the trainings for and by youth in the agroecological movement, is that they pay attention to sharing

reproductive work, in particular domestic work. A young woman describes the double workload and subordinated position of young women:

> "*I work at home and I work in the fields, right, I do domestic work and I help harvesting, weeding -- these things I can help with. Then my brother, he only works in the fields; if he needs to clean the house, to make food, he just can decide to* not *do it.*" (Renata, young peasant from Araponga)

At these trainings for and by young people in the agroecology movement, the organisers attempt to change this division of labour by dividing cleaning chores equally among young men and women. By repeatedly demonstrating the malleability of labour divisions, social movements can help establish relational autonomy among young women and men.

Another characteristic of how youth engage in the agroecology movement is their use of popular art[8]. Mycorrhiza[9], a theatre and dance group of young people from Viçosa supports the agroecological movement by doing research on popular cultures and by sharing their knowledge about these cultures via theatre and dance. A young women of Mycorrhiza elaborates on this role of youth:

"*If they (the elderly) don't pass it on to anyone else, that culture dies. It is important to record it and continue it, right. Youth is very present in the resignification of popular culture; they have a different vision on culture. For example, I am 21 years old and I had never seen a Congado before I arrived here; but I am very interested, except that I am not part of that community. Congado is a community usually made up of mainly Black people. They are all direct descendants of slaves and that is important to understand how this religious practice started. This language is not mine, I can have all the respect in the world and I can talk about it, but it is not mine, I have to have maximum respect for those who preserve tradition and .., but I also have the right to speak about this tradition and to bring it to the memory of other young people and to let other young people know that this tradition exists*." (Mariana, Mycorrhiza member)

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[8] Popular art refers to vivid aesthetic experience, such experience being immediately sensible and meaningful. Popular art is not produced for an elite class but is an expression of [and for] popular (sub) cultures (Shusterman 1995).

[9] Mycorrhiza refers to the association between fungus and plants.

The story of Mariana portrays the cultural reproduction of oppressed cultures through popular art. Via popular art, youth deal with oppression because of race or because of a peasant identity. By reproducing a diversity of cultures present in agroecology - rather than the dominant industrial agriculture that is reproduced by mass media and the commercial world -relational autonomy is created among actors and spectators. Relational autonomy is also created by resignifying these diverse cultures in their performances. The actors are a mixed group of young people in terms of race, gender and urban/rural divide, and this allows them to cross several boundaries and to go beyond binaries in the performance and reproduction of popular culture. The young people use popular art for its imaginative and disruptive force to expose oppression. When Marielle Franco, a black lesbian activist and city councilor from Rio de Janeiro was murdered on March 14 2018, Mycorrhiza did a performance in Viçosa at the University Campus to show that she was murdered because of her activist work and to ask for an investigation. The film 'Marielle presente/Marielle present' # 14 (https://www.facebook.com/amanda.fernandes.73307/videos/1902401326489979/) that was filmed by the first author, portrays the crime scene and grieving people. At the same time, young people use popular art for its imaginative force, portraying the changes that they aspire to make.

In relations between unions and youth, relational autonomy is created in different ways. A union like *Sindicato dos Trabalhadores na Agricutlura Familiar* (SINTRAF) in Espera Feliz actively supports young people's autonomy in the bonds that they create with youth of all colours. One of many ways they do so is to hire youth. For instance, they hired a young Black woman to coordinate and represent the union. Besides, they organised education on the different oppressed cultures, and they arranged transport for youth from land reform settlements to attend the union school and other social movement events for and by youth. These land reform settlements are home to relatively high numbers of Indigenous and Black young people because of the colonial history that displaced them and hindered their access to land. During the presentations at the union school, one of the groups of young people explicitly presented themselves as a group of young Black people and they recognised the role of unions in creating relational autonomy. They wrote a song that reflects this:

> "*Everyone wants to deceive our youth, but we [young people] arrive with determination to transform the society. The Union School guides us, it valorises our origins and our culture. Chorus: Sarará Crioulo (3x)* "

The chorus '*Sarará Crioulo'* refers to Black people and the words 'guide us' and 'valorises our origins' refer to the cocreation of autonomy in the relation of the union with young Black youth.

The film workshops and the viewings that were facilitated by organisers of social movements associations together with me became a method to deal with the multiple, interconnected forms of oppression and to co-create relational autonomy by recognising and appreciating intragroup differences. Several films made by youth are about how they deal with prejudices about peasants. For instance the film '*A realidade dos Jovens Rurais*/The reality of rural youth' # 19 shows the story of a Black girl sitting in a classroom and hearing two classmates gossiping behind her back about her peasant identity. At home, an organiser of a rural youth organisation passes by and invites her to join a cultural event. The girl joins the event and the film ends with her dancing with others and the text '*In the circle of life we are all the same*'. This active mobilisation of rural youth to join events is their way of dealing with prejudices. The local viewings of the films on prejudices about peasants deepen their discussions on oppression:

> "*There are two things, city people have prejudices about peasants, and young people themselves have prejudices about Black people, homosexual people and women.*" (Christina young person from Espera Feliz)

During the editing of one of the films on prejudices about peasants, they discussed their own prejudices and responsibility in cocreating relational autonomy:

> "O*ne of the girls starts off a discussion on prejudices about peasant woman. (...) People also have prejudices about Black people. The girl admits that she also had prejudices against Black people and that she is ashamed of that. Another girl tells that when she was younger she knew a Black girl who only ate rice and therefore she thought that all of them were alike. The people are called for lunch but the*

*discussion keeps going. They start talking about homosexual youth. One of them notes that he has homosexual friends and respects that." (notes on participatory observation)*

***Creating relational autonomy at the level of bodies***

At a meeting in Espera Feliz, a woman shares the story of a how a couple produced relational autonomy. There was a young woman when she heard that she could get cancer by washing clothes with 'poison' (the residues of pesticides), she refused to wash these clothes and the transformation toward agroecology on the farm of the young man and woman began. By refusing to wash clothes because she would thereby be subjecting her body to pesticides, the woman produced bodily autonomy in her relationship with her husband. At the same time, she altered her and her husband's relation with nature, thereby producing relational autonomy in farming practices as they became less dependent on externalities such as agrochemicals. Machines for small-scale agriculture can enhance and undermine bodily autonomy. For instance, the portable mechanical mower plays a major role in working with cover crops in between the coffee to improve soil quality. A young female farmer from Araponga noted that it is mostly men who use them and who earn more as rural workers because of the investments in the machine and the fact that the machine is heavy in use. There are few women who use the machine and it is unclear why this is the case. It is possible that this is because the machine is heavy to use, which indicates a design flaw, but it is also possible that cultural and financial issues prevent them from using this machine.

Bodily autonomy is also created by acknowledging the multiple identities among peasants. During the fourth national symposium on agroecology, in Portuguese *IV Encontro Nacional de Agroecologia* (ENA), the communication group in the organisation asked me to make small video clips on the diversity within the agroecological movement. In one of these video clips, a young transsexual peasant summarises the youth plenary at the ENA:

"*In this plenary we managed to have several important debates, right, about the permanence of the youth in rural areas, from the perspective of the construction of agroecology as a political project for rural Brazil and from the perspective that agroecology comprises all diversity. When we talk about diversity we are talking about*

*sexual diversity, we are talking about women, we are talking about youth, we are talking about Blacks, [and] the Indigenous peoples.*" (Dê, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDDdJRBujbc)

By presenting a gender non-conforming body in front of the video camera, Dê creates bodily autonomy with regard to gender in the relation s/he establishes with the mediated viewers. Young peasant Lucas demonstrates in front of the video camera the existence of Black agroecological peasants in Rio de Janeiro city and thereby creates bodily autonomy, in relation with mediated spectators, with regard to race, urban/rural divide and peasant identity. Lucas states:

"*we don't have support from the government, we don't have the recognition of agriculture in Rio de Janeiro. Urban agriculture does not exist in Rio de Janeiro, according to the government. But we always resist and show that it does exist through markets and agroecological family farms: through markets we can put our products on the table of people from the periphery.*" (Lucas, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5Tk6poMTXw)

The story of the young Black peasant in Rio de Janeiro city also shows how his autonomy is impaired in the relation with the local government who denies their multiple identities of being urban, Black and peasant. By including the farming experiences of (Black) people in urban areas in the category 'peasants', he resignified the meaning of peasants and he created bodily autonomy by not limiting the category 'peasants' to bodies in rural areas.

**4.5. Discussion**

Like women engaged in peasant and popular feminism, youth envision possibilities to enhance autonomy in production relations with nature and among family members at the farm through the diversification, cultivation, and processing of new farm products. With regard to access to land and government policies such as Pronaf Jovem, Moura and Ferrari (2016) already indicated that the credit programme for rural youth does not always produce relational autonomy because local governments and unions aren't

always aware of these programmes or of the possibility to get a youth DAP (Declaration of Ability) and because they are not always capable of implementing these programmes due to excessive bureaucracy. As I have shown in my analysis, the design of the programme exacerbates the interdependence of parents and children with respect to acquiring credit. In addition to peasant studies on knowledge transfer within the family to ensure autonomy in farming (Wanderley, 1996; Woortmann and Woortmann 1997), this study shows that knowledge transfer has become bidirectional as young people also produce and share knowledge within social movement relations and they take this knowledge home, among others to their parents, who do not always possess this type of knowledge. This changes the position of young people in the family as they become knowledge-holders; in addition, it strengthens the dialogue within the family, which is one of the factors that is decisive for youth to continue with farming (Moura and Ferrari 2016).

Our findings suggest that events for and by youth of the agroecological movement in Brazil are particularly important in the redistribution of domestic work. This is partly the result of the women engaged in 'peasant and popular feminism' and partly the result of the work of youth organisations on gender issues (Goris et al. 2019). This study demonstrates that these mixed events by youth organisations offer a place to experiment and practice redistributing domestic work among youth. These practices create relational autonomy among peers and support dialogue at home about domestic work. As I also indicated earlier, this dialogue is decisive for young women to continue with farming (Moura and Ferrari 2016). The study complements the work of Moura and Ferrari (2016) by showing how organisers of youth events deal with a lack of dialogue on the farm about productive and reproductive work. By creating opportunities to do things differently, social movements can enhance the capacities of young people to also do things differently at home and on the farms.

Parents need to get used to the fact that the new generation is doing things differently. The increased mobility of rural youth in Brazil, which is called '*circulação*' in Brazilian literature (de Castro 2016b), means that rural youth moves to and from the city to study, to work, to socialise, and so on. This research shows that this circulation of youth can lead to changes in the expectations of parents, who often start to believe that their children are not interested in taking over the farm, though this is not necessarily the case at all. In line with what Garcia Júnior (1989) and van der Ploeg (2012) also noted, our analysis shows that studying or having other work can in fact be

strategy for ensuring the existence of their farms. In the past, this moving in and out of social categories, from being a peasant to doing paid manual labour on plantations or in industries, was a necessity, a characteristic of the peasantry (Sherwood et al. 2018). Peasants would buy land with the money earned at plantations or in industries. While this is still the case, there are also young people who aspire to follow multiple careers in their lives. Whereas many adult agroecological farmers hold the view that part-time farmers are mostly conventional farmers (Teixeira, Van den Berg, et al. 2018), this research clearly demonstrates the existence of young, part-time agroecological peasants and the interest of the younger generation in combining farming with part-time work. Peasant is a political category (Edelman and James 2011) to which these young people ascribe and it denotes a specific way of farming in harmony with nature. Bodily autonomy is created by including urban and part-time farmers in the peasant identity.

The increased societal attention to institutional and systemic racism is an emerging topic in the agroecology movement in Brazil. This research shows how the union in Espera Feliz actively mobilises Black youth to participate as organisers of and educators in youth events. Furthermore, the study points at popular art as a method to deal with oppression due to race, gender, class, sexual identity and peasant identity. Popular art, including the process of film-making and the films made in this research, creates relations with (mediated) viewers, which in turn opens up the possibility for multiple identities to emerge. The theatre performances of Mycorrhiza as well as the films portray the diversity within the agroecology movement. They provide specific self-representations that counter the narrative of agroecology and urban agriculture as *innovative* (Gripper 2020), for example by showing the history of farming in harmony with nature among Black, Indigenous and traditional White peasants, as well as the history of horticulture in cities (da Silva Gomes 2009; Leal da Silva et al. 2019). Popular art creates the abilities to reproduce and value, and at the same time resignify traditional cultures, thereby addressing oppression within these traditional cultures. Finally, the household strike, the refusal to wash clothes with pesticides, is a novel way to deal with social and environmental injustice. Arruzza et al. (2019) have pointed at the worldwide emergence of household strikes but this example illustrates how bodily autonomy is created in rural areas and how this helps women to deal with gender oppression and environmental issues.

These different examples of the co-creation of relational autonomy on farms, movements and bodies are all interrelated. Within social movements, relational

autonomy is created that can enhance the relational autonomy of youth on the farm. In addition, the co-creation of bodily autonomy to have multiple, embodied identities or to keep away the body from pesticides can enhance the relational autonomy of youth on the farm. These different relations rubs off on the relational autonomy of young people on farms, which is decisive for their engagement in agroecological farming. The relational approach toward autonomy employed in this study allows me to disclose what augments or undermines the autonomy of young peasants.

### 4.6. Conclusion

This research has shown that young people create autonomy through relations on the farms, in social movements and at the level of bodies by employing strategies that are derived from and show similarities with peasant and popular feminism. As such, this study contributes to understanding how young people in agroecology deal with multiple, intersecting forms of oppression in relation to their gender, race, class, sexual orientation and peasant identity, which hinders them from farming. I have demonstrated how youth co-create relational autonomy by engaging in processes of agricultural and livelihood diversification and in processes of democratisation. The mixed youth events disclose a distinctive strategy for and by youth, which is aimed at the redistribution of productive and reproductive work. During these events, relational autonomy among peers is created, which enables them to redistribute the forms of agricultural, domestic and care work that are intertwined in agriculture. Popular art appeared to be an aesthetic, disruptive and imaginative force that is able to enhance autonomy in relations with (mediated) viewers, as it simultaneously appreciates, reproduces, and resignifies peasant cultures, thereby addressing tensions between patriarchal traditions and feminism. The concrete actions by the union in Espera Feliz to include Black and Indigenous youth and to create dialogues on the topic of oppression may inform others in terms of how to deal with systemic racism within agriculture. To conclude, the unique strategies employed by youth create relational autonomy and space for novelty within agroecology.

# CHAPTER 5 AGROECOLOGICAL PEASANT TERRITORIES: RESISTANCE AND EXISTENCE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR EMANCIPATION IN BRAZIL

**Abstract**

We explore peasant territories as an emancipatory alternative in the context of authoritarian populism and neo-liberalism by focusing on two agroecological peasant territories in Brazil. We argue that territories harbour socio-ecological, cultural-political and politico-institutional bases that engender different forms of resistance and existence. Peasant territories build and defend emancipatory alternatives by creating self-governed knowledge and production systems, by problematising and mobilising against exploitative relations, and by transforming parts of the state. We conclude that peasant territories provide a basis for emancipatory transformation. What is more, they can be considered as emancipatory alternatives in themselves.

This chapter is based on the following publication:

Van den Berg, L., **M.B. Goris**[10], J.H. Behagel, G. Verschoor, E. Turnhout, M.I.V. Botelho & I. Silva Lopes, 2019. Agroecological peasant territories: resistance and existence in the struggle for emancipation in Brazil, The Journal of Peasant Studies, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2019.1683001

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[10] Leonardo van den Berg and I contributed equally to the article and we share first authorship, even when Leonardo van den Berg is the first mentioned author.

## 5.1 Introduction

In Brazil, the agribusiness sector is politically connected to neo-liberalism and supports and promotes food production that caters to global markets rather than local demands (Cunha 2017). This connection is part of a political trend that is connected to the globalisation of markets and is increasingly visible in countries across the world. Neo-liberalism fosters the commoditisation of agriculture and the insertion of peasants into global commodity markets, where they become subject to a 'race to the bottom' (Schneider and Niederle 2010; Camacho and Cubas 2011; Marsden 2012). Accordingly, it contributes to the economic marginalisation and social exclusion of local populations, including peasants and Indigenous peoples (Bruff 2014; Cunha 2017).

Authoritarian populism[11] is another political trend that threatens peasants' ways of doing and life (Bruff 2014; Thomas and Tufts 2016). It consists of a form of politics that present society as engaged in a struggle between 'the people' and a prejudiced other. Consequently, it uses the name of the people to justify interventions that are harmful to others, who often include peasants and Indigenous peoples (Scoones et al. 2018). In Brazilian politics, the agribusiness lobby – which is now a controlling force in the Brazilian federal parliament – has actively pursued this form of politics (Andrade 2019). Since 2016, this political situation has ushered in austerity measures that dismantle pro-poor and pro-minority policies, including those specifically targeted at peasants (Andrade 2019).

Scoones et al. (2018) argue that emancipatory alternatives that allow people to be different and to do things differently are necessary to protect peasants and counter trends of neo-liberalism and authoritarian populism. Brazilian peasant movements provide an important base for emancipatory alternatives. These movements have historically constructed peasant territories: geographical and socio-material spaces that closely dovetail with peasant ways of doing and life (Escobar 2010; Camacho and

[11] Populism is also associated with (popular) movements and governments that have supported processes of democratization. Here, we follow (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) and define populist movements and governments as those that seek to acquire popular support by building societal antagonisms, mechanisms of 'othering', and rhetoric devices. We thus argue that populist strategies may be employed both the political Left and the Right.

Cubas 2011). Importantly, from the 1980s onwards many peasants have engaged with agroecology as not just a technical approach to agriculture and food production, but also as a political and social movement. In Brazil, this political and social movement champions a transformative epistemology based on principles of solidarity, reciprocity, horizontality and respect for nature (ANA 2014; Nyéléni Declaration 2015; Van den Berg, Hebinck, et al. 2018a).

In the Zona da Mata region in Minas Gerais, peasants have recently protested against the neoliberal government of President Michel Temer (2016–2018)[12] and concomitant austerity measures. As peasants put it, their territories are and have been a base of resistance against global markets which affect and try to control their ways of farming and of life. The impeachment of president Dilma Roussef in 2016 has triggered a new wave of resistance, reaffirming peasants' desire to do things differently and to construct alternative farming, education, innovation, market and other practices that strengthen their territories and promote emancipation.

Few studies explore how peasant territories foster emancipation. Many peasant, agroecology and food movement studies focus on farming practices, policies or social movements rather than peasant territories as the primary emancipatory agents (e.g. Altieri and Toledo 2011; Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011). Studies that do focus on peasant territories often conceptualise these as a product of explicit political conflict: as 'territories of resistance' that are shaped in reaction to 'territories of domination' (Fernandes 2008; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012), and tend to overlook how other, less oppositional needs and desires shape territorial resistance and encourage emancipation. How peasant territories engage with and support wider socio-political change therefore deserves further inquiry.

In this article, we explore peasant territories as an emancipatory alternative by focusing on two peasant territories in the municipalities of Araponga and Espera Feliz,

[12] The government of Michel Temer was succeeded by the current government of Jair Bolsonaro in 1-1-2019, which follows a similar economic course. While the current Bolsonaro government is much more explicit both in its authoritarianism (with inclusion of self-identified military veterans in the government) and populism (with frequent references to the political left and environmentalists as 'enemies of the country'), both trends were already visible in the Temer government. Moreover, both governments are critically supported by the same 'rural bench' (bancada ruralista), which represents the interest of agribusiness and global trade in Federal Parliament, for their base of power in government.

in Minas Gerais, Brazil. We draw on data collected through participant observation, focus group meetings and interviews with peasant organisations (unions, associations, cooperatives, schools), informal groups (of peasant women, youth, church) and peasant farmers in the period 2016–2018 to provide a detailed account of how these territories have historically defended and advances peasant ways of doing.

In the next section we elaborate on the concept of territories and the entwined linkages between resistance, existence, and emancipation. We then introduce the context of agrarian development in Brazil and the region of Zona da Mata in Minas Gerais, after which we present in-depth ethnographic accounts of two peasant territories. We show how peasants construct territorial practices that are autonomous and different from dominant practices and ideas. We then argue that territories defend and advance these practices by making strategic shifts under changing political trends and by taking control over production processes, fostering political mobilisation and transforming parts of the state. We conclude that peasant territories are both bases for the construction and defence of emancipatory alternatives as well emancipatory alternatives themselves.

## 5.2 Territories: resistance, existence and emancipation

### 5.2.1 Peasant territories and emancipation

Peasant emancipation lies in the creation of autonomy from hostile relations and in allowing and fostering the construction of different ways of knowing and doing and in creating horizontal engagements between these different ways. We understand peasant territories as geographical and socio-material spaces that closely dovetail with peasants' ways of doing and ways of life (Porto-Gonçalves 2006; Escobar 2010; Camacho and Cubas 2011). These peasant territories are dynamic entities and territorial change is a non-linear process. Accordingly, we emphasise heterogeneity, contradictions and complexity in our understanding of territory (Long 2001; Escobar 2010; Woods 2015). Specifically, we consider territories to be able to fulfil multiple functions that build on each other: they at once serve as socio-material basis for emancipatory action and they constitute emancipatory alternatives that peasants strive to create and maintain.

The socio-material basis for emancipatory action of peasant territories lies in how they defend and advance peasants' life and ways of doing. In particular, territorial

development consists of a struggle for autonomy from hostile agents. Hostile agents include landlords, agri-business, extractive industries, and large corporations who struggle with peasants territories over land, food, markets, agricultural inputs and other resources, as well as over policies and ideas of how resources should be used, managed and distributed (Fernandes 2008; Escobar 2010; Camacho and Cubas 2011; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012). Peasants create autonomy from these agents by developing particular ways of farming, (Van der Ploeg 2008), markets (Schneider and Niederle 2010), and securing rights to resources such as land (Fernandes 2008; Van den Berg, Hebinck, et al. 2018a). Autonomy can be obtained in different ways. Land rights can for instance be obtained through the legal demarcation of geographical areas as 'Indigenous' or 'peasant' land, by conquering land or by purchasing it (Fernandes 2008). The struggle for autonomy occurs at different levels. For example, efforts by peasant movements to ratify the United Nations declaration on the 'Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas' took place at the international level.

Territorial development aims to constitute emancipatory alternatives through the construction of difference. As it proceeds, agents learn and create knowledge and practices by building alliances, distancing themselves from mainstream institutions, and experimenting with new practices (Wiskerke and Van der Ploeg 2004; Schneider and Niederle 2010). According to Escobar (2010, p.48), territorial development may occur along the lines of dominant ideas of economy, individual, rationality, separation of nature and culture, mind and body and so forth, or it may imagine explicitly alternative constructions of the world from the perspective of difference. Difference need not be constructed in opposition to dominant knowledge and practices, but may also emerge from what existed prior to what was dominant (Porto-Gonçalves 2006), or from bodily affects that overflow dominant practices and representations (Haraway 1993).

### 5.2.2. Resistance and existence

Authoritarian populism and neoliberalism may threaten peasant territorial practices, including the autonomy and difference that they harbour. These threats manifest themselves through laws, policies, markets and other interventions that put peasants in a position in which they have to compete for, or where they become prone to the grabbing of, resources by banks, agri-businesses, the state and peers (Van der Ploeg 2008; Schneider and Niederle 2010; Scoones et al. 2018). Such threats may be countered through both active and direct, as well as passive and indirect struggles.

Emancipatory struggles do not only become manifest as a fight against threats, but also as a fight for a different way of life – a different way of doing things. Some authors (e.g. Porto-Gonçalves 2006; Daskalaki 2017; Sherwood et al. 2017) propose to call this 'a fight for existence': a struggle against something or someone may thus be part of a larger struggle in favour of something else. In other words, peasant struggles can be a means to create room for something new. Struggles in support of something different often entail challenging dominant ideas and assumptions. Accordingly, we consider existence as an integral part of multiple forms of resistance.

We distinguish four forms of resistance: (1) overt resistance, (2) everyday resistance, (3) resistance of the third kind, and (4) rightful resistance. The first and most visible form of resistance is when agents come together around political ideas and engage in an 'overt' struggle, such as roadblocks, strikes, rebellions, demonstrations, and occupations (Wolf 1975). Overt resistance can be part of revolutionary expressions of class struggle (Paige 1975; Wolf 1975), as well as defensive responses to threats to peasants' livelihoods (Scott 1976). Agents that come together in overt struggles may also do this as part of a strategy for existence: they want to create space for something new. Vergara-Camus (2009) for example shows how peasant rebellions in Brazil and Mexico were employed as a political resource to counter neo-liberal authoritarianism and sustain pressure on authorities to allow acquisition of land and building of new livelihoods by peasants. Overt resistance can also be used to counter authoritarian populism and assert peasants and workers as 'the people' rather than prejudiced 'others'.

The second type of resistance is covert or everyday resistance, which occurs when agents seek to disassociate themselves from super-ordinates, such as landlords, employers or government officials, in the practice of everyday life (Scott 1987). This form of resistance is informal, subtle, indirect, and non-confrontational, including instances of foot-dragging, petty theft, or sabotage. Damage need not be material but may also be directed at symbolic elements that hold the relation with super-ordinates together (e.g. rumours, jokes about super-ordinates). The transformative potential of everyday resistance is found in the establishment of a supportive narrative that carries criticisms of prevailing political conditions; these may feed into other forms of resistance but may also cultivate existence and the desire for alternatives (Scott 1987; Malseed 2008; Kerkvliet 2009). The agroecology movement for instance creates a

narrative that values peasants, Quilombolas and Indigenous peoples' way of doing while countering prejudices about race, gender, and rural people.

The third type is 'resistance of the third kind', which resides in production and distribution practices (Van der Ploeg 2007; Van der Ploeg 2008). Resistance of the third kind is realised by creating or tuning production and distribution practices – for example, machinery, fertilisers, or markets – in order to become more autonomous from neo-liberal markets, and to be governed by alternative values such as reciprocity or solidarity (Van der Ploeg 2007; Van der Ploeg 2008; Sabourin 2011; Van den Berg, Hebinck, et al. 2018a). Peasants may do this by buying less and producing more of their own goods and by establishing their own processing plants, food markets, labour arrangements and/or credit schemes instead of relying on global markets (Schneider and Niederle 2010; Pahnke 2015; Van den Berg, Roep, et al. 2018b). This type of resistance strongly builds on expressions of existence, in particular when it leads to new production and distribution practices.

The fourth type is 'rightful resistance' (O'Brien and Li 2006; O'Brien 2013). Whereas overt resistance openly challenges governmental authority, rightful resistance engages with government through negotiation. In doing so, rightful resistors strategically employ the ideas and commitments of the powerful to change policies or laws that will serve their own interests (O'Brien and Li 2006). Rightful resistors often use divisions within the state by for example collaborating with some government institutions to exert pressure on others. Rightful resistance has been employed both to defend vulnerable groups from threats such as privatisation and legal reforms and to advance existence and autonomy, for example through policies and laws that support alternative practices (O'Brien 2013) (Table 7).

| | Agent(s) | Emergence | Resistance | Existence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overt resistance** | Peasants who come together around a social demand | Spontaneously from informal networks and/or formally organised | Confront powerful agents and demand to stop changes that damage peasants | Confront powerful agents and demand recognition and/or support of difference |
| **Everyday resistance** | Peasants' everyday practices | Spontaneously from informal networks | Damage everyday practices at the cost of powerful agents without confronting them | Nourish everyday practices that allow for difference |
| **Resistance of the third Kind** | Peasant production and distribution practices | Strategic orientation towards autonomy | Production and distribution practices that minimize dependency on powerful agents | Production and distribution practices that allow for difference |
| **Rightful resistance** | Peasant alliances with powerful agents and their ideas | Formally organised, clearly defined objectives | Create alliances with powerful agents to negotiate or inhibit institutional or policy change from damaging peasants | Create alliances with powerful agents to negotiate for institutional or policy change that allows for difference |

**Table 7** Characteristics of different forms of resistance.

### 5.3. Social movements and the Brazilian state

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

To support peasants, the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) was founded in 1975 by the left wing of the Catholic Church (CPT 1997; Fernandes et al. 2012). During the period of military control, only Church-based organisations were allowed to work with and organise the poor, enabling these organisations to secretly support the development of peasant movements (CPT 1997; Wolford 2010). At the time, considerable parts of the Catholic Church in Brazil embraced Liberation theology, which is based on a materialist perspective of society and interprets the teachings of Jesus Christ in terms of liberation from unjust economic, political, and social conditions (Boff and Boff 1986). CPT's support for peasant movements ranged from mediating between peasants and government officials, to providing legal support to peasants entangled in disputes over and giving advice to peasants on nutrition and farming practices (CPT 1997). After the restoration to democracy in 1985, open struggles for land and rights for rural workers were once more possible and many new peasant movements and organisations arose. One of these organisations is the Brazilian landless workers movement (MST), which occupies abandoned land, demands its redistribution, and establishes new peasant territories (Stédile and Fernandes 1999; Wolford 2010). The MST aligned workers' dreams to live a free and autonomous life with movement leaders' wish for cultural change and revolution, which at times also generated tensions within the movement (see Loera 2006).

Another movement that emerged in the 1980s is that of the Base Ecclesial Communities (CEB): self-organised, autonomous groups that engage in politically oriented readings of the bible, using Liberation theology, with the purpose of improving their own conditions (Betto 1985; Boff and Boff 1986). The CEB's were set up by the Catholic Church and led by community members. With support from the CPT, the

CEBs provided a basis for the foundation of new local rural workers' unions (STR). In many parts of Brazil, the CEB's and Liberation Theology questioned relations of patronage and dependency between sharecroppers and rural workers and landlords, giving voice to poor, silent and seemingly powerless populations (Stédile and Fernandes 1999; Comerford 2003), such as those described by Scheper-Hughes (1992) in the Brazilian Northeast. In this period, governments continued to almost exclusively invest in mechanised, chemical and export-led agriculture. This agri-business model of farming is also known as the Green Revolution and was later also promoted under family farmers.

In the 1990s, the focus of many peasant movements shifted from land reform and rights for rural workers to a struggle for an alternative rural development paradigm (Favareto 2006). New organisations included the Federation of Workers in Family Farming (FETRAF) and the Movement of Small Farmers (MPA). These movements began to criticise neo-liberal development and the agri-business model of farming and constructed alternatives based on principles of sustainable development, solidarity, and social and political democracy (Silva et al. 2014). These and other peasant organisations, including the MST, embraced agroecology as an alternative to the agri-business model of farming and formed alliances with other organisations working with agroecology – including academic and research institutions and NGOs (ANA 2014). In 2002, these organisations formally united in the National Articulation for Agroecology (ANA). Older movements such as the Movement of Rural Women also re-invented themselves as a network including multiple, autonomous movements (Rubin and Sokoloff-Rubin, 2013). In 2003, the Workers Party (PT) rose to power and, under the pressure of peasant and agroecology movements, new policies and laws supporting peasants and other marginalised groups were established. These included credit programmes to access land, funds for rural education, and support for the establishment of institutional food markets (ANA 2014; da Costa et al. 2017). While these were positive political changes for peasant and agroecology movements, at the same time a powerful elite constituted by large plantation holders, transnational agri-business corporations and local rural elite – represented by the 'rural bench' in Federal Parliament – did not completely lose power. In different areas of Brazil, it even expanded its control over land and other resources, often at the expense of more vulnerable populations of rural workers, smallholder farms, Indigenous peoples, Quilombolas, mineworkers and rubber-tappers (Zimerman 2010, 2016).

Policies and laws supporting peasants ended in the 2010s when right-wing populist opposition movements, nourished by right-wing Brazilian media empires, rose against the PT government (Pimentel 2015; Firmino 2017; Vieira 2017). This culminated in the impeachment of president Dilma Rouseff in August 2016. Under the newly inaugurated president, Michel Temer (2016–2018), austerity measures were put into place. Policies supporting peasants, Indigenous peoples, and other minorities have been and continue to be dismantled while support for agri-business is on the increase (Cunha 2017).

The history of peasant movements in Brazil is intertwined with the development of peasant territories in Araponga and Espera Feliz. In the 1980s, hundreds of CEB groups were established in both Araponga and Espera Feliz. CEB members from both territories later approached the CPT to establish an STR in Espera Feliz in 1986 and one in Araponga in 1989. The initial objective of the STR was to protect rural workers and sharecroppers from encroachment by landlords. In Araponga, this focus shifted to land acquisition when the Land Conquest Movement arose in 1989.

In the 1990s, both territories also focused on alternative rural development and agroecology. The peasant unions from both municipalities became part of large peasant federations, FETRAF and FETAEMG, who in turn teamed up with the Centre of Alternative Technologies (CTA) and the Federal University of Viçosa, thus becoming part of ANA. New alliances and ideas led to the establishment of peasant associations, credit cooperatives, novel farming practices and local markets. The federal and state governments were effectively pressured to implement policies that helped establish land credit programmes, institutional markets and peasants' schools. Today, the new government is dismantling these same policies.

Peasant territories responded to neo-liberal authoritarianism by shifting between different types of resistance and existence. From 2003 to 2016, and under the aegis of the Workers Party governments, many peasant movements directed their efforts at rightful resistance – negotiating and pushing through new policies and laws. This allowed them to build new territorial practices and expand their territorial bases. When president Dilma Rouseff (Workers Party) was impeached in 2016 and austerity reforms were put in place, efforts shifted to more overt forms of resistance aimed at countering these reforms. At the same time, these protests also continuously questioned the legitimacy of the new government. Despite the dismantling of many policies that supported peasants, rightful resistance efforts were not in vain as many territorial

practices were to some degree autonomous from political change and continue to exist today. At present, new forms of resistance and existence are beginning to emerge.

### 5.4. Resistance in the Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais

#### 5.4.1. Overt resistance

When the Michel Temer government seized power from 2016 to 2018 after the impeachment of president Dilma Rouseff, a wave of protests took place in Brazil. The most visible protests were those opposing social welfare and labour reforms (as proposed by the Proposta de Emenda Constitucional 287 or PEC 287). PEC 287 proposes a reform of the pension system, replacing the right to pension after 35 years of work for men and 30 years for women, with a minimum pension age of 65 years old for both men and women. While pensions are funded by income – and other taxes – the reform requires peasants to pay an additional monthly contribution per household member. Peasant movements argue that this is unfair because they are already putting more into the pension system than that they get out of it. They also argue that peasants and workers will be hit hardest by these reforms because they start working at an early age and because their professions demand heavy labour. Peasant women who have a double workload (they work on the farm and at home) will be hit even harder.

Peasants' organisations, federations and confederations, including the Federação dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras na Agricultura Familiar (FETRAF), Federação Trabalhadores Agricultura do Estado de Minas Gerais (FETAEMG), Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura (CONTAG) and the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) as well as other workers' organisations and social movements, joined hands to mobilise people and organise protests against PEC 287. Peasants and peasant organisations in Araponga and in Espera Feliz were involved in some of these protests, including a large protest in Brasilía in December 2016 and the first nationwide general strike in 23 years, in June 2017.

> *"We voted for President Dilma [...] but he [Michel Temer] took our vote. So we said: 'we have to do something'. The fire was burning in ours veins: 'let's to go to the street and demonstrate'."* (José, Leader Peasant Youth Group in Araponga)

Another large anti-PEC 287 demonstration was the ‘For the life of Women! Against Welfare and Labour Reforms’ demonstration in Belo Horizonte on International Women's Day in March 2017. For the women, the demonstration was not a conservative response to, or a fight against, PEC 287. Women also mobilised because the Temer government (2016–2018) signified a regression in what they accomplished in their fight for existence as women within the state, including rights and recognition for their work.

> *“The fact that we are women doesn't mean that we don't have rights. So we are defending our rights. – Participant of the ‘For the life of Women!’”* (Maria, Demonstration Participant from Espera Feliz)

Overt resistance against PEC 287 was also organised in the vicinity of Espera Feliz and Araponga on the 15th of March 2017 by youth and peasant organisations who blocked two highways (BR116 and BR265).

Overt resistance was also directed against other government reforms. On the 6th of December 2017, the Education Department of the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV) was occupied. Students, including peasants from Araponga and Espera Feliz, as well as university staff protested against severe budget cuts in the ‘Education for and by the Countryside’ programme as well as against ‘Education without party’ reforms. The former funds Licena, a university study that is designed to be accessible to peasants and is based on pedagogies that value peasants’ practices and experiential knowledge. ‘Education without a party’ is a law that aims to limit political and societal discussions at high schools, for example by banning subjects such as philosophy and sociology. Peasants’ main concern with the law and budget cuts is that they threaten difference and diversity by restricting peasants’ freedom of expression and devaluing peasant knowledge.

> “*They are creating a type of education in which you have no voice; you are the receiver of what the teacher teaches.*” (Fernanda, Student Lycena from Espera Feliz)

Some protests against the Temer government were part of events that seek to forge new and strengthen existing collaborations and celebrate diversity and difference. The Troca de Saberes (Exchange of Knowledges), a yearly event at the Federal University of

Viçosa, aims to bring together citizens, students, researchers and peasants from neighbouring territories. Next to a protest against the government's reforms, the event hosted workshops on agroecological practices, presentations by peasant and Indigenous people and stalls depicting collaborative efforts between peasants and researchers. At the fourth National Agroecology Encounter (IV ENA) held at the beginning of June 2018 in Belo Horizonte, protests were also held alongside sessions where delegates from different territories shared and celebrated their struggles and experiences with agroecology and discussed collaborations and plans to deal with the current challenges. Preceding the IV ENA, regional encounters and protests were organised for the Zona da Mata region in Viçosa.

Next to a struggle for existence and against reforms, protests and the events that they were sometimes part of were sites of encounters where difference was articulated and where collaborations for existence and resistance were cultivated, forged or strengthened:

> "*At the manifestations we are all united. We get to know each other, other groups.*" (Silvia, Member of the Raízes da Mata women's group in Espera Feliz)

### 5.4.2. Everyday resistance

An important form of everyday resistance in Araponga and Espera Feliz is found in the reflection groups of the Base Ecclesial Communities (CEB), which were informed by Liberation Theology and established throughout the whole of Brazil. During CEB's meeting members began to criticise the idea of sharecropping: they had to do all the work while receiving less than half of the harvest, were forced to work when it was raining or when they were sick, and had little choice over what, when, and how to plant. Through these encounters and discussions at the CEB's the idea of sharecropping changed from being seen as 'natural' to something that is unjust.

> "*In a way she [the CEB's] awakens the oppressed.*" (Fernando, Board Rural Workers Union Araponga)

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

In Araponga, the topic of sharecropping led to discussions about the unequal distribution of land. True justice, peasants concluded, could only be attained if they owned land. This wish for land also arose out of peasants' desire for a different existence; a life where peasants could decide when, what, and how to farm themselves. Land ownership was seen as the only way to become completely free from landlords. These discussions led peasants to form collaborations that would purchase land in groups. This became known as the Joint Land Conquest Movement.

> "*The necessity arose for us to discover a way to obtain land. The problem was that we were poor, we didn't have any money. [...] We had to think of a different strategy to conquer land.*" (Donival, Board STR Araponga)

In the two decades that followed CEB's participants also challenged existing farming, market and education practices, forged agroecological alternatives and founded new organisations (see also below).

> "T*he union is CEB, the CTA is CEB, the EFA is CEB. All these organizations were born from her. [...] She pushed people to think and to create these institutions. [...] She made the movement.*" (Niuton, Coordinator Land Conquest Movement)

Beyond the reflection groups, the CEB's also came to mean what some peasants in Araponga refer to as 'life': loose encounters that cultivate the expression and articulation of difference and existence.

> "*She [the CEBs] is the mother because she is patient with you, she gives you warmth, she feeds you, she takes care of you. The father [the union] gives direction, he imposes order. But the CEB's is very caring. [...] She is a force that is more inside people, that says: go, you can do it. You can do it, go. [...].*" (Niuton, Coordinator Land Conquest Movement)
>
> "*The CEB's doesn't have this thing of being Catholic or Christian. She has an awakening role.*" (Joana, Board STR Espera Feliz)

Despite their achievements, the number of CEB's groups has diminished in both municipalities. In the 1980s, Espera Feliz counted over 400 reflection groups, in 2017 there were 267. The activity of groups has also diminished. According to representatives of the STR in Araponga and Espera Feliz reasons for this include the Vatican's rejection of Liberation Theology, a shift in activity to formal peasant organisations which were no longer illegal after the dictatorship in 1985, criticism of CEB's members about the workings of the Catholic Church, increased dependency on public policies, and division within the CEB's regarding issues related to agro-toxin use. However, with a hostile government in power, peasants' unions in both Araponga and Espera Feliz have re-directed their hopes and efforts in the CEB's.

> "*The CEB's are returning and becoming stronger because with this government people came back to themselves, to reality.*" (Joana, Board STR Espera Feliz)

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

Like the CEB's, the women groups also nourish difference and existence. They do this by organising farm visits, recipe exchanges, workshops, food tastings, meetings and conversations. At these meeting, new ideas form and new agroecological practices emerge around forgotten plants, vegetable gardens, handicrafts, medicinal plants and beauty products, amongst others.

By fostering own production instead of buying industrialised foods such as pasta, soda, and instant juices, everyday existence feeds into resistance of the third kind. Within the group women are stimulated to express themselves and develop argumentation, mobilisation and organisation skills that are seen as important for peasant movement work, thereby feeding into rightful resistance.

"*When I came in here, I had no courage to speak to people. I did not have the guts to pick up things. But nowadays I am the secretary of the group. So I think, the group of women help us a lot to raise self-esteem.*" (Josefina, Board Raízes da Terra Womens' Group)

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

### 5.4.3. Resistance of the third kind

Resistance of the third kind can be found in several farming practices, many of which were constructed in response to government policies and practices that promote agribusiness ways of doing. These agents pressured peasants to use chemical fertilisers, to specialise in the production of coffee, and to adopt mono-cropping. They promised that these practices would give peasants freedom and wealth. The production of food crops was discouraged. It was said that food crops could better be bought in the supermarket.

Peasants, however, were not always able to produce enough coffee to pay back the investments they had made in farm inputs and buy food, especially when the price of chemical fertilisers and food in the supermarkets began to increase. Agri-business practices were moreover causing land degradation which led to yield declines.

"*I was so busy with producing coffee that I could not take care of my mother when she became sick.*" (João, Arapongan peasant)

When peasants realised that agri-business practices degraded their natural resource base and did not bring the freedom they envisaged, they began to challenge these practices. Discussions took place at the CEB's, peasant organisations and informal groups which led peasants to collaborate with the CTA and the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV) and devise agroecological practices that reduced land degradation and farm dependency on coffee markets. These collaborations led to new initiatives including farmer-led

experimentation, on-farm experiments, peasant-to-peasant exchanges and other gatherings where problems and progress were reflected upon.

In Araponga coffee agroforests were developed with trees that can supply nutrients to the coffee, like Mycorrhiza-hosting trees that can adsorb phosphorus that is tightly bound to the soil, leguminous trees that can capture nitrogen from the air, or deep-rooting trees that can take up nutrients at greater depths (Cardoso et al. 2001; CTA-ZM 2005). In both municipalities practices to protect and regenerate soils (e.g. tree planting, green manuring, cover cropping, and selective weeding) arose. When these practices were in place in the 1990s joint experimentation and exchanges amongst peasants and between peasants and researchers continued. These new practices strengthened peasants' resource base.

New, reinvented and revived food practices also emerged from peasants encounters and collaborations. More and a higher diversity of food crops were cultivated including a large variety of crops, vegetables, fruits and medicinal plants. Animals were also held, including chickens, pigs, cattle and goats. Trees were planted in agroforestry systems for their fruits and wood. Foods began to be processed by peasants themselves – both in a collectively-owned processing plant and by a municipal peasant cooperative. Cassava and maize, for example, were processed into flower; pig fat and avocados into soap; sugarcane into sugar; milk into cheese; and fruits into jams and juices.

Peasants continued to produce coffee and engage in commodity markets to obtain money. They argued that they did this to be able to go to the doctor or dentist when needed, send their children to university or simply be able to go out or have a vacation.

Agroecological practices were not only used to reduce dependency on commodity markets but also for existence (Botelho et al. 2016; Van den Berg, Roep, et al. 2018b). Many peasants wanted to create a type of farming that allowed them to live and work according to values that differed from agri-business ones. They wanted more freedom to decide when and how to work, to farm with more respect for nature, and for their farm to be a pleasant and healthy environment for their family to live and work in. Foods were not only grown to avoid the supermarket but also because peasants valued the taste of their own varieties. Some trees were kept because they had beautiful flowers or because they offered shade while working the field. Some products such as cheese

were produced as gifts. Sugarcane was produced to share with fellow peasants who helped out with the harvest.

Resistance of the third kind was found not only in farming practices but also in practices through which peasants acquired land and credit for land. The Land Conquest Movement, for example, functions as an alternative land and credit market in Araponga (Campos 2014; Van den Berg, Hebinck, et al. 2018a). Strict conditions and high interest rates make it unfavourable for peasants to acquire credit from banks and land is often expensive and sold in large tracts. With the Land Acquisition Movement peasants formed groups, pooled their financial resources and collectively bought land. The Land Conquest Movement also tried to ensure that land that peasants wanted to sell was offered to fellow peasants, so that land remained within the peasant territory.

> "*With the land acquisition movement the people themselves do everything. They pay for the land, they build their own house, plant their fields [...] with their own resources.*" (Niuton, Coordinator Land Conquest Movement)

The land conquest movement is also an expression of existence. While it enables peasants to access credit outside of, and keeps land from entering, neo-liberal markets, the movement is also seen as a project to create an agriculture that is based on values that respect the land, animals, and neighbours. These values are also reflected in the 'ten commandments of land conquest' drafted in 1995, which are a set of principles such as 'recover and preserve the soil', 'use leguminous species', 'visit your neighbours farm', 'take care of animals' (CTA-ZM 2002, p.26). Resistance of the third kind was also found in alternative food markets that made peasants less dependent on the coffee market, allowing direct sales to consumers. In both Espera Feliz and Araponga peasants founded a cooperative through which they run a peasants' shop and an open peasants' market. The shop and the open market sell fruits, vegetables, cassava, coffee, beans, maize, maize flower, cassava flower, sugar, honey, syrup, and other products directly to consumers.

> "*When you are able to get things directly from producer to consumer, both gain. Because you can sell for more while the consumer pays less. Unfortunately, it is usually the middlemen who take the largest share.*" (Edimar, Arapongan Peasant)

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

#### 5.4.4. Rightful resistance

Rightful resistance is largely found in practices through which peasants negotiate changes in government policies and laws and make claim to access these and other policies and laws. Through their involvement in the large peasant federations FETAEMG and FETRAF, the STR of Araponga and Espera Feliz were able to do so.

> "*It was because of the struggle by movements, not only by the one in Espera Feliz, that we conquered public policies to access land, markets and dignified housing.*" (Joana, Board STR Espera Feliz)

One of these policies is the Land Credit Policy (Crédito Fundiário) which provides loans for farmers to buy land at low interest rates. Later, the Housing Policy (Política de Habilitação), which provides finance for farmers to build a house on the purchased land, was implemented. The STR in both municipalities mediated access to these policies. Becoming recipients of these policies is considered to be only one part of rightful resistance. Claiming the benefits these policies bring often meant the STR had to go dodge complex bureaucratic hurdles (e.g. produce a whole range of documents peasants often did not have such as land titles, identity cards or producer's cards) and pressure government representatives in Belo Horizonte or Brasília.

With the impeachment of president Dilma Rousseff in 2016 the land credit and housing policies were frozen until further notice. The STR in both municipalities are

currently negotiating with government officials to accept the applications for credit that were made before the policy was frozen.

> "*We fought nine years to get a proposal for the Land Policy approved to settle 38 families [...] which are pending for two years, four years.*" (Joana, Board STR Espera Feliz)

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

> "*The land conquest movement slowed down after the Land Credit Policy [...] But today people are going back to the old model [the Land Conquest Movement].*" (Niuton, Coordinator Land Conquest Movement)

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

> "*We established other markets. We did not only focus on public policies. [...] Because if the public policy stops, the doors would close. [...] These markets are not affected by government. They give the cooperative independence.*" (Joana, Board STR Espera Feliz)

Rightful resistance is evident as well in the National School Feeding Programme (PNAE). PNAE is based on a law that dictates that at least 30% of the ingredients in school meals from public schools should be produced by family farms. Like with the PAA, the peasant cooperatives coordinate this programme by maintaining contact with the different schools and farmers and synchronising supply and demand for a wide range of foods. PNAE is currently still in place. By organising continuous engagement between schools and peasants, it feeds into resistance of the third kind (see above).

Rightful resistance is also present in the continuous claims that the peasant high school Escola Família Agrícola (EFA-Puris) has to make to access the Bolsa Aluno, the Fund for Rural Education and other subsidies on which the school depends. Subsidies from the Fund for Rural Education have been cut by 50% between 2015 and 2017 and are planned to be cut by another 86.1% in 2018 (Intini 2016). EFA-Puris has to apply for funding every year and on several occasions funds were not transferred, resulting in time-consuming negotiations with government officials. In a few cases negotiations failed and the school resorted to more overt forms of resistance, including a protest in Belo Horizonte and a petition, to obtain financial support.

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

> "*Acquiring land is not acquiring land to simply have land [...] Because with land the family will live better, will be able to produce without using pesticides. Sometimes farmers don't have this independence where they live. Sometimes they are obliged to do things they are told to do because they don't own the land.*" (Joana, Board STR Espera Feliz)
> "*A farmer without land is like a bird without wings. It knows that it cannot fly.*" (Donival, Board STR Araponga)

The markets created through the PAA and PNAE also support peasants in their struggle for a different type of life and farming, for instance by enabling them to combine farm diversification with sales of multiple products.

The EFA-Puris school seeks not only to offer access to education but also to construct a different type of education – one that values peasants' knowledge,

experiences, and practices. This is done by organising farm excursions, talks by farmers, peasants' reflections on the work they carry out on their farms, and applications of the curriculum to farm practices (e.g. making soap during chemistry lessons and making effective micro-organism mixtures during biology). Much of the educational curriculum teaches students how to become less dependent on external knowledge and farm inputs, thereby feeding into resistance of the third kind. The school also teaches the history of their territory and its people – many of who are descendants from an Indigenous group called the Puri.

> "*The Puri for us has two meanings: love for the land and the struggle for freedom. So you are free, you walk with your own legs, walk with your head up. You will not be anyone's employee.*" (Fransisca, Coordinator Rural High School Araponga)

Overall, government austerity measures have had large impacts on the practices and prospects of rightful resistance. However, the STR's in Araponga and Espera Feliz trust that their territories have the capacity to deal with this.

> "*There is a lot of work that we do that started before this government. [...] How did we do things before? The CEB's, the base work.*" (Joana, STR Espera Feliz)
> "*The persecution of the government is awakening the memory of the people. The people are waking up, and feel the need to unite and organise themselves.*" (Donival, STR, Araponga)

## 5.5. Discussion: peasant territories as sites of and bases for resistance and emancipation

### 5.5.1. Peasant territories as sites of resistance

Peasant territories in the Zona da Mata engendered different forms of resistance and existence to defend and advance peasant ways of doing and life in the face of political trends of neo-liberalism and authoritarian populism. In the literature on peasant territories, it is argued that peasant territories continuously confront, and enter into conflict with, agents that promote neo-liberalism such as governments, landlords and

agri-business, because they threaten non-commodity relations that are seen to constitute the territory (Fernandes 2008; Camacho and Cubas 2011). While such conflicts are also present in the Zona da Mata, neo-liberal threats are also addressed through other, less confrontational means, including ‘resistance of the third kind’ and ‘rightful resistance’.

Through resistance of the third kind, which includes the production of own inputs and food and the construction of nested markets, peasant territories reduced their dependency on some, and completely circumvented other, commodity markets, thereby significantly reducing pressures that draw peasants to a ‘race to the bottom’ (cf. Marsden 2012). Through rightful resistance, peasant territories moreover employ the government's own rhetoric on rural development and sustainability to negotiate for laws, agricultural extension, policies and rights that serve to advance peasants' ways of doing and life, such as the National School Feeding Policy and the Land Credit Policy. Rightful resistance was particularly employed under the Worker Party's government (2003–2016), which although mainly supporting agri-business, was more open to peasant and agroecological movements.

Escobar (2010) argues that in Latin America, the prejudiced ‘other’ of authoritarian populism has, since colonial times, been portrayed as non-modern groups such as Black, peasant, women and Indigenous people. Still, the central depiction of modernity as a defining feature of ‘the people’ is a more recent development. In Brazil, this arguably started with protests against the Rouseff's Workers Party government in 2015, where protestors claimed that left wing parties and the groups they support act against and rob ‘the people’ (Firmino 2017). The depiction of the people as modern and superior opposed to others as non-modern and backwards is expected to reach new extremes under Jair Bolsonaro's current government (2019–2022), which promotes the rhetoric that peasants, landless and Indigenous people, environmentalists, social scientists, feminists, etc., act against the progress of the Brazilian people. In Brazil, moreover, this authoritarian populism goes together with neo-liberalism: the insertion of people in commodity markets is depicted as a defining feature of being modern.

To deal with threats of being excluded, marginalised or displaced it has been argued that networks that reassert and defend difference, and that promote horizontal dialogue between different knowledges, must be created (Porto-Gonçalves 2006; de Sousa Santos 2009; Escobar 2010). In the Zona da Mata, threats posed by authoritarian populism come from and are defended at both the local and the national level. At the local level, agents such as shopkeepers, municipal authorities, and pesticide salesmen

spread the rhetoric that modern farmers, which include agri-businesses, plantations and entrepreneurial family farms, are superior to peasant farmers. They thereby create shame among peasants and tensions between them and neighbouring modern family farmers, pressuring them to modernise or migrate to the city. These threats are addressed through everyday resistance, which is found in spaces where peasants and their allies discuss and politicise modern agricultural practices. This includes the creation of counter narratives that depict the negative effects of modern farming on human health, the quality of products, the environment and on peasants' freedom, and that champion peasant and agroecological ways of doing. These spaces can be seen to constitute and nourish the formation of networks of difference that advance peasant narratives and where innovations that support peasants ways of doing and life are developed.

At the national level, austerity measures implemented by the government of Michel Temer (2016–2018) threatened to dismantle policies and laws, including Education for and by the Countryside, the Land Credit Policy and the Food Acquisition Programme, that support peasants' territorial education, market and land acquisition practices. To address these threats overt resistance was employed, which mobilised peasants and linked them to peasant organisations throughout Brazil and to movements of rural and urban workers, Quilombolas, Indigenous peoples, landless farmers, environmentalists, feminists and other movements, in a mass protests against government reforms. While these protests did not stop the reforms, they did create and strengthen networks that affirm difference.

### 5.5.2. Peasant territories as bases for emancipation

Territorial development, as the unfolding of autonomy and difference, was found to be related to three pathways of emancipation. The first pathway lies in the farm labour and production process (Chayanov 1966; Van der Ploeg 2008; Van der Ploeg 2017). Several scholars (e.g. Toledo 1990; Chayanov 1991; Van der Ploeg 2008; Pahnke 2015) argue that peasant emancipation is fostered through the creation of production, processing and distribution systems that are autonomous from hostile relations such as landlords and commodity markets. Such systems are shaped according to peasants' own knowledge, values and aspirations and reduce peasant dependency on commodity markets, while not breaking the relations with commodity markets entirely. The latter still enable peasants to obtain financial resources to participate in societal

activities such as go to university or a hospital without being drawn in a ‘race to the bottom’ (Van der Ploeg 2017). Peasant territories in the Zona da Mata harbour a socio-ecological base constituted by horizontal relationships between peasant, nature, the community and militants from peasant and agroecology movements, which, through resistance of the third kind, are drawn in different constellations to form production and distribution systems that are autonomous and attuned to values of cooperation, reciprocity, freedom, trust, friendship, and respect for nature. Emancipation was not only sought in production and distribution but also in the creation of self-governed education, innovation and land distribution systems.

The second pathway is found in the formation of political subjects and popular movements (Gramsci 1971; Laclau and Mouffe 1985). For Gramsci (1971), people become political subjects when they come to recognise and valorise themselves as protagonists and form a collective identity capable of transformation. A pathway to emancipatory alternatives then lies in the articulation of shared symbols or social demands that explicitly oppose dominant ideas, to create a popular movement that cuts across classes. In the Zona da Mata, social encounters of peasants in community groups, peasant schools and union gatherings can be seen to constitute a cultural-political base where, through everyday and overt resistance, peasants become political subjects. In these encounters, popular movements are moreover created by problematising everyday relations with landlords and agri-business and by articulating social demands that oppose agri-business together with researchers, citizens and activists. Finally, the politico-cultural base engendered articulations not only based on opposition to dominant agents and ideas, but also based on affects that overflow or pre-exist dominant categories.

A third pathway of emancipation lies within the state. Fox (2007), for example, argues that the pathway to emancipation lies in deepening engagements between the state and civil society. These engagements target state's institutional infrastructure through a politics of representation and accountability (Ribot 2013). This pathway resonates with the processes we described above as rightful resistance: In the Zona da Mata relations between peasant unions, cooperatives, federations, confederations, and agroecology organisations and the state formed a politico-institutional base that enabled peasant territories to engage with and transform the state. The relations, skills, and materials harboured by the politico-institutional base enabled policies and laws to be altered and

new state-civil society mechanisms to be introduced; which, in turn, have led to peasant land acquisition and a better distribution of resources within peasant territories.

### 5.6. Conclusion

Peasant territories engender different forms of resistance and existence to defend and advance peasant ways of doing and life, particularly in the face of neo-liberalism and authoritarian populism. In the Zona da Mata threats against neo-liberalism are addressed by employing resistance of the third kind, which involves the production of own inputs and food and the construction of nested markets, to reduce dependency on commodity markets. Also, rightful resistance is employed to negotiate for policies that support these practices. Threats against authoritarian populism are addressed through everyday resistance and overt resistance, which challenge relations and narratives that depict peasants as inferior and which create narratives and networks that promote difference.

The significance of peasant territories for emancipatory alternatives is twofold. First, peasant territories contain a socio-ecological, cultural-political and politico-institutional base that harbours and nourishes a pool of horizontal relations between nature and people, natural resources, affects, skills, capacities and ideas. These relations have the potential to combine in constellations that foster emancipation by engendering different forms of resistance and existence, fostering people to problematise and mobilise against exploitative relations and transforming parts of the state.

Second, the peasant territory is an emancipatory alternative itself. Peasant territories are constituted by alternative, autonomous and self-governed farming, educational, market exchange, innovation, land distribution and other territorial practices. On the one hand, these territorial practices defend peasants from destructive political trends and create autonomy from dominant agents and ideas. On the other hand, these territorial practices operate according to peasants' own wishes and values such as that of cooperation, reciprocity, freedom, trust, friendship, and respect for nature, in contrast to those wishes and values expressed by proponents of neo-liberalism and authoritarian populism.

# CHAPTER 6 SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

## 6.1. Introduction

In Brazil, young people involved in the agroecological movement have to face multiple, interconnected forms of oppression linked to gender, race, class, sexual orientation, beliefs, place of residence and 'peasant' identity. As I stated in the introduction, there is a lack of knowledge about the way in which these young people deal with these forms of oppression and how they create room for agroecological farming and movement practices. To close this knowledge gap, I carried out research on emancipatory practices among young peasants in Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais, Brazil. Out of the emancipatory practices I identified, I want to highlight three important ones: 1) resignification i.e. the articulation of meanings in new ways to create space for diversity, 2) the building of new forms of relationships among people and between people and nature to reverse power relations and 3) diversification of farming systems and livelihoods in order to become autonomous. These emancipatory practices are rooted in youth identity and practice, supported by popular education, and initiated by social and political movements.

In the next section I provide an answer to the research questions guiding this thesis, and show the multiple interactions that can be found between resignification, the building of relationships, and the transformation of farming and livelihood practices. After that, I first delve into the role of popular education in articulating resignification and relationship building, and the accelerators and inhibitors of these emancipatory practices. I then look into the catalysing role of social and political movements in transformative changes toward agroecology and, specifically, in the co-creation of relational autonomy at the level of farms and subjects' bodies. I end with a reflection on the research approach and emancipatory character of this PhD thesis.

## 6.2. Answering the research questions

*Research question 1 – 'How do young peasants resignify agroecology?'*

I have addressed this first research question mainly in Chapters 2 and 5. In them, I show that a widely shared narrative is one of the main needs of the agroecological emancipatory movement to create a cultural-political base and collective identity. This shared narrative is crucial to prevent others from using the term 'agroecology' for greenwashing purposes (Pimbert 2015; Wezel et al. 2018). Young peasants contribute to this shared narrative on agroecology by using their capacities to formulate meanings in novel ways. This practice is called resignification.

The findings show that, first, young people change social frames i.e. the specific ways in which people understand reality by using the four framing strategies outlined in the work of Benford and Snow (2000). Young people resignify through *frame amplification* by building on narratives that preceded the dominant discourse on industrial agriculture and that survived in the margins of society such as the cultures of Afro-Brazilians. They *bridge frames* by linking with other social movements such as the National Movement of Quilombola Rural Black Communities. Next, they *extend frames* by including new elements such as young women who are being paid for agricultural work, which was previously an uncommon phenomenon and is thus not self-evident. Finally, they *transform frames* by changing the meaning of objects, for example by using the word 'poison' instead of 'remedy' to designate pesticides. The power of such frame transformations becomes evident when youth from conventional farms who attend popular education decide to use fewer (or no) agrochemicals (Chapter 2). For all resignification practices *repetition* was found to be essential to ensure lasting change (Deleuze 2011).

Second, youth mainly resignify peasant agroecology by making visible and positively confirming differences between groups of young peasants. Their resignifications target preconceived beliefs and stigmas about their place of residence, religion or livelihood forms among others – issues that, from the perspective of young people, do matter in processes of recognition by their parents, social movements and governmental bodies. For instance, youth aspirations to have another job next to their work on the farm inadvertently lowered parents' expectations about their daughter's/son's willingness to take over the farm even when the daughter/son actually

wanted to be a successor. The fact that their parents portray part-time farmers as farmers who engage in intensive agriculture (Teixeira, Van den Berg, et al. 2018) doesn't help and the consequences are that parents are starting to invest less in their farms because they don't believe they have a successor. Extending the meaning of the category 'agroecological peasants' to include part-time agroecological farmers, urban peasants and young peasants that adhere to Umbanda, humanism or Evangelism in an overall Catholicism-oriented movement creates more space for diversity and the scaling-out of agroecology. Enhanced constructive dialogues and acceptance of differences at farms, in social movements and in governmental bodies turn out to be decisive factors for young people to engage in agroecological farming and movement practices (Moura and Ferrari 2016).

Finally, a shared narrative is built through youth's resignifications, which helps create a cultural-political base and mobilise political actors. Insofar as this narrative creates more space for cultural and natural diversity, resignification can be considered an emancipatory practice. Since emancipatory practices take place continuously as part of social movement activities, this suggests that agroecology can be considered as an emancipatory movement. Furthermore, the continuous resignification of a shared narrative informs collective *identity in-the-making*. Following Butler (1993, p19), I emphasise the need to continuously revise identity and to keep asking "[w]*ho is represented by which use of the term, and who is excluded*?" By iteratively considering this question, the agroecological movement in fact reveals an unfolding democratisation process in times of authoritarian populism. Importantly, popular education is a space in which the affective and situated abilities needed for this consideration are enhanced, which is part of the answer to research question below:

*Research question 2 – 'How does popular education create emancipatory practices for and by young peasants?'*

Chapters 2 and 3 answer this question by showcasing affective social pedagogies and methods that create emancipatory practices for and by young peasants. The possibilities created in popular education practices to affect and be affected was seen to augment people's agency by building and altering (unexpected) relations and by reversing power in these relations, for example between father and daughter (Cole 2011). Three emancipatory practices in popular education are especially relevant,

namely the self-organisation of youth, the pedagogy of alternation, and the diversification of farming systems and livelihoods.

The first emancipatory practice - the self-organisation of youth - creates resignifying capacities through the sharing of knowledge, the collective development of skills and voice, and the creation of a discursive space to practice resignification. This discursive space allows youth to express and develop their ideas, and is later extended by organising events for larger groups of youngsters. The mobilising force behind these events is what young people call 'intentional leisure': joy as an organisational principle. For these events young organisers invite youth from rural and urban spaces, and from conventional and agroecological farms. The events break with many binaries such as the rural/urban, the agroecology/conventional, and the farmer/consumer divides, and resignify agroecology as a community-to-come, open to anyone interested in peasant agroecology. By collaborating with existing activities that resonate with youngsters, such as traditional gatherings or local soccer competitions, they attract a diverse group of people. To combine knowledge and native seed/seedling exchange with traditional festivities is common but to align with, for instance, soccer is ground-breaking, and engenders joy. These meetings alternate between joy and learning, attract youth and provide an inviting discursive space for them. As Haraway (2016, p.7) states, young peasants argue for "*pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction.*"

The second emancipatory practice - the pedagogy of alternation – is used at the family farming high school EFA-Puris. It consists of alternating school time with community time. The practice helps to build and alter (often in unexpected ways) power relations between parent and child, between teachers and students, between parent and students and nature, and between men and women, among others. The pedagogy of alternation recognises traditional and Indigenous knowledge and therefore advocates learning both at school and in the community, where young people learn from their parents and other people. Chapter 3 demonstrates that parents also learn from their children who attend popular education toward agroecology. The children become knowledge-holders in agroecology, and this alters the parent-child relation. The pedagogy of alternation creates and strengthens dialogues on farms – dialogues that are imperative for young people to continue with farming.

A third emancipatory practice - the diversification of farming systems and livelihoods - is also fostered through popular education. Popular education provides a

space to acquire the knowledge, experience, and sense-making conducive to the diversification of farming systems and livelihoods through farm visits, community research, experimentation with diversified systems, and the organisation of community gatherings. This helps to broaden the range of career options - whether it is coffee producer, beekeeper, or other agricultural specialisations in diversified systems or in combination with other livelihood strategies. The message of popular education toward agroecology is not to become a coffee farmer, but to appreciate the work done by peasants and social movements to preserve biodiversity and cultural traditions within the territory. This creates space for diversified farming systems and livelihood diversification.

Summarising, I found that popular education – by creating discursive spaces, new relationships and space for doing things differently - is an integral part of the three emancipatory practices previously indicated: resignification, the reversal of power in relationships, and the diversification of farming systems and livelihood strategies. All three practices ensure more cultural diversity and biodiversity.

*Research question 3 – 'How do young peasants connect with and engage in social political movements in times of authoritarian governments?'*

This question is answered in Chapters 4 and 5 by using the concept of relational autonomy to understand how youth find ways to exercise control over their lives by connecting with social and political movements. Here, relational autonomy refers to the co-creation of autonomy in interactions among people, and between people and nature. I also use the concepts of resistance and existence to explain shifts between forms of resistance that are part of a larger struggle to do things differently.

In answering research question 3, I first show how youth are actively mobilised by social movement organisations through home visits, by arranging transport to youth events, and by hiring youth to work in the union and cooperatives, among others. By arranging transport from settlements of agrarian reform[13] to events and including Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian cultures in the curriculum of popular education, social

[13] These land reform settlements are home to relatively high numbers of Indigenous and Black young people because of the colonial history that displaced and excluded them from access to land.

movement organisations include a diverse group of youth. In the past, spirituality was seen as the main force that connected youth with social political movements. At present this is still evident in e.g. church services during social movement events or in *misticas*[14], which incorporate religious diversity and help in sense-making. However, we have seen that today, next to spirituality, joy has become another important force to mobilise youth.

Second, I show that youth engage in unique ways in social movement organizations. Two things stand out. They like to use political art and to experiment with different ways of living. In political art they re-work popular culture and provide a mirror to society (Turner 1982). Young artists and their audience together create an autonomous, relational space that is friendlier towards different, 'unconventional' identities and in which things can be done differently. At the mixed youth events, which sometimes consist of several days, they experiment with ungendering work. Young women and men engage in household chores, learning or experimenting with agricultural work normally performed by one gender but not the other. This learning by doing is promising in terms of changing the gender dynamic, as merely talking about gender issues sometimes proved to be counterproductive. This experimentation enhanced the relational autonomy of young women and men while at the same time improving dialogues at home, and thereby enhanced the relational autonomy of family members. The relational autonomy built within social movements in turn altered relational autonomy at the level of the farm and that of individual bodies, thus allowing youth to increase control over their lives and well-being.

A third way in which young peasants connect with and engage in social political movements in times of authoritarian governments involves shifting between different forms of resistance, for example from 'rightful resistance' to 'resistance of the third kind' and 'overt resistance'. Resistance of the third kind refers to changing production and redistribution methods so as to become more autonomous from neo-liberal markets by building on values of reciprocity and solidarity. Young people do this through diversified farming systems and livelihood diversification. For example, Chapters 4 and 5 show how, in the organisation of new peasant markets, gender and generational issues are addressed simultaneously by ensuring that women and youth can sell their farm

[14] Mistica is a spiritual encounter that unites Christian (mainly Catholic) and Indigenous and African religious elements to bring energy, focus and harmony to feel love for a cause (Issa 2007; Hammond 2014).

products on these markets. Shifting to overt resistance, in turn, is about political actors organising demonstrations around political ideas. Youth were strongly present in more overt forms of resistance such as the blockade of two major highways and the occupation of the Education Department of the Federal University of Viçosa. These protests were organised by young people because measures by the authoritarian government disproportionally affected them. These findings are in line with the work of Ghimire (2002), who posits that young people who are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder and have to face multiple forms of oppression play an important role in social movements. Even so, I found that youth also develop capacities to deal with sensitive issues such as gender inequality or authoritarian government by using intentional leisure, experimentation and popular art. Chapter 5 also points at emancipatory practices in which power dynamics involving the Workers Party-led government (2003-2016) induced changes in the political-institutional base and allowed for new policies and laws aiming to support agroecological peasants. However, this from of 'rightful resistance' turns out be difficult in times of authoritarian regimes.

Finally, I have shown that experimenting is not only a promising method for learning and transforming agricultural work (as we have seen in Chapter 3) but also for dealing with the social and political aspects of gendered and generational labour in agriculture. The methods used by the agroecology movement to connect with Indigenous and Black youth and with youth adhering to different beliefs are an important pathway to inclusivity. The relational autonomy developed within social and political movements has a catalysing effect on the creation of relational autonomy at the level of the farm by creating space to produce and distribute differently; at the level of the individual body, this relational autonomy has allowed for the opening up of the question of identity.

### 6.3. Revisiting the objective

By answering the research questions I have gained insight into '*emancipatory practices among young peasants in Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais, Brazil*', the objective of this PhD-thesis. I have explained how a variety of emancipatory practices in popular education and within social movements work and produce more space for diversified farming systems and for different ways of living and being. Throughout the thesis it has become clear that these emancipatory practices take place continuously and that they

affect each other. These interactions between emancipatory practices underscore the *iterative*, *dispersive* and *catalysing* features of emancipatory practices.

In this thesis, I have identified three important emancipatory practices: (1) resignification, (2) reversing power in relations and (3) diversifying farming systems (and livelihoods). The interactions between them are depicted in Figure 34 and they show that more equal power relations and the knowledge and experience gained with diversified farming systems in popular education together create the affective and situated abilities to resignify. In turn, resignifying leads to reversing power in relationships and to transforming farming practices and knowledge on diversified farming systems. This is an *iterative* process. This thesis adds to Van Dijk's work, and states that not only knowledge (Van Dijk 2017) but also the shifting of power relations create the situated and affective abilities to resignify.

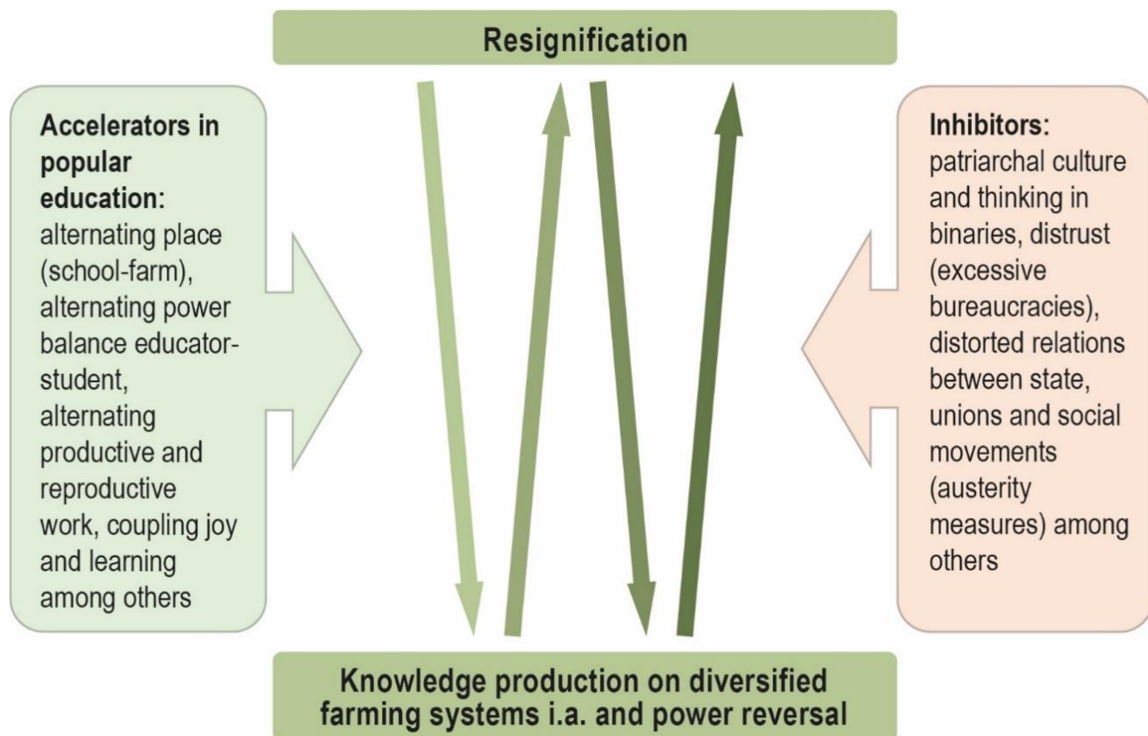


***Figure 34*** *Iterative process of resignification, power reversal, and knowledge production*

This iterative process can be illustrated by going back to Chapter 2 where I presented the case of two young Black women who learned, through popular education, that the farming practices they carried out in their Quilombo [15] were in fact

[15] Quilombo is a traditional community of descendants of Black enslaved people.

agroecological. This recognition and resignification in turn sparked their interest in agroforestry, an agroecological technique they were not yet familiar with. This process can be considered emancipatory because by recognising the young Black women as knowledge holders on agroecology, power is reversed with other students and educators. In popular education on agroecology they acquired new knowledge on agroforestry and thereby gained the abilities to plant more trees on their plots – thus resignifying their agroecological practices to include more trees. This complements the work of Moura and Ferrari (2016), who show that constructive dialogues are decisive for youth to continue with agroecological farming. The social pedagogy of alternation and what youth in Zona da Mata call 'intentional leisure' play an important role in creating the kind of constructive dialogues that accelerate emancipatory practices. The thesis adds to works on learning for sustainability (Wals and Corcoran 2012) by showing how emancipatory practices in popular education feed in to a larger ensemble of emancipatory practices among young peasants.

The interactions between emancipatory practices can foster transformative changes towards agroecology because of their ability to *disperse* to other spaces and people and *catalyse* new practices. The relations built between peasants have created a cultural-political base for the transformation of farming practices which, in turn, constitutes an ecological base for healthy ecosystems. A good case in point is the experience of a young woman in Chapter 3 who learned through popular education new ways on how to work with nature. Back at the farm, she wants to convince her father not to use pesticides. Her father initially reacts defensively, but eventually uses fewer pesticides. Both the father's and the daughter's relation with nature alters by relying more on natural processes and becoming less dependent on pesticides. Throughout this thesis we have seen that the youth's new knowledge and experience can affect their parents and improve relational autonomy at different levels. So, emancipatory practices that originate from social movements can open up the space for diversified farming systems and livelihoods, resulting in greater cultural diversity and biodiversity, and allowing for the possibility to adhere to multiple identities. It is interesting to note that these emancipatory practices recursively fed into social movements and resulted in new relations with the state during the regime of the Workers' party (2003-2016), creating a politico-institutional base in support of popular education (Chapter 3) and agroecological peasants (Chapters 4 and 5).

These iterative, catalysing and dispersing features of emancipatory practices also point at emancipation's political character in the sense that emancipation breaks with oppressive categories and norms, and that it creates alternative ways of living. These features also highlight emancipation's relational character in the sense that the reversal of power relations that emancipation involves takes place in relations. All in all, emancipation in agroecology requires diversity. Youth's articulations and (re)significations of agroecology emphasise the importance of creating a variety of interconnected spaces in which diversity can flourish: diversity in agricultural production and distribution, cultural diversity, religious diversity, sexual diversity and so on. By demonstrating these different forms of diversity, this thesis adds to peasant studies (Van der Ploeg 2008; Cacho et al. 2018; Milone and Ventura 2019). Diversity in agroecology is not only about production and distributing practices, but is inextricably linked to and dependent on cultural, religious, ethnic, and sexual diversity.

## 6.4. Reflection on concepts

As discussed above, this thesis confirms the importance of conceptualising emancipation as political and relational. The research presented in this thesis complements earlier studies of agroecology, including the work of Van der Ploeg (2012), by showing that peasant agroecology, as articulated by youth engaged in the agroecology movement, allows for emancipation not only by ensuring a self-controlled resource base but also by creating more space to adhere to – and develop – multiple identities. In this section I reflect on the potential and pitfalls of the concepts used in the analysis.

As part of considering emancipation as political, I have looked at issues of identity and belonging. This thesis shows that identity is a collective process and that it is emergent, and in-the-making, insofar as the youth are continuously interrogating and renegotiating their shared identity based on the recognition of the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression that they face. As such, this thesis moves away from a taxonomic concept of identity which has been criticised by Haraway (2016) for its tendency to view identity as complete, singular, and exclusionary. In this thesis, these limitations were also clear in Chapter 4, which illustrates that the peasant identity has to be detached from rural bodies for the category to include urban farmers. Instead, as proposed by Sandoval (2002), I could have used the concept of affinity. This concept

of affinity is rooted in social movement practices and studies that have shown that forms of 'oppositional consciousness' can bind coalitions. As such, the concept highlights that social relations can flourish under conditions of openness and mutual respect but that they do not require fixed values or common identities. The notion of affinity can be better suited to emphasising this openness and malleability of social relations in collective action than the concept of identity - even if conceptualised as relational and in-the-making.

Next, in this thesis, I have used the term 'patriarchal culture' to discuss gender oppression. The notion of patriarchal culture is associated with eurocentric ideas about oppression by white men that have been brought to Brazil by colonisation. My use of this concept may have resulted in a lack of attention paid to other vernacular forms of male dominance, for example, in Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian cultures that intersect with the other forms of oppression studied. Arguably, Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian women have to deal with distinct, intersecting forms of oppression (Escobar 2010). It is likely that this omission stems from the fact that, I as a White female researcher from the Global North, have no embodied experience with some of these forms of oppression. This is merely one example of how my own societal positionality is important for a reflexive understanding of the research.

I used the concept relational autonomy to explore emancipation as relational. This thesis argues that this concept is promising in terms of demonstrating how power relations can be reversed in a multitude of relations, between people, between people and nature, between people and agricultural machines and tools, and so on. In the introduction, I stated that all agroecological practices are both agronomic and social in nature. Relational autonomy allows us to ask questions that disclose the specific interconnections of agronomic, social, economic and political aspects in agroecological practices by asking whose autonomy is augmented or impaired in which relation and why. The systematic application of this concept requires that all respondents offer information on relational autonomy in a fixed set of relations that include—in the case of this research—relations among youth, youth relations with their parents, educators, nature and with agricultural machines and tools. Yet, this was not fully realised in this research because the semi-structured interviews did not all address all of these relations. Only halfway into my research did I realise how important it was to consistently inquire about the relationship between humans and their agricultural tools and machines. Agricultural machines and tools can greatly ease the work of peasants,

but they must be adapted to the body variation within the population (Singh et al. 2019; Kumar et al.). With the concept of relational autonomy I was able to explain how the relational autonomy of women was not promoted by the portable mechanical mower. This machine is used in the managing of cover crops in between the coffee bushes, an important agroecological practice. However, the machine did not extend the bodily autonomy of the young female peasant in Chapter 4 and one of the reasons might be that it is generally too heavy to use. Further research needs to confirm this design flaw.

To understand emancipation within peasant agroecology, I had to look at oppressed groups within agriculture. One large group comprises landless peasants, who are made invisible by the terms used in agriculture, because, for instance, they are referred to by the commonly used technical terms '*meeiro*/sharecropper' and '*trabalhadores rurais*/rural workers'. Both groups do farm work, but whereas sharecroppers lease land and share the harvest with the landowner, rural workers are mostly hired per day for fixed jobs such as harvesting or pruning. Part of the rural and urban youth who aspire to be farmers have no access to land and work primarily as rural workers. Perhaps, later in their career, they are able become agroecological peasants with their own land, as was the case with many agroecological peasants in Zona da Mata. What helped in the interviews with youth was to not consider their situation as static and simple, and instead, ask about their future aspirations and multiple work relations. In a number of cases, this strategy helped clarify their double position as a landowner and rural worker. However, in the focus group meetings that I organised I was unable to ensure sufficient representation of this group of rural workers – the peasants without land. Peasants themselves are aware of this issue and are able to problematise it. For example, an agroecological peasant in Espera Feliz stated at a meeting: "*A good agroecological peasant is a peasant who ensures that his/her rural workers can become peasants themselves.*" Of course, not all rural workers aspire to become a self-employed peasant, but they do have knowledge, embodied experience, ideas and a voice which is highly relevant.

## 6.5. Reflection on methods

By living in Zona da Mata and by engaging in an ongoing action research conducted by researchers from the region, I was able to participate in a non-exploitative,

collaborative research. The research strategy ‘Practice as research’ (PaR) that I employed promoted this. I used film practice as the main input for this PaR approach, and this worked out well in two ways. First, I was able to align invitations by unions and youth organisations for film workshops with my research and with my background in ethnovideography. Second, almost all films were screened and this allowed for onsite discussion of preliminary research outcomes. This made the research transparent and open to input and reflections from people involved.

One of the central ideas behind PaR is that by ensuring that research is collaborative and non-exploitative, the research benefits all research participants. In the context of this thesis, the important question then is whether and how this thesis contributes to ongoing emancipatory practices? In research relations, emancipation can be fostered when meaningful tasks are distributed among all participants. I was used to sharing responsibilities with colleagues but not with the Brazilian youth I was working with. In the beginning of my research, which was partly carried out via film workshops, I wanted to facilitate, keep notes, keep track of the time and energy spent, and share knowledge about filming - all at the same time. From Brazilian colleagues and popular education practices I learned to hand over tasks as much as possible, especially to create more learning opportunities for everyone. This enabled others to speak in front of a group, to do energisers, to take notes and so on. In this way, young people remained owners of the workshop and were able to share their experience with film-making and knowledge on local video cultures, while I as a researcher and film-maker could participate, listen, ask questions and share knowledge. By shifting power relationships between the researcher and other participants – who are positioned as knowledge holders – research activities turned into emancipatory occasions.

The making of films by youth created a discursive space for them to resignify agroecology, as demonstrated in Chapter 1. The main characters in the films produced during this research create autonomy with the viewers, albeit in a mediated relation. This is discussed in Chapter 4, and is observable in viewers’ posted comments. For instance, a film discussing the position of Black women, men and youth in the movement (www.facebook.com/articulacaonacionaldeagroecologia/videos/1716674578417989) reached 6300 views (24-6-2020) and received 15 online comments, including

> "*Save blackness in land struggles and in the kitchens of Brazil's corners! Bastions of agroecology with their ancestral knowledge.*"
> and
> "*Hey Luiza, how you strengthen us! Listen to her!!! Thank you.*"

These comments demonstrate what Rose (2011, p11) calls the 'affective experiencing of an image'. The video clips show emancipatory practices and engage viewers in affective experiences which are themselves also potentially emancipatory. For instance, the character in the above video resignifies agroecology to acknowledge the role of Black peasants in its history, movement and practice, and in turn, affects viewers to do the same in their own circles. This attests to the fact that film characters enter into 'an intercorporeal relationship' with viewers and are able to produce relational autonomy (Hansen (2004), in Rose 2011). Notably, one film that was produced on the position of rural workers was not posted online by my research partners, probably because it was too sensitive - thus pointing at a limitation of using film for mediated emancipation.

My ambition in this thesis was to do emancipatory research about emancipation. Research in which I as a research participant together with all research participants co-create emancipation in (mediated) relations. The findings show the engagement of youth in emancipatory practices via the film workshops and films. Those film workshops and films are part of a larger body of emancipatory practices that are carried out via popular education and social and political movements. This thesis and I have thus become part of this larger ensemble of emancipatory practices. Like the young peasants featured in the thesis, I myself started to understand identities and communities as being not fixed, but continually changing, and the research enabled me to reflect on my own multiple identities and the diverse practices and communities that I engage in. As such, undertaking the research opened up space to resignify my own peasant identity and made me cherish and wonder about the legacy of the peasantry in The Netherlands, including the traditions and embodied knowledge that have survived in my family. I have started to explore which elements of this legacy can be employed to support forms of farming that do not repress human beings and nature, how these elements can be shared with new entrants in agriculture and future generations, and how they can be part of dynamic resignification processes, accepting that legacies will inevitably change in order to remain alive and meaningful. In the end, it is the affinity for agroecology that can unite and bind diverse voices beyond direct

family ties, across generations and social groups, including farmers as well as conservationists, researchers, and policy makers.

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