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# **Mística, myself and I: Beyond cultural politics in Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement**

**Alex Flynn**

University of Cambridge, UK

## **Abstract**

How do grassroots social movements respond to shifting perceptions within their bases on key issues? This article centres its analysis on the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST – Landless Rural Workers' Movement) and instances of the movement's cultural activity, in particular, *mística*. It is recognised that the MST's cultural activity reflects a deep engagement with cultural politics, and further, that the movement's culture sector contributes directly to the delineation and formation of the 'landless' identity. However, from an ethnographic perspective and privileging the experiences of the members of the movement, this article goes beyond cultural politics to suggest that shifting notions of individualism, in the context of the movement's cultural activity, are having an impact on MST artistic expression and members' daily lives. The article argues that from within the bases of the movement, there has been a shift from what can be termed a *receptive* individualism, where members internalise cultural activity, to an *expressive* individualism, where members actively seek to shape the movement's cultural programmes. Members speak of a lack of visceral energy that the culture sector's activities used to possess, which provides the impetus for the article's concluding remarks on how social movements respond to transformation more widely.

## **Keywords**

Brazil, MST, cultural politics, identity, transformation, social movements

## **Abertura**

Santa Catarina, the south of Brazil. We wake up at six am to a breakfast of freshly baked bread, homemade jam and hot instant coffee, but shortly breakfast is over,

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## **Corresponding author:**

Alex Flynn, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, Division of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, UK.

Email: [af485@cam.ac.uk](mailto:af485@cam.ac.uk)

and people get ready to go to the main hall where a *mística*, a type of theatre performance, will be performed to start the day.

The hall is a vast space and filled with hundreds of empty chairs, facing a stage raised above ground level. Above, huge banners have been stretched lengthwise from one end of the hall to the other in a panoply of red, yellow and green. The stage has been decked with flags. The largest is the movement's flag; red, machete held aloft, instantly recognisable amongst the others and next to it, the national flag of Brazil. A banner runs from the roof to the stage, some 25 m, with the word 'SOCIALISMO' printed in red letters on a white background.

All around the hall are memories of the movement's collective past depicted through the photography of Sebastião Salgado. Here famous images such as 'Meeting for the Land's Occupation', 'A Massacre, A Wake' and the omnipresent 'The Icons of Victory' are displayed. The line of images stretches 60 m, the entire length of the hall, all the way to the far corner where there is a display area, showcasing MST produce. Printed and hand painted slogans have been draped over handrails, steps and tables. 'LUTAR ACREDITAR E TRANSFORMAR – A JUVENTUDE QUE INSISTE EM MUDAR' (struggle, believe and transform – the youth insist on change) hangs near the back of the hall. On a facing wall there is a series of seven images in homage to the massacre of Eldorado dos Carajás,<sup>1</sup> in the middle of which is a declamation of the 'ASSASSINOS DE CARAJÁS' (murderers of Carajás).

The hall is still empty as a few people on the stage tentatively begin a routine, led through their steps by a woman who seems to be directing. It seems to be a rehearsal and some of the participants are wearing blindfolds. An acoustic guitar has become louder and it becomes clear that the music is an accompaniment to the actor's movements. The sound of people's shuffling feet and sombre chords amplified through the PA echo through the empty hall. The rehearsal breaks up and the sun already streaming brightly through the high windows, I go back outside.

I wait around outside the main hall as I watch people filtering in. There must be roughly 500 people passing in front of me. The majority of people are wearing red t-shirts, shorts or jeans and flip-flops. The MST *boné* (baseball cap) is everywhere. The t-shirts have iconic images of Che Guevara or Fidel Castro on them. Many t-shirts also have song lyrics from Silvio Rodriguez, a Cuban protest singer, or slogans of the movement printed on them. Even people's motorbikes are decorated with small images of Che Guevara in the same way that cars in the city are ornamented with Virgin Mary/rosary/Jesus loves you images. These are the members of the movement, from all parts of the state.

The meeting still hasn't opened. We're all inside now, and people are beginning to fidget, constantly refilling and passing around *chimarrão*.<sup>2</sup> The *chimarrão* is passed to me and as I drink I ask what we are writing and passing to our neighbour. Elisa tells me that it is a *grito*. I don't know what a *grito* is but she tells me to learn it. She says that it is part of belonging to their O\_ AS\_ *brigada* (brigade,

a division of organisation within the movement). I recite the lines a couple of times. She says to me, 'you're learning already!'. But now the *mística* is starting. Some members taking part in it have already walked into the space between the seated audience and the stage. People fall quiet, everyone watches.

The guitar starts first, with the same amplified sombre chords that I heard when I first came in. The minor progressions are menacing and convey a foreboding atmosphere. Accompanying these tones, a group of people in the centre are parading. They are wearing the blue blindfolds that I noticed before. They grasp in an unsighted manner and appear lost. More actors enter from a side door. They are carrying placards and other paraphernalia. One man is carrying a tank on his back with a hose to represent the application of pesticides. Another is wearing a tall top hat coloured in such a way (blue, white, red) to represent the figure of Uncle Sam. The various placards read, '*agronegocio*' (agribusiness), 'EUA' (USA), 'Coca Cola', '*Bancos: BID, Bradesco*' and '*veneno*' (lit. poison, in this context, pesticide). Another figure is holding a box that represents a television with Globo's logo attached to one side.<sup>3</sup> These figures encircle the blindfolded actors who are now squatting on the ground and continue to pace around them, all the time accompanied by the ominous chords of the guitar. The placards are waving in the faces of the blindfolded and the television is placed on top of one of their heads. Another group of actors then appears. They are dressed in MST clothing and carry agricultural implements such the symbolically powerful *foice* (long handled scythe). They also carry MST flags, which they wave in the faces of the actors portraying the capitalists. The capitalists have now become encircled, as they encircled the blindfolded. The MST members now remove the blindfolds of the actors squatting in the middle of the group and the music changes. A positive song is now being played on the acoustic guitar with a tuneful, soaring, vocal accompaniment. The actors portraying the capitalists are symbolically defeated and they are left seated on the floor. Now able to see, the original actors have joined the actors representing the MST in a line behind the capitalists and all of them begin to wave their flags in time to the music. The audience also begin to clap in time to the music as the chords merge into a popular movement song. Many people around me stand to join in with the symbolic triumph that has been portrayed. The day has begun.

Leaders appear on stage. They greet the audience with an amplified *bom dia*, (good morning). The response is half-hearted, so it is repeated twice more until the audience roars *bom dia* back to the stage. And now the speaker calls the name of the one of the *brigadas*. A group at the back of the hall stand up and chant a verse that is unique to their *brigada*. Now I understand what a *grito* is. Members of O\_AS\_ are feverishly trying to memorise theirs in time as each brigade, one by one are reciting theirs to the hall. It seems our turn is coming closer and Elisa starts to complain about how this one is new and how they keep on changing it. I notice that when the members of the *brigadas* chant their *grito*, each member raises their left fist to every second beat. Our turn has come. We shout out our lines and pump our fists. I am conscious that we want to make a good impression on the other *brigadas*

from the state. There is pride involved in being part of O\_ AS\_. Luizinho, who devised the *grito*, is proud that it was a success. He is smiling.

Now a leader on stage begins to speak. Almost everyone is in the hall, although there are a few stragglers outside. But people now don't really seem to be paying much attention. There's a constant hubbub of noise as people sip *chimarrão* and chat to their neighbours. The leader whose name is Everton is outlining the strategy of the movement. He breaks it down to three key points: to take land; to continue the struggle for agrarian reform; and to create a new society. He dwells on the first two points for two minutes and the next hour is spent outlining the third. The audience is growing ever more restless and in the middle of his speech he suddenly stops. He raises a clenched fist and shouts '*Reforma Agrária!*'. The audience is suddenly awake and in the manner of the question and answer format of the catechism of the Catholic Church responds '*Por justiça social e soberania popular!*' (for social justice and a people's sovereignty). Again the call and answer is repeated and then there is applause. As everyone settles down, the speech continues in its previous vein and the *chimarrão* is again passed around. Now we are being asked to learn a specific phrase.

*O movimento tem que superar o sistema do capitalismo – é possível realizar.*

[The movement has to overcome the capitalist system – it's possible to achieve]

The phrase is recited twice from the stage before we all repeat it twice upon request. This phrase is also to be written down and everyone does so using the paper and pens provided. I admire the organisation and effort that has been put into this meeting. I catch a glimpse of a leader's folder and within there is a word processed schedule, nicely colour-coded, laying out the detail and timings of the coming days' activities.

It has been a long morning and people are more and more restless. The number of members who have gone to the bathroom and not returned is steadily growing. Finally we break for lunch, and amidst much chair scraping and stretching of bodies, I find myself outside in the heat staring at cattle pens and green fields; it's been a lot to take in. I ask around and it seems responses to the session are mixed. I meet a young man who asks me what I thought of the *mística*. I say it was beautiful. He looks at me with a smile. He says that the emotion he experienced watching the performance was intense. He says that understanding the meaning of the performance made the hairs on his body stand on end. Another person I meet is one of the few people who has bunked off to spend the whole session hiding in the dormitory. I ask her why. She shrugs and smiles.

## **Introduction: Social movements and cultural politics**

Some of the world's most successful social movements have engaged in cultural politics as a means of bringing about desired political change. In employing the term 'cultural politics', I take my lead from Alvarez et al. (1998) and their

argument that through collective actors mobilising around shared identities, social movements have enjoyed and will continue to enjoy substantial success in bringing about political and cultural change. Dagnino, Alvarez and Escobar define cultural politics as ‘the use of public spaces and ‘social movement networks or webs’ to articulate experiences of social inequality as legitimate fields of artistic expression and political change’ (Pardue, 2011: 104) and the Zapatista movement in Chiapas (Barmeyer, 2003; Kampwirth, 1996), the Mothers of the Disappeared in Buenos Aires (Borland, 2008), and the movement to oust President Fujimori in Peru (Moser, 2003), have all engaged in cultural politics in this sense. More recently, the Arab Spring, and the Occupy movements in London and New York have also featured politicised and locally resonant forms of artistic expression being employed in public spaces to realise change, and the impact of these instances of protest, carefully articulated through differing forms of artistic production (be they masks, flowers and guns, or quasi-religious Christian harvest rituals) has been felt on a wide range of issues. One of such is agrarian reform, and in Brazil, this struggle is inextricably interlinked with the Landless Worker’s Movement. Just as the issue in Brazil is defined by the movement, the movement itself is also defined in the public consciousness by images. The fact that there exists a multiplicity of other movements that are struggling for agrarian reform, yet are not recognised anything like as widely as the MST (see Loera 2010: 287 for a summary of movements struggling for agrarian reform), is perhaps testament to the success of the MST’s cultural programmes, in publicising and making unique their struggle through such images. Indeed, as even João Pedro Stédile, one of the MST’s foremost leaders admits, ‘despite the MSTs huge success relative to any other contemporary agrarian movement, the group has organized only a small percentage of the landless population in Brazil’ (Borras, 2008: 208) and the images that MST programmes promote have therefore come to define the entire issue. One thinks of the black polythene tents, the camps by the roadside, and then the more specific products of the MST’s cultural activity, the memorialisations, the marches, the songs, the demonstrations and the visual art installations. But despite the diversity of its cultural activity, the MST is mainly known for its *mística*, short instances of theatre performance laden with the ritualistic use of symbols, which are accessible on the Internet and widely seen. In fact, the movement has become internationally known for its moments of ‘mystique’, where artistic expression is used to depict the struggles of agrarian reform.

*Mística*, in its most technical sense, refers to a form of ritualised theatrical performance that often prefigures the opening of large MST meetings. Performances are normally five to ten minutes long and mute, accompanied only by music. However, as Issa (2007) notes, the term *mística* is subject to some confusion. She describes that ‘when used in analysis of the MST, [*mística*] has been translated into English as ‘mysticism’ (Wright and Wolford, 2003), élan (Veltmeyer and Petras, 2002), ‘millenarianism’ (Löwy, 2001), and ‘mystique,’” (2007: 124). When I asked members of the MST for a definition, it became clear that *mística* was understood in two separate, but interrelated, ways.

Firstly, in its simplest sense, a *mística* is an instance of theatre performance that opens meetings, as in the ethnography presented above, or is otherwise performed at certain significant occasions. Members speak of a beautiful *mística* that they have seen performed. But secondly, *mística* is also a metonym. Vergara-Camus (2005: 13) describes how *mística* refers to a set of 'cultural practices and symbols' and members of the movement often refer to *all* activities of the culture sector as *mística* of the movement. In this sense *mística* implies visual and performative aspects of movement life, such as artefacts like movement t-shirts, flags and banners, and ritualised movement activity that has performative dimensions, such as marches, protests and occupations. In this sense therefore, *mística* refers to a much more abstract concept that speaks of how the members of the MST connect with their movement on a deeper, more spiritual plane of expression. *Mística* is therefore the movement's subjectivity, and even the emotions that members experience in their daily lives as part of the MST. As such, in this article, I will argue that the MST, through *mística* in the broader sense, does far more than merely articulate protest in public spaces in the manner of the movements cited above. Indeed, the movement's artistic programmes go beyond an engagement with cultural politics and play a part in the very idea of what it means to be an MST member, an idea that I suggest is undergoing significant changes.

From 2007 to 2009 I lived with members of the MST in multiple locations in Santa Catarina, South Brazil, and the resulting ethnography constituted my doctoral thesis. The MST is a transnational social movement, officially founded in 1984 at a meeting in Cascavel, Paraná and it has coalesced around two basic principles; a fairer society, and the necessity for the means to achieve this, agrarian reform (Branford and Rocha, 2002; Fernandes, 1999). With 1.5 million members, the MST is the largest social movement in Latin America and its struggle for agrarian reform is premised upon direct action tactics that include organising landless families to occupy unproductive farmland before lobbying the government to redistribute these lands to the families who have encamped. Following an occupation, and if the application for forced purchase and redistribution has been successful, a settlement comprising the families that occupied the land is built, and the families are encouraged to engage in agricultural production along non-industrial, family-farming lines. These politics are located in a wider ideological Marxist perspective on political economy, but other thinkers have also contributed to the MST's revolutionary ideology, including importantly, Paulo Freire with his theory of empowerment through education (Wright and Wolford, 2003: 312). On an organisational level, the MST has co-ordination committees for each sector of activity, and sectors include production, *frente de massa*,<sup>4</sup> health, education and culture. Such is the emphasis on this last area that the culture sector's programme and mandate operates at all levels of the movement's hierarchy; the activities of the MST's culture sector are an integral component of the movement's wider ideological programme. As such, culture sector activities are firmly part of members' quotidian lived experience, both in practical and affective realms, and in both movement and non-movement space.

Any description of the MST using such a large brushstroke of course involves generalisations and there are specific geographical factors that are relevant to this research. The state of Santa Catarina is closely associated with the MST's origins, in that some of its early leaders were plucked from a seminary and established in a house in the state capital Florianópolis. As such, the movement is extremely well established throughout almost the whole state and members enjoy a standard of living much different to MST members in, for example, the Amazon or the North East. This relative comfort and its concomitant lack of repression is felt by members to have both positive and negative effects on culture sector activities, but it is clear that MST members in Santa Catarina feel relatively safe to perform in public spaces without overmastering fear of violence, a situation that is not common throughout the country. Instances of MST engagement with cultural politics that I witnessed and participated in included marches, state meetings, demonstrations, parades, ritualistic theatrical performances of *mística*, and the collective singing of songs.

Therefore with these qualifications in mind, the first section of the argument focuses on analyses of the MST's culture sector in the wider literature, exploring how the sector's activities go beyond a mere engagement with cultural politics and instead have a constitutive role in the construction of the *sem terra* (landless) identity. The second section centres its analysis on how members of the movement are responding to the culture sector's activities. More illuminating than merely quoting leadership positions on cultural activity, or recounting MST discourse (as can be found on the official MST Brazil website), is an analysis that privileges a more intimate, ethnographic portrait, as expressed by members who take part in and are witness to, daily interactions on this level. Here, the argument foregrounds change as a vector, and suggests that notions of individualism are evolving in the context of member's interactions with culture sector activity. Interview data suggests that members who wish to express themselves artistically have attempted to transform and adapt what they perceive as dominant discourses around what constitutes a *sem terra* performance and I suggest that the shift from a *receptive* individualism, where members internalise cultural activity, to an *expressive* individualism, where members seek to shape cultural activity, is having a significant impact. In the fourth section, I raise questions as to why members of the movement are beginning to openly question whether the culture sector's programme has become stale. Members speak of a lack of visceral energy that the culture sector's activities used to possess, which provides the impetus for the article's concluding remarks on how social movements respond to transformation more widely.

## The MST and the culture sector

As previously stated, the MST is not the only social movement to have employed a programme that engages with cultural politics. Rubin (1994) describes how the COCEI of Mexico employed strategies of political theatre, building on already present oral histories in a culture which had made theatricality part of resistance.



Moser (2003) has detailed how in Peru, programmes of street theatre gave the women who took part in them access to 'the potency of speaking in the public sphere, the power of carnivalesque reversals and inversions, the 'positive' form of protest and dissent as well as its potential as a space for bearing witness to state manipulation and corruption' (2003: 178). And just as the MST celebrates certain dates ritualistically nationwide, Barmeyer (2003: 127) describes how the EZLN commemorate the January 1994 uprising and the village heroes who died in the ensuing battle of Ocosingo.

What differentiates the MST's programme from these examples, however, is the movement's particular historical trajectory, its longevity, and the scale of the culture sector's work. After the military coup of 1964 and the halting of any kind of agrarian reform, problems surrounding access to land worsened. As the situation of landless families grew more desperate, their suffering drew the sympathy of the local parish priests in the most southerly state, Rio Grande do Sul. The *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (CPT – Pastoral Land Commission) had become more involved in people's struggles for land following the second Vatican council and the more general popularisation of liberation theology, and certain elements within the Catholic church slowly became key allies for landless families in the struggle against the military government for agrarian reform, especially through the manifestation and activity of *Comunidades Eclesias de Base*, Ecclesiastical Base Communities (CEBs). Therefore the movements that would coalesce and become the MST that were in existence in 1979 were closely linked to Catholic organisations and liberation theology more widely. Liberation theology, and the ritualistic nature of the Catholic Church's liturgy in general, has often been cited as contributing to the ritualised form that characterises the MST's engagement with cultural politics, and in particular, *mística* (Lara Junior, 2005; Löwy, 2001). Indeed, Karriem (2009) comments that *mística* (in the sense of the theatrical performance) is partly a result of '[a]n enduring influence from liberation theology' (2009: 319) while Ondetti is more explicit, stating that *mística* was 'an updated version of popular organizing methods developed earlier by the popular church' (2008: 123). The culture sector's activities are therefore rooted in historical and cultural paradigms of what constitutes artistic expression and how this can be used to articulate social-economic dimensions of inequality. The link between performances of *mística* and medieval mystery plays is especially strong and certainly for older members of the movement these connections are apparent. But the culture sector's activities go far beyond the use of artistic expression in public spaces to articulate experiences of social inequality. McNee (2005: 343) has described the culture sector's objectives as encompassing a much wider remit:

[T]o study, stimulate and circulate local rural knowledge and cultural practices, including the medicinal uses of plants, organic methods of cultivation, regional dances and festivals, storytelling and music, cooking and food preservation, crafts

and architecture, etc. In this way, the MST proposes the rescue of dimensions of local rural difference viewed as threatened by capitalist modernization.

McNee argues that the culture sector's programme is distinctly recognisable through its activities, representing through words, art, symbolism and music the struggles and reality of the MST. As I have previously mentioned, these activities are diverse. Although *mística* is the most well-known means of expression, McNee states that the culture sector's programme is also manifested through such activities as the brigades of 'Theatre of the Oppressed', the construction of murals, projects of memorialisation, the mass meetings and creations of visual art installations. But beyond notions of protest or preserving local methods of production, the culture sector's activities are firmly linked to identity. The definition that the MST itself applies to the culture sector's role is clear.

At demonstrations, marches, occupations, imprisonments, and commemorations of victories and conquests, music, poetry and dance are presented, expressing and strengthening the Sem Terra cultural identity.<sup>5</sup>

Going beyond an engagement with cultural politics, the purpose of the culture sector is intrinsically bound up with the construction and fortification of the *sem terra* identity, a conclusion reached by observers including Lara Junior (2005) and Wolford (2003), who both stress the collective nature of this identity. Wolford has argued that the culture sector's activities have contributed to the construction of an MST 'imagined community' (2003: 500), while Lara Junior focuses on how through the use of symbols such as seeds and tools, the MST have created politicised collective subjectivities that link directly to notions of what it means to be *sem terra*. Throughout the movement's 28 years of existence, this *sem terra* identity has been subject of much debate. Wolford notes how 'the early editions of MST's monthly newspaper, O Jornal Sem Terra (The Landless Newspaper, or JST), were filled with discussions of the new 'social citizen' that MST wished to create' (2003: 505) and how the new social identity aspired to prioritise certain personal values above others. For example, vices included 'individualism' (where one person 'puts himself above the organisation'), 'spontaneity', and 'immobility' (which causes a person to not 'involve himself with anything') (Jornal Sem Terra 1991: 3 cited in Wolford, 2003). However, *sem terra* identity has always been closely linked to action. 'The more that the masses attach themselves to their symbols, leaders and the organization, the more they fight, the more they mobilize and the more they organize themselves' (Jornal Sem Terra 1997: 3 cited in Wolford, 2003).

However, despite the baldness of the rhetoric, the processes behind the construction of an identity and thereby realising a situation where the 'masses attach themselves to symbols and leaders' are complex and longitudinal. Moving from bombast and toward ethnography, I found a key early environment in this respect

to be the *acampamento*, (encampment) where new MST members occupy land, often for a period of years (Figure 1). José, an *assentado* (settler), told me that the *acampamento* was where ‘you learn to be a *sem terra* – this is the environment in which your new identity is formed and this is accomplished much easier when you are in a large group rather than a smaller group’. Cultural activity is particularly present in these early environments, where disparate groups of strangers are placed together and instructed to work in a collective manner; something is needed to bond and energise people and *mística*, in the general sense, is extensively used to communicate core values. Wright and Wolford (2003: 311) comment that some of the key themes of MST *mística* alongside perseverance and humility are ‘responsibility and discipline’ and these are important first steps in camp life but also what is expected in becoming a *sem terra*. In the minds of certain MST leaders, new recruits enter the *acampamento* disempowered, vulnerable and weak, and through the scheme of communal living and the moral code that the movement’s leaders place on *acampamento* life, emerge capable, politicised and with opportunity. And to a certain extent, a ritualistic element has become attached to the act of being encamped. Indeed, Loera (2010: 290) asserts that the concept of *tempo de acampamento* (encampment time) has become a set social code within the MST:

[T]his expression references the set of relationships and activities an individual engages in which are perceived as being related to his level of *commitment*, his dedication to his



**Figure 1.** The *acampamento*.

*tent (barraco)*, the encampment, the *movement* in general, to his fulfillment of his *obligations*, as well as his demonstrations of loyalty.

What reinforces this concept of a set social code is that it is thought impossible to be *sem terra* unless you have passed through the process of encampment, and although in reality the rules are somewhat flexible around this, it is also *officially* impossible to gain land without having been first an *acampado* (occupier). The performative aspect of the camp is reinforced by the fact that it is also a political statement. The refrain that ‘there is land, but no one to occupy it’ is commonly heard amongst leaders in Santa Catarina because numbers in the camp are important; fundamentally each *acampamento* is a site of political pressure and the more people each encampment has, the bigger the declamation of the state of agrarian reform in Brazil. As Loera (2010: 293) pithily observes, what all MST militants are ideally seeking is to maintain the ‘encampment’s numbers and create the visual effect that any occupation desires: an apparently endless sea of black tarps’.

The centrality of the *acampamento* to the *sem terra* identity is also reflected by its appearance. Its visual aspects have become internalised and self-reproductive, generating an iconic aspect that has come to visually represent the very essence of the MST. In Santa Catarina, all encampments follow certain unwritten guidelines, rules of right, or perhaps terms of *best practice* in the manner of their construction. The *barracas* (hut on an *acampamento*) are constructed from branches with a sloping roof and black polythene tightly wrapped around the frame. The school of the *acampamento* is made of wooden boards and has a tin roof. Movement flags are attached to high points, be they trees or perhaps tall poles placed into the ground. And the *lona preta* (black polythene) of the movement has come to assume a huge symbolic importance (Figure 2).

But the *sem terra* identity also has performative dimensions. On an *acampamento*, it is well to know as many movement songs as possible, to demonstrate willingness to integrate and establish yourself as an MST *assentado*. Wearing clothes that have associations to the MST, raising your left fist to every other beat of movement songs, and taking on board the rhetoric and sentiment expressed in MST cultural activity are all means of demonstrating that you can assume a new identity. In this, the performative sense of becoming someone new through the reception of culture sector activity is paramount. To become a *sem terra* it is important to farm in a certain way, to erect your *barraca* in a certain, orderly manner and when encamped, refrain from drinking or bringing sexual partners back to the *acampamento*. These values are communicated through culture sector activities that stress collectivity, forbearance, sacrifice and finally victory – victory over a system, or perhaps over oneself.

These processes are also configured as part of a historicised trajectory. Wolford (2003: 508) argues that the *sem terra* identity in movement discourse stretches back to figures such as Zumbi, Antonio Conselheiro and Che Guevara, configured as a ‘noble line of predecessors’ and all previous symbols of rural discontent. Wolford (2003: 509) stops short of suggesting that movement leaders are seeking to promote



**Figure 2.** The barracas of *lona preta*.

an ideal settler, but she concedes that ‘outlines of what is considered acceptable behaviour are evident in the imagined community’s guidelines for participation’. When these guidelines are transgressed, *acampados* generally find themselves evicted from their encampment and there is not a great deal of room into which to introduce differing notions of what constitutes being *sem terra*. In this, as Wolford indicates, there is not a great deal of spontaneity surrounding how the *sem terra* identity is to be constructed and this lack of spontaneity is also present in the device that has a principal role in the construction of *sem terra* identity, the culture sector.

### **Shifting notions of individualism within cultural contexts**

As alluded to in the abertura, performances of *mística* are not necessarily characterised by a great deal of spontaneity, and what lies behind this, the individual’s agency to perform. In my ethnography, I only witnessed and participated in performances that were designed by culture sector members and then rehearsed, before being performed for an audience, which did not interact with the performance beyond clapping along to a song, if one was to be sung. This design is also evident in other forms of activity designed or led by the culture sector. There is an MST songbook for example, while marches and demonstrations are orchestrated and planned to the extent that certain t-shirts will be designed in advance and shipped to the location of the protest for members to wear. I found myself wearing a white t-shirt with red lettering at one such protest as I was somehow designated a

member of the *co-ordenação* (coordination) as opposed to the red t-shirt with white lettering, destined for the *massa*.<sup>6</sup> With such close attention to detail, João Pedro Stédile has felt it necessary to refute accusations of institutionalisation within the movement and more specifically within the culture sector.

We realized that if you allow *mística* to become formal, it dies out. No one receives orders to be emotional; you get emotional because you are motivated as a result of something. (Stédile and Fernandes, 1999: 130)

Accusations of institutionalisation are also rejected by Issa (2007), in her article *Praxis of Empowerment*, where the author emphasises the centrality of pedagogy and empowerment to the culture sector's work, citing the influence of Boal (2000) and Freire (1975). Issa's article cites an interviewee, asserting the intrinsic spontaneity of how members experience performances of *mística*:

[*Mística*] is extremely creative and free, and it's that liberty which makes it mystical. Sometimes we're asked: Why don't you write down the *místicas*? They are so beautiful! And we don't do it because it's creative; it's created in the moment (Interview cited in Issa, 2007: 130).

However, even though Issa stresses *mística's* spontaneity, she also alludes to certain tensions in this respect that characterise MST cultural activity. Issa relates how Ranulfo Peloso a national MST leader of the culture sector, writes to his colleague Ademar Bogo, outlining what he feels *mística* (in the narrower sense of theatre performance) ought to comprise. Issa suggests that the guidelines are 'simply general considerations used for theorizing and discussing *mística*; there are no 'rule books' or written directives' (2007: 136) but many MST members find this list of guidelines, here paraphrased, rather more prescriptive than she suggests.

1. *Mística* for entertainment purposes, to convey mystery or to shock is not authentic
2. To be beautiful *mística* should be brief, solemn and simple and should incorporate symbols, gestures and personal testimonies
3. There should be no surprises; it should be prepared and rehearsed
4. Improvisation should be avoided

Beyond these points, Peloso also makes other recommendations. What is noteworthy about these recommendations is that they were made on or previous to May 2006 and away from the everyday reality of MST *assentamentos*. All of the following tendencies that Peloso identifies as negative, I observed in instances of MST cultural activity in between 2007 and 2009.

It is important to avoid the use of *mística* to adorn a meeting ('Now that the *mística* is over, let's get down to business'). It should not become the task of 'specialists,' even

though some are more creative and sensitive than others. It should not occupy one's entire focus ('I couldn't attend the course, because I had to prepare the *mística*'). It must not turn into a competition ('Their *mística* was better than yours'). (cited in Issa, 2007: 131)

Issa's assertion that MST cultural programmes can be spontaneously conceived at grassroots level is therefore somewhat open to question. Other scholars have raised questions, principally regarding the culture sector's overly aggressive conscientisation and delimitation of the individual. Navarro (2002: 11) has argued that the leadership of the MST exercises control over its membership through the work of the culture sector with 'indoctrinating mechanisms'. McNee (2005: 343) has described how Bogo, perhaps the key intellectual behind the culture sector, 'idealizes a return to what he [Bogo] romantically describes as 'peasant culture', including 'pacific coexistence, visiting neighbors, lending and borrowing, folkloric festivals, popular wisdom, and the true *sertaneja* music'. McNee suggests that this vision is an 'essentializing, static approach to culture and tradition' (2005: 343). And Ondetti (2008: 122) has detailed how the MST leadership was conscious from an early stage of the need to build a strong collective identity 'that would cement the organization's membership through affective bonds' and he highlights the significance of two important tools, both centrally conceived, to be used as the centrepiece for any *mística*; the MST flag (see also Caldart, 2000: 135) and the MST hymn. The latter, he notes, was composed by Bogo, who he describes as 'probably the MST's most important ideologue'.

Therefore many academics, broadly sympathetic to the movement, have questioned the culture sector's activities with regard to the potential for spontaneity, and more importantly, what lies behind that, the programme's delimitation of individual agency. But to draw parallels between the grassroots nature of the MST and the manner in which its cultural activity is performed is to mistake the problem. I would rather suggest that the MST's culture sector, although it functions as part of a grassroots social movement where power is theoretically distributed to the base, does not observe any other definitions of individualism other than its own. As I have suggested, contrary to Issa's assertion, *mística* is not supposed to be a ritual that can be spontaneously conceived and performed by any given MST member. It has rather become a technology, which alongside other culture sector activity, is carefully controlled, rehearsed and planned, to deliver a telling impact by collective performers in heightened situations.

However, as Stédile reminds us, no one receives orders to be emotional, and it is here that the notion of a *receptive* individualism, upon which the culture sector's activities are premised, can be seen to emerge. Members may play only a limited role in the design of cultural activity, there may be only limited spontaneity in its performance or design, but all members can internalise the performance and make a personal affective interpretation. MST cultural activity almost always occurs in a collectivised manner. *Místicas* are performed in groups for group audiences. In *acampamentos*, new members are formed into collectively organised groups

called *núcleos* and one of these *núcleos* will be assigned the role of ‘culture’. Marches, where protest songs are sung, are comprised of large groups of people. State meetings are generally conducted in the manner of a plenary with shared sleeping arrangements and in these situations there is often no purely personal space. There is a great deal of emphasis in MST cultural activity on the collective, and this is often the case in social movements whose source of power rests firmly on politicised collective subjectivities. But importantly, these collective dimensions do not necessarily preclude an individual, internalised engagement. Obeyesekere (1992) argues that while public displays are configured with ‘interpersonal, communicative value’ (1992: 396), private understandings are connoted with ‘unconscious, deep motivational and *intracommunicative* significance’ (1992: 396, my emphasis). Members are therefore free to practise a *receptive* individualism in that the movement leaves room for each member to understand the performance as s/he wishes.

This process of internalisation was made clear to me by an *assentada* named Lúcia. She spoke with great conviction of how, for her, *mística* (in its broader sense, that of the performative and visual aspects of movement life) was one of the most important elements of being a *sem terra*. She told me that she had fallen very ill and that even after the minister had been called, it was the subjectivity of *mística* that had helped her to live.

I came from there. It was like made from me, it came from inside, back in that time. It was what led me to know the movement and what made me want to join the movement.

Lúcia described how *mística* had changed her life and had helped her to forge a new identity but importantly, she made it clear that this process came from within her and not from any outside source. Another example of internalisation and how members interpreted different phenomena in individualised ways occurred during my research with regard to the oft-seen juxtaposition of the movement’s flag with the Brazilian national flag. Mirelle, another *assentada*, and Lúcia’s houses had MST and Brazilian flags flying from the roof as well as pinned above the door. I asked Mirelle why she used these flags.

It’s identification no? In fact, the flag is always inside you. I want to identify myself as a *sem terra*.

On a separate occasion I asked another *acampado* named Fernando what he saw when he viewed the two flags next to each other. Fernando explained that he had joined the movement as he was struggling for his family. He told me that he had five children and that he was joining the movement as he wanted them to have access to a proper education. I asked him what he felt when he saw the flags and he said that he was *sonhando* – dreaming, for his children and dreaming for their future. For Fernando, this ritualistic juxtaposition of the movement’s flag with symbols of the state signified hope, whereas for Mirelle, the flags were interpreted



as her belonging to the movement and what it meant for her to be a *sem terra* in wider Brazil. Therefore, there is room for different interpretations in the internalisation of the MST's cultural life, but what is significant is that a growing number of members do not seem content to continue to practice this mere *receptive* individualism and are instead, beginning to demand creative control over the production of cultural activity itself.

Certain members to whom I spoke articulated positions on how to express themselves that hinted at a very different notion of individualism to that assumed by the movement's culture sector, notions that can be characterised by what I will term an *expressive* individualism. In the course of my ethnography it became clear that there were some members who felt that there had been a decline of not just *mística*, but also of the wider MST cultural programme. The lack of spontaneity, in contrast to Stédile's comments, was mentioned as a particular problem but not in the sense of how members received performances, but rather as in how they were conceived and performed. There was also dissension surrounding the idea that *mística* tended to be foregrounded above other forms of expression. There was a sense that *mística* had become 'the only way to be a *sem terra*' and speaking to Tais, an MST member and daughter of a regional leader, this question became clearer.<sup>7</sup> Her comments became explicit when she told me that despite the culture sector's activities, 'what is really lacking in the movement is investment in respect of culture'. I asked her in what sense.

Today we have *mística* in the movement. You go to a meeting for young people, to a state meeting, a national meeting and the only thing you see are *místicas*, and it's a strong point of the movement you know, but it's the only thing, and not everyone really feels *mística* you know. There are people who sing, play guitar, other instruments, really well. Some people who love to dance, you know? This question of *mística*. We had a meeting of the youth and each *assentamento* had to prepare something for this meeting. And we prepared a belly dance. I learnt how to do it well, alone, but it was cool. So we put on this show, me and another girl. We created this choreography of a dance, we put it together ourselves and took it to this meeting for the people there. I felt like it was the joy of the meeting, the dance, you know. Like, it was something new, no one had ever done something like this.

Tais told me how all the other acts that people had prepared at the meeting were *místicas*. I asked her how her idea had gone down with the members of the state leadership, some of whom had been present.

It was like this, that thing about contradiction. Because a lot of them saw the belly dance as something erotic, which was totally different to my vision. And so they didn't allow us to present it in that form. We had already prepared everything, we'd got dressed for it, we'd got made up for the dance but we couldn't do it because the leaders of the meeting thought that people could have seen it like it was something vulgar. So it ended up as a lack of respect.

Tais' experience of what she said amounted to censorship was formative in her views on the state leadership. She felt that her means of contributing to the movement's cultural life had been stymied and devalorised, going on to describe the leadership as the *gerontocracia* (gerontocracy). What is significant about Tais' frustrated contributions to the movement's cultural activities is that Tais was insisting on the right to design her *own* form of artistic expression. She was not content to perform another *mística*, like other members of the movement, she wished rather to individualise her contribution and open a fresh and spontaneous space in which the politics of the movement could be articulated. In fact, she was demanding to exercise an *expressive* individualism; a new politics of the self for the movement that goes beyond the *receptive* individualism that members practise when they internalise in their own discrete ways the performances that they view.

This shift was also perceptible when talking to many other members of the movement who were beginning to chafe at having to express themselves in ways in which the culture sector, and more widely, movement leadership had constructed for them. Gaetano, who has been a member of the movement for over 10 years, had made the decision to express himself in ways that he defined, rather than taking part in prescribed movement activity. Gaetano told me in forceful tones that he deliberately avoided the state meetings because he didn't like the way that he perceived the leadership to 'talk down to the *massa* (the collective) from the stage'. His son Alvisé felt the same way, and although he had participated in the 12,000 strong contingent that marched to Brasília in 2005 for the national meeting, what was important to him was the personal collection of photos that he possessed of this event. In this display, it was clear that both Alvisé and Gaetano had strong feelings of loyalty to the MST, but they had both become alienated from the movement's cultural activities, in particular the mass assemblies. Their feelings of belonging were rather located in more personal and individualised spheres, for example Alvisé showed me photos taken with his group of friends *within* the group of 12,000 marchers and significantly, these photos were shared with me in the personal environment of their family home.

Important changes are taking place in the MST and these shifting notions of individualism are challenging Stédile's assertions that the movement's cultural programmes remain relevant to its members. The institutionalism that Stédile also rejects in the culture sector is of wider importance when one considers how important the culture sector is to the wider movement. After all, as I have argued, the functions of the sector's work go beyond exploring engagements with cultural politics and constructing the *sem terra* identity. Mineirinho, a member of the culture sector leadership explained to McNee how he saw the sector's role as 'exploring and amplifying the culture and arts of Brazil's landless communities so as to open a different sort of dialogue with Brazilian society, helping it to better understand who we are and where we come from' (McNee, 2002). And the culture sector's activities perform so many roles that any kind of lack of urgency within it at members' level is a concern with potentially serious

consequences in a more structural sense. As the movement renews its forces for another 25 years of struggle, the prospect of a programme that once inspired people becoming stale is unwelcome. And yet, shifting notions of individualism are contributing to how the culture sector's activities are being received on the ground.

## Transformation and disjuncture

Thiago is now a *vereador* (town councillor) for the *Partido de Trabalhadores* (PT – Workers' Party), working mainly with rural trade unions. In 1996, he joined the movement, and was moved to an *acampamento*. On one occasion, he described the evolution of his involvement with the MST in an interview.<sup>8</sup>

My first contact was in Rio do Sul, through the CPT, the church. And I liked their philosophy and after '96 we did the basics with the farmers and we carried out the very first occupation in the western region.

Thiago was heavily involved in *acampamento* life. He talked a lot about *mística* in its broader sense) and the importance that it had played when he was encamped with 200 other families, struggling to get by without the *cesta básica* (a state delivery of *feijão* and rice to *acampamentos*) that is provided under the present government.

The subjective side of things, guitar, poetry, music... this moves mountains, it transforms, much more than sometimes all of those words. And back then, we did this. Every Tuesday, after the work in the field, we wouldn't go back to work in the afternoon. One day we'd play guitar, another we'd study, another we'd plan the week, pray... because praying is also part of the subjective, it's also *mística* – Catholicism, but it wasn't really to do with this church or that church, it was a spirituality for the struggle.

The purpose of *mística* for Thiago was very clear.

*Mística* is something that unites peoples, gets them ready. It unites experience and gives clarity. I reckon the movement grew really big really quick. And we couldn't look to all its aspects, all the parts of the movement that deserved attention. Something had to get left behind and I don't know if it's exactly this, but I reckon one of those things that got left behind was *mística*. It got put to one side.

Interestingly, Thiago described *mística* as performing a function beyond a mere engagement with cultural politics or even the construction of the *sem terra* identity. Indeed, he insisted that the MST had 'lost a lot of its *mística*' and even 'lost itself' and that this loss could and was having serious consequences. When I asked about these consequences, Thiago gave me a better idea of how *mística*, for him, operated on levels of central importance.

The loss of *mística* makes the spirit go cold. You lose, I don't know... *Mística* takes away fear, *mística* gives you a... I'm not sure exactly... it's more like you get cold and you become solely pragmatic. I'm off here to earn some money, I'm off there to get hold of some land... *mística* purifies the spirit – I'm going to this place because of the people, the crowd, justice. It's really difficult to explain. You lose that human warmth, you lose your way and in that manner you principally lose your resistance. And you lose sight...

I asked him of what.

Of the goal. It can be whatever goal in the context of the group because you're working to make the conditions of the group better and your group is always part of something bigger. And that's what *mística* guarantees, that your group will be connected to other groups which is the network that is the greater good. The lack of *mística* brings this pragmatism as a consequence. *Mística* is a vision of the future, the way you're part of something bigger.

Many members of the movement that I encountered concurred that the practice of *mística* was not as strong as it once was. On a separate occasion I spoke to Lúcia about *mística* and she mentioned to me how *mística* no longer had the same dynamism that it had once possessed.<sup>9</sup>

This coldness, this cooling off, it's a lack of... there's less repression now, there was more conflict in the countryside back then, people got together more. We're both here now chatting easily, you have your stuff, I have mine. But back then, it was tough, really heavy. So people got together and then it was a tool for people. Nowadays there is no repression and *mística* has cooled off as well.

We also talked about the individual nature of the performances.

Ah, I'll copy that one, let's do that one that's already been done. There isn't that evolution. But before, ten, twelve years ago, *mística* was *mística*... are you hearing me?

Thiago's comments on the spiritual dimensions of *mística* point to a more complex understanding of the form's purpose and it was clear that *mística* for Thiago had the potential to go beyond the mundane or the 'produced'. Rather, it was the spiritual plane of the movement, its conscience, the manner in which to express transcendent objectives to keep people honest. Of course, Thiago believed that it had helped to construct community and had helped to keep people strong in times of repression, but Thiago seemed to indicate that the secular direction of the movement had required a nascent spiritualism, one based in praxis. He seemed to be indicating that without this dimension, the MST could be in danger of replicating the pragmatic elements of a society that it was trying to move away from. Thiago

even insisted that the movement had ‘lost its way – lost its *mística*’ and I would suggest that Lúcia’s comments on ideas of staleness and repetition overlap with the lack of warmth in the performance of cultural activity that Thiago identified. Lúcia spoke of her frustration with the movement’s culture sector, implying that a cadre of organisers was churning out the same old performances over and over again. Lúcia felt a lack of dynamism in MST cultural activity and contrasted this to period in which she credited the power of *mística* with saving her life. The lack of a visceral energy to inspire and warm people was a key concern for both Lúcia and Thiago and the role that shifting notions of individualism play in this context is made clear by Tais’ experience. As a result of wanting to express her understanding of being *sem terra* through a form other than *mística*, Tais was effectively censored and her performance deemed unsuitable. Tais had become bored of endless performances of *mística* and was asserting an *expressive* individualism, a notion of agency that went beyond the *receptive* individualism with which leaders expected her to be content. Stymied and devalorised therefore, she lost her warmth for the movement; the movement became less relevant for her as soon as she felt that she could no longer express herself within its cultural paradigm. Gaetano and Alvisé’s experiences also suggest that movement cultural activity has become in some ways constrictive, in that members do not feel able to express themselves sufficiently within the paradigm that the culture sector delineates. Shifting notions of individualism and the difficulties that leadership seem to be experiencing in integrating them in this context are crucial and where this significant disjuncture will lead seems of great significance for an organisation that is universally recognised as a grassroots social movement (Branford and Rocha, 2002: 253; Carter, 2005: 24; Harnecker, 2002; Vergara-Camus, 2009: 182), with decision making power devolved to the base.

## Conclusion

During the 21 months of my ethnography, I encountered members of the movement who told me how important the MST’s engagement with cultural politics was, and how they had been touched by collective cultural experiences. Members spoke of the memorialisation project in Pará, the march to Brasília, the singing of particular songs, and performances of *mística* that they had witnessed. Members spoke of how particularly performances of *mística* had made them feel renewed and re-energised; one such *acampado* mentioned how it was good to go to meetings and feel your commitment redoubled for the struggles ahead. *Mística* was also described by members as removing their fear when they were in situations with the threat of repression and it was clear that *mística*, among other elements of the MST’s cultural activities, was effective in drawing a community closer to one another and diminishing feelings of marginalisation.

However, members also expressed concerns. Thiago was unhappy that MST leadership had prioritised other areas of the movement’s growth, leaving what he termed as *vida cultural* (cultural life) to one side. There was also the perception

amongst movement members that the leadership were overly focused upon *mística*, that for the leaders, cultural activity was best expressed in this form, to the exclusion of other artistic manifestations such as dance or music. Conservatism was a factor here as Tais' account illustrates. As *mística* has been invested with an approved notion of what it is to be *sem terra*, other forms of expression have therefore suffered from negative connotations; rock music being too North American, or dance being too sexual. In this context, MST cultural activity can be understood to have undergone a degree of essentialisation under a leadership that Tais describes as the *gerontocracia*. Stédile's comments on the spontaneity of *mística* articulated around the idea that 'no one receives orders to be emotional' are already almost 15 years old and this hints at the problems associated with integrating shifting notions of individualism as conceived of by the membership. While younger members have been brought up accustomed to seeing *mística* performed, they have not taken an active part in the manner of its creation and indeed in certain instances, they have been prevented from attempting to contribute, in that their understandings of MST life expressed through art have been censored or otherwise deemed unsuitable. Tais suggested pertinently that until the leadership allowed a younger generation to create their own cultural understanding of *their* movement, the form would continue to stagnate, merely representing a reworking of struggles that had already occurred.

Clearly, however, the diminishing power of *mística* to mobile MST members has to be viewed within a broader context. As Rubin (2004) suggests, both states and social movements 'arise out of multiple historical and cultural pathways [and] involve interweavings of culture and politics', and any analysis of the MST must therefore be informed by how Brazil has changed since 1984, the year in which the movement was formally founded. Perhaps most obviously, socio-economic conditions have changed drastically. Hall (2008) states that under president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002), and especially under Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's presidency which began in 2003, 'targeted assistance in education, health and nutrition, now united under *Bolsa Família*, has expanded rapidly to benefit forty-four million (24 per cent of the total population), absorbing almost two-fifths of the social assistance budget earmarked for the poorest sectors' (2008: 799). And the results of such unprecedented social spend have been marked: A 'one-third reduction in land invasions by the MST landless movement during President Lula's first administration',<sup>10</sup> Hall notes, while Maria Cecilia Manzoli Turatti, an activist academic and sympathiser of the movement concedes that in the urban *periferias*, the MST's primary location for recruiting members, the *bolsa família* payments have had a significant effect in 'demotivating citizens from choosing to live in the harsh conditions imposed in an *acampamento*' (Beguoci, 2007). More recent data indeed seems to confirm this trend. A 2011 report, released by the CPT, indicates that between 2003 and 2011 the number of encampments in Brazil as a whole fell from 285 to just 30 (Arruda, 2012).

Therefore it seems that the *Bolsa Família*, together with greater opportunities for small-town and urban employment, have made people think twice about

committing the great deal of time and effort necessary to even attempt to win a piece of land. And it is perhaps the case that the general sensation of being *parado* (without momentum) that is generated by a lack of new members has amplified the tendencies discussed above regarding *mística*. Repeated exposure to a *mística* that does not evolve has reduced its emotional effect and it is common to hear members' air frustrations with the intransigence of the leadership on cultural matters.

However, there is certainly a great will amongst younger members of the movement to confront these issues. Apathy is not a problem for the movement, rather, according to movement members, there is at present, merely an *impasse* in the integration of what individual expression within a collective paradigm actually constitutes. It may be that the transformative social effects of cultural production merely need to be refreshed; the 'complex interrelationships between [...] spontaneity and organization' (Darnovsky et al., 1995: xii) merely reset and renegotiated. What is entirely evident, however, is that whatever comes to pass, it is the members of the MST that will make it happen.

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### Notes

1. In this incident on 17 April 1996, which occurred at a roadblock that the MST had organised in the Amazonian state of Pará, 19 MST members were killed in a confrontation with military police and a further two members died subsequently. The date in MST ritual is observed with *mística* performances in *assentamentos* and *acampamentos* but a huge memorialisation project was also undertaken as a permanent physical reminder.
2. The hot tea of southern Brazil and Argentina. Often it comes as a kit, which consists of a basket that holds a flask of hot water, a space for the *erva mate* (the tea itself is an important product in the region of the *Planalto*), the *cuia* (the vessel from which you drink it) and *bomba* (straw).
3. Rede Globo is the largest commercial television network in Brazil and the third largest in the world with 120 million daily viewers. Due to its sheer size, Globo has been accused of being too powerful and is perceived by some to wield undue influence. The relationship between the MST and Globo is problematic and commenting on this, Hammond states that 'it is not surprising that a media system so concentrated in the hands of the wealthy and so tied into the dominant political system often lives up to the stereotype of the capitalist press, hostile to progressive movements from below' (2004: 71).

4. The *frente de massa*, literally translated, as 'mass front' is the MST sector responsible for recruitment, assembling *acampamentos* and more generally movement mobilisations. Harnecker (2002) terms the sector as 'not just one more sector or activity of the MST, as we have already said, it is its very heart, 'pumping blood to the whole movement.' It unites cadres working at the base, and all those who expand the Movement to the whole country'.
5. <http://www.mstbrazil.org/?q=culturecollective> (accessed 4 March 2011).
6. A *massa* literally translates as the masses, but here it rather signifies the base.
7. Interview with Tais, 20 April 2008.
8. Interview with Thiago, 11 December 2008.
9. Interview with Lúcia, 11 February 2009.
10. According to research carried out by the State University of São Paulo, the number of families involved in land occupations by the MST fell from 65,552 in 2003 to 44,364 in 2006 (IPEA, 2008 cited in Hall, 2008).

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**Author biography**

**Alex Flynn** is an ESRC Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Cambridge's Division of Social Anthropology. His research centres on transformation in diverse contexts, encompassing radical social movements, the mass media, and contemporary art worlds. He is currently researching squats in London and the cultural politics of theatre performance.