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Everyday forms of political expression

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GRASSROOTS VOICES

Everyday forms of political expression

Wendy Wolford, Guest Editor

Editor's introduction

This is an exciting time to be working in the field of peasant – or agrarian – studies. Around and across the globe, rural actors have organised themselves to protest the dominant trends of commodity agriculture, proposing alternatives based in new and old community-environment solidarities (Borras *et al.* 2008, Deere and Royce forthcoming). Landless movements have forced the seemingly anachronistic topic of agrarian reform back onto national and even international agendas (Rossett *et al.* 2006, Moyo 2007, Wolford 2007); indigenous movements have formed to promote cultural awareness, the struggle for territory or homeland, and political autonomy (Harvey 1998, Perrault 2003, Postero and Zamosc 2004); farmers' movements have come together to protest the environmental and social effects of large-scale industrial agriculture and to promote small-scale diversified farming for local consumption (Featherstone 2003); consumer movements have developed to champion organic, local, humane, and healthy food (Raynolds 2000, Guthman 2004); and environmental activists have entered into the fray, campaigning against new technologies in food production such as Genetically Modified Organisms and confinement livestock rearing (Shiva 2000, Schlosser 2003). Many of these movements have come together at key moments and in key sites to advocate for transnational change (Edelman 2003). Umbrella movements such as the Via Campesina as well as temporary alliances of independent organisations at global events including ministerial meetings of the World Trade Organization and alter-globalisation demonstrations have been crucial in injecting a critical voice into high-level international discussions regulating the production, trade, and consumption of food, fibre, and fuel (McMichael 2006, Desmarais 2007).

As the strength and importance of these movements has grown, so too has scholarly interest and recognition. Academic and activist research has generated important insights into the historical and spatial conditions of movement formation as well as their organisation, strategies, demands and proposed alternatives. Many observers have argued that the contemporary period is a 'historic moment' (McMichael 2006, 408) and new conditions of production and social reproduction – characterised generally as both the globalisation of neo-liberal ideas, policies and practices and the increasing tendency towards what David Harvey (2003) calls 'accumulation by dispossession' – place rural activists in unique situations (Gudynas 2008). New social movements are building increasingly global networks that cross traditional boundaries of class, issue politics, and nation-states. They negotiate a future in the context of great uncertainty about food prices, technological changes,

oil prices, and international financial and political stability. This makes it difficult to find theoretical frameworks capable of encompassing the wide range of participants, activities, ideologies, and identities that crystallize at given moments into social movements. In this special issue of *Grassroots Voices*, I argue that we face four key challenges in understanding contemporary rural social movements.

First, the uncertainty of the present conjuncture as well as the formation of movements across traditional boundaries complicates traditional structural analyses of rural mobilisation. As many scholars have argued, research on social movements has a tendency to favour structural analyses (Goodwin and Jasper 1999, Wolford 2003, Kurzman 2008) because of the focus on questions such as ‘why do movements form?’ rather than ‘why do people join movements?’. It has been convincingly argued that movements form when they are able to garner the financial and cultural resources under appropriate political conditions, but we still do not understand why seemingly propitious macro conditions compel only a small fraction of an aggrieved population to organise. Contemporary movements bring together such diverse groups and issues that it would seem wise to avoid equating mobilisation with structural conditions such as poverty, landlessness, and political frustration.

The second challenge we face is the difficulty of analysing the forces arrayed against and around these rural social movements. This is a challenge in part because of an understandable desire to find comfort during difficult or depressing times by studying only those social groups that seem to offer a positive alternative. This is a common feature of social movement studies but it perpetuates a mistake known as sampling on the dependent variable. In other words, researchers try to explain why social movements form or what social significance they carry by analysing social movements that have formed and are socially significant in some way. We need to take the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci up on his challenge to explain why it is that social mobilisation so often doesn’t happen, even when organising would be in the interest of clearly delineated sub-groups. The decision not to join social movements is much more common than the decision to join, but we have significantly more research on the latter.

The third challenge confronting the study of new rural movements is their high level of porosity or dynamism. We typically assign a higher degree of coherence to social movements than is appropriate. Movements – or ‘the movement’ – are regularly invoked as coherent actors (the movement says this or the movement does that) when in fact decisions are made (and un-made or contested or negotiated) by a complicated web of activists on the ground. One of the main reasons for this presumptive coherence may be the tendency to focus both methodologically and analytically on the leaders of movements rather than the everyday members or what I have elsewhere called ‘movement participants’. Leaders act as political brokers that play an outsized role in the formation and development of social movements but focusing our research on such activists can generate an overly coherent, well thought out narrative. We would do well to incorporate recent research on the state and contentious politics more broadly, both of which bring an important actor-focused qualitative element to the study of social movements (Auyero 2004, Sharma and Gupta 2006, Wolford 2006). This research suggests that the lines between state and non-state – or movement and non-movement – are slippery and often highly strategic. We may understand more about political mobilisation if we explore the ways in which movements take on meaning at specific moments in personal histories rather than analysing movements as already meaningful themselves.

The fourth, and final, challenge will be to avoid the desire to find explanations for the current situation – or even alternatives to what is often referred to as the Global Food Crisis – in linear, causal narratives. To paraphrase Guyatri Spivak's (1988) famous argument, the search for the politically active subject continues to be a search for consciousness, and consciousness tends to be read historically (forward) through action and read backwards as intention (also see Agrawal 2005). In social movement research this often means that participation in organised events or entities is taken to signify acceptance of the movement's goals, ideologies, and tactics when, in fact, people participate at any given time for a variety of reasons and with a range of commitment levels. People who take part in movements are as likely as anyone else to act without thinking or change their minds or contradict themselves.

In organising this first section of *Grassroots Voices*, I hope to address these challenges and contribute to the research on contemporary peasant organising by offering a series of voices not often heard in the literature on social movements. The interview texts that follow represent interviews conducted with people who are or were involved in political mobilisation – usually organised movements – but who are not leaders or even necessarily very 'good' members. One of the interviewees did not join a movement at all, even though there were well-organised ones in his area that many of his counterparts joined. These people do not always have coherent stories and they have not necessarily resolved the contradictions between this world and the alternative one they imagine. They are all doing crucial, difficult work far from the spotlight, although few of them would see themselves as important political actors. Their histories, experiences, and stories help us to get past the 'framing', the strategic essentialisms, the media stars, the sensationalism, and the structuralism that characterise movement studies and allow us to focus on the banal confluences of everyday life and political engagement. The interviews illustrate the importance of contingency and conjuncture, the porosity of movements over time and space, and the way in which people inhabit and sometimes reproduce contradictions even as they attempt to resolve them.

In presenting these interviews, we do not argue that the interviewees are somehow the authentic movement members or that their personal narratives 'tell it like it really is'. Their stories are situated, partial, and edited, as are all stories. Their inclusion is less about representativeness than it is about representation: these are voices not often incorporated into academic or activist accounts and this exclusion complicates a nuanced understanding of how movements form and work over time.

Seven interviews are included in this section. Each of the stories is radically different but together they generate some common conclusions. Two of the interviews were conducted in Brazil, one in Bolivia, two in South Africa, one in Zimbabwe and one in the Philippines. Three of the four interviews were conducted with women but only one of these was working in a women's movement. Six of the seven people interviewed were grassroots activists although none of them were high profile leaders in their own right. What all of them highlight is the importance of movement – or mobility and change – in and for new rural movements. People move both physically and mentally from place to place and from time to time, they pass in and out of movements, they move on. In a sense, movements are a means to an end rather than the end themselves. The interviews suggest that by studying movements we can better understand agency, action, intention, and subjectivity in contemporary times, rather than the other way around.

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Seeds for autonomy: defending agrarian attitudes and institutions in Santa Cruz, Bolivia

Gabriela Valdivia

Media representations and academic analyses of the current situation in Bolivia portray confrontation between two important groups (c.f. Dunkerly 2007, Eaton 2007, Lora 2007, Gustafson 2008). On the one hand is the government of President Evo Morales seeking to dismantle neoliberal economic practices to rectify historical injustices against indigenous and campesino populations. On the other, regional and agri-business leaders in the eastern lowlands (particularly the department of Santa Cruz) seeking political and economic autonomy in order to protect capitalist agriculture as a way of life.¹ While supporters of autonomy are typically described as wealthy elites reconstituting a 'new right' (c.f. Gustafson 2008), the interview presented here, with Jorge Rosales, Director of the Santa Cruz Regional Office for Seeds (*Oficina Regional de Semillas*, ORS), offers insights into less-explored agrarian visions currently articulated with autonomy.²

While the names of cruceño agrarian and political leaders often appear in the media in association with the autonomy movement, Rosales's name appears only in relation to his expert 'technical assessments' on matters of agrarian production, for example, confirming information on transgenic crops and certifying that proper testing methods for transgenic products have been followed (Heredia 2004, López 2004, Rivero, 2008). His name or ORS' do not appear on academic analyses of the autonomy movement in Santa Cruz, either. As he pointed out in the interview, he prefers to work 'keeping a low profile' to keep politicians at bay.

While not a public figure associated with the autonomy movement, Rosales is a well-recognised actor within the cruceño world of agriculture. His positioning as an expert – Director of ORS and board member of the *Órgano de Solución de Diferencias*, an agricultural trading subcommittee of the World Trade Organization (WTO) – provides a less explored venue through which to understand how cruceño agriculture and autonomy intersect. Through his emphasis on 'production, not politics' and his positioning within transnational webs of agricultural trade and expertise, he frames his support for autonomy as technical support for the project of capitalist agriculture. In his view, autonomy is a solution to the problem modern

¹Agrarian capitalism here is defined as agriculture based on a combination of wage labour (where a class of wage labourers sell their labour power to a class of private entrepreneurs who own the means of production), nonwage labour practices (e.g., family labour), use of large extensions of land for production, technology to extract value from land and labour (e.g., mechanisation, improved seed varieties), and dependence on international markets to sell the commodities produced.

²This is not to say that elitist and racist attitudes are not present in the movement. See Gustafson (2006) for an analysis of the violence and discrimination associated with regionalism in Santa Cruz.

agriculture is currently facing in Santa Cruz (c.f. Ferguson 1994, Li 2007). From the 68 interviews I conducted in 2007 and 2008, Rosales' interview stood out as one with the most 'technical' arguments for supporting autonomy.³

Rosales, an agricultural engineer in his fifties, is not a political leader or agricultural producer. He is a *semillero*, a promoter of certified seeds. His self-described 'purely technical' role as Director of ORS is fundamental to capitalist agriculture in Santa Cruz. Funded in 1982, ORS is a locally-managed, public institution, affiliated with the Ministry of Rural, Agrarian, and Environmental Development, that promotes the use of certified seeds to improve agricultural productivity (*Comité Regional de Semillas Santa Cruz* 2007). Its board of directors is composed of state and agrarian sector representatives sharing 'the same north' (i.e., aiming for the same goal): promoting the use of certified seeds to improve livelihood conditions for all agrarian producers.

Rosales' participation in ORS has shaped his support for autonomy, which he sees as the way to guarantee the reproduction of agrarian life in the lowlands.⁴ Calls for autonomy for Santa Cruz date back to colonial times (Roca 1981), but mostly stem from opposition to resource use and income distribution policies that cruceños viewed as unfavourable to local development during the Republican period. Regional autonomy was seen as a way to defend cruceño rightful territory from highland government 'invasions' (Dunkerley 2007, Eaton 2007). The regionalist vision became more entrenched in the 1950s and 60s, a time when highland governments suppressed the election of local leaders in favour of strategic appointments to facilitate national integration and civic groups became the way to articulate local demands vis-à-vis centralised governance. The current resurgence of autonomy, marked by an increasing number of marches, protests, and hunger strikes, is a response to 'highland-centred' governments since 2003, gaining momentum with President Morales. According to Mauricio Roca, a prominent agrarian leader, Morales' rule is equivalent to a 'territorial colonisation' that must be resisted in order to defend the agrarian producer.⁵

Departmental autonomy, among its supporters, is seen as a way to secure the *local* right to administrate and execute governance decisions over local resources, and uphold regional and local institutions as the most attuned actors to oversee development (Urenda 2006). More specifically, autonomy operationalises resistance through greater regional control over natural resources (land, timber, gas, and oil), the right to retain control over two-thirds of all tax revenues generated in the department, and authority to set all policies other than defence, currency, tariffs, and foreign relations (Eaton 2007) – all aspects that have been 'jeopardised' by Morales. While I have not observed Rosales join in demonstrations, marches, or hunger

³Four interviews stood out as clearly articulating the technical aspects of production with support for autonomy: Rosales' interview (ORS), two with members of the Chamber of Agriculture of Santa Cruz (CAO), and one with a member of a large-scale rice production association (ASPAR). I chose Rosales' for this paper since both CAO and ASPAR are frequently seen as serving the interests of agrarian elites.

⁴Diverse groups support autonomy in Santa Cruz, ranging from neighbourhood organisations to agrarian associations to the chamber of exports. Opposition is also strong, particularly among those that see it as an elitist reaction against Morales' project of social democracy. Seeing that it is led by agri-business leaders and urban elites, many small-scale producers are unsure of what autonomy offers them.

⁵Mauricio Roca is the President of the Chamber of Agriculture in Santa Cruz (*Cámara Agropecuaria del Oriente*, CAO), a private institution that represents the interests of medium- and large-scale commercial agriculture in Santa Cruz.

strikes – the most visible forms of protest today in Santa Cruz – his work fits within another important strategy to secure autonomy: the production of departmental laws that facilitate local sovereignty. As the interview explains, Rosales draws on new departmental laws to prevent interventions from the central government that would change ORS' role in Santa Cruz.

Autonomy also guarantees Rosales' role as an expert *semillero*. Prior to the interview, I attended a meeting with Rosales and the ORS board of directors. Invited by a board member to observe, I witnessed how ORS prepared to face intervention from the National Institute for Innovation in Agriculture and Forestry (*Instituto Nacional de Innovación Agropecuaria y Forestal*, INIAF), Morales' attempt to centralise control over the 'seeds complex' (the institutions and capital destined to seed research and certification and extension programs). The goal of the meeting was to iron out the details for turning ORS into a truly locally-governed institution.⁶ At one point in the meeting, exasperated by lengthy discussions without obvious consensus or resolution, Rosales declared, '*Cruceño* institutionality is at stake; let's work together to save it'. Arguing voices soon subdued, which allowed important decisions to be made. His framing of *cruceño* belonging was both measured (this was the only time a political statement of this nature was made in the meeting by a public officer) and effective.⁷ I sought to interview him after observing him 'in action' at the meeting. I saw his attention to technical details (e.g., about how to name programs and products under the new governance) as offering insights into how autonomy is given meaning – even operationalised – within the agrarian sector.

The interview was conducted in Spanish, in Rosales' office at ORS, immediately after the board meeting. It was guided by questions about 'how ORS works' (e.g., what is the relationship between ORS and *cruceño* institutionality, who is served by ORS, why are seeds relevant). This was the first time we met, and the opportunity to interview Rosales was largely facilitated by a board member with whom I had developed a friendship based on a common interest in small-scale rice production. Though not scheduled ahead of time, Rosales graciously agreed to being interviewed, partly, I believe, because he was curious about what I was researching. The two-hour interview was tape recorded (except for when we talked about the limitations of working with smaller agrarian producers, when he requested I turn the recorder off). I transcribed the interview and later manually coded themes that I saw emerging from the analysis. The themes below are a result of this coding and the translated interview excerpts highlight frames that Rosales used to situate himself and certified agriculture within the political terrain of autonomy.

'Attitude is fundamental': agrarian subjects caring about production (not politics)

For Rosales, preserving the practices of seed certification is a project of cultural defense. His interview brings attention to beliefs about how the world ought to work

⁶A few weeks earlier, in an effort to curtail takeover, agrarian capitalists persuaded Santa Cruz's Prefect, Rubén Costas, to transfer all aspects of local seed complex to departmental sovereignty to strengthen ORS' local identity.

⁷The agrarian sector in Santa Cruz is diverse, internally conflictive, and historically plagued by unequal relations of production (c.f. Gill 1987) – claims to a united political voice should be viewed with suspicion. While Rosales' views are not representative of all agriculturalists, they offer insights into how material aspects of production are grounding his support for autonomy.

(such as in his vision of ‘production attitude’) and state–sector relationships that have shaped his support for autonomy.

GV: At the meeting you brought the board together by talking about ‘cruceño institutionality’. What is that?

JR: As you know, on 4 May 2008, we voted for the autonomy statute for Santa Cruz. . . . As public functionaries we are responsible for fulfilling the statute that was approved by the pre-autonomy assembly mandate. That is the beginning of protection. The last two and a half years we have been trying to save institutionality with administrative moves and lobbying in La Paz. . . . We are going to defend, protect this decree, with our attitude.

GV: Attitude?

JR: Attitude is about changing the norms that govern seed producers and users. They are the two most important ones. . . . I say, the agriculturalist has to be like a king to us. . . . This institution is designed, and its principal objective is, to safeguard the provision of seeds for agriculturalists. . . . 70 percent use our certified seeds. . . . The use of seeds is huge. The cruceño agriculturalist is accustomed to, or how shall I say it, trusts, and doesn’t want to use seeds that are not of quality. And how do they identify quality? With the label this institution [ORS] provides.

GV: How does ORS conserve that attitude?

JR: The institution may have some small discrepancies, as you witnessed in the meeting, but we all have the same north. There is credibility in the system. If we change the name from Regional Seed Committee to ‘Committee’ there is no problem. But I don’t agree with changing the logo . . . changing the logo is like saying ‘this is not the same’ . . . The agriculturalist might not even notice the change. This has always been one of my politics: to work keeping a low profile. I have been criticised, misunderstood, but this is my working philosophy; keeping a low profile puts the brakes on the politicians.

GV: Politicians . . . Who are they? What is their attitude?

JR: This is the hardest battle we are winning. I have been here for 26 years. With each government we have had our small, I would call, ‘earthquakes’. But after explaining what we do, they have said, yes, you are right, we won’t touch seeds. Of course, they could have taken seeds if they wanted to . . . but they didn’t. Here, we work for seeds not particular interests . . . they can see that we work in a transparent manner . . . But this government says, ‘nobody has done things well here. Everything is done poorly’. That is the division, the vision. Another fundamental difference: they say they work exclusively with the small producer. That is their other vision. They don’t care about the certification of soy, sunflower, or maize. They don’t care.

That is why we believe that the right attitude is the attitude of the agriculturalist. If a parallel institution appeared, which I doubt, because it is not easy to implement a system of certification like ours, like INIAF wants to do, there would be no trust in them. Maybe some sectors, people that get free seeds and don’t care if they are certified or not, which is what the government is doing, handing out seeds from nowhere. But this is where attitude is fundamental: the attitude of the producer is that he wants certification, he wants the label we offer. We protect the agriculturalist that has the attitude that makes them come here to be certified . . . through this attitude we are going to consolidate. . . . Everything we have done up to now is to prepare ourselves for the time when INIAF comes to

intervene here . . . That is where the battle really starts, like we said in the meeting. If I didn't have the board of directors I have (you have seen them), what would I do by myself? I would not have had the strength to make the prefect do what he did.

It is a matter of defending 'what is ours' by all means

Rosales' appreciation of certified seed usage is infused with a vision of defence from 'inefficient' highland politics. His views offer insights into the groundings of protecting 'what is ours' – *our* institutions, *our* producers, *our* seeds – that have shaped visions within the agrarian sector of 'us and them', 'here and over there', and 'now and back then'. Within this vision of divisions, he praises the protection of institutions that reproduce a *cruceño* way of life 'long term' – even if the means (i.e., the autonomic statute) are considered unconstitutional by critics.

GV: How is re-engineering ORS protecting institutionality?

JR: It gives the statute recognition. Obviously, to them, autonomy is illegal. But not to us. We are working. We have the funds, the people, the experience. What we have to do is figure out what we need to do so they don't take what is ours. That's how we are going to implement autonomy. Personally, I hoped that both sides would reach a consensus and develop an intermediate position. But we haven't been able to do that, from either side.

GV: You see people taking sides?

JR: We haven't found a way to say, let's see, let's make a new constitution. Let's reach an agreement, poor people have been left aside for a very long time, we all know that. But now we are six regions that want their departments self-managed, decentralised, who want to decide how their money is spent. Not like now, where *one* representative from the Ministry defines the projects that take place here. That has to end . . . With attitude and action we are going to protect, we have to be the ones that administer. . . . But it is a slow process. First, we have to be recognised. The leaders are saying: do this, do that. But it takes time. We can't rush.

GV: How worried are you about INIAF?

JR: We are not worried. It can be a parallel institution, but it is going to be difficult. INIAF needs money and people with expertise that know certification. We are accredited. . . . Every three years the international system audits us and every four months they analyse our work. They keep us doing quality work here. INIAF won't be able to do that here . . . they will go into other regions that have not been able to establish a proper and greater system of certification like here, because they can't.

GV: They can't? How are other places different?

JR: Simply because of the type of agricultural systems they have. It is agriculture of *minifundios*. Agriculturalists that don't speak Spanish, it is difficult to communicate with them. They were never helped properly . . . When I was ten years old, we were about 60,000 people in Santa Cruz. Now that I am almost 52, we are going to be 1.3 million people because of migration from those impoverished areas. . . . Since there is no state policy – or ever was – of making agriculture an economic pillar, like we do here, people come here because we work. . . . I have been an agricultural engineer for 27 years . . . and I have never seen such a state policy. That's why things are the way they are.

Now this government is trying to create an institute specific for agrarian development. We fully support it. Unfortunately, it thinks only the small, small, small matter. They told us that. They are interested in producing for eating well. That is their politics. On the other hand, the politics of small-scale agriculture here is produce to get out of poverty. Become an entrepreneur. That is what we do, with our extension programs. We try to educate. We don't give them anything for free here. We give the fishing rod, so they can fish.

'To produce well you need a good plant': safeguarding the project of quality

Rosales refers to ORS as a fundamental *cruceño* institution. It works for agrarian producers that desire autonomy: self-governing, entrepreneurial agriculturalists that practice a production 'attitude' educated through knowledge and practices of certified agriculture (i.e., board members and the producers they represent). For Rosales, this is the agriculturalist worth protecting. Enhancing the institutions that support capitalist production – a policy advocated by the first wave of agricultural modernisation led by the *Movimiento Revolucionario Nacionalista* (MNR) of 1952 in Santa Cruz (which he references as 'lessons from the 50s') – ought to be a goal of autonomy. His vision does not represent all agrarian interests in Santa Cruz, however. Culture and political economy are imbricated in the othering and exclusion that helped capitalist agriculture grow in the lowlands, which Rosales hints at in his analysis of seed access among small-scale producers.

GV: Anyone can access ORS certified seeds?

JR: We, *semilleros*, have a view: a good seed is never an expensive seed. Why? Our seed producers and users make up the board – it is for them. Unfortunately, the small producer is not. Well, that's a process. He is beginning to understand that to produce well you need a good plant. Before, the last thing they thought about was the seed. It didn't matter where they bought it... But that can't be anymore. To produce quality, I have to get the plant with the greatest genetic potential. Based on that, I can control that my plant doesn't get sick. That is easier to change among the large- and medium-scale producers. It is more difficult among the small ones ... they can tell a good seed from a bad one, but don't have a profound understanding. They see a clean seed and say, ah, that's a good seed. But they can't tell what variety it is. If it brings weeds. Or carries diseases. ... You can't see those things. That makes it difficult to work with the small ones.

GV: It's difficult because they can tell the difference between seeds?

JR: In Yapacaní and San Julián [zones with small scale producers]... We have a local system of distribution... We build capacity among producer associations, too... The small producer doesn't always buy certified seeds ... but he starts to demand quality. It doesn't matter if it has a label or not. He questions the supplier: is your seed good? He can see that a seed of better quality will get a better return. I remember a classic case in Sucre, in a meeting where a producer said we hadn't given him the fish for free, but taught him how to fish. He said, 'now that I know my rice is from good seeds, I can negotiate a good price, because I know what I have in my field'. That was an emotional moment... The Seeds Committee attempts to reach everyone in Santa Cruz. Obviously, it is easier to reach the big producer and the mechanised small producer. With the small one, because of financial difficulties, we go much slower...

GV: What kinds of difficulties?

JR: Up to now, for example, the government hasn't released funds for technical assistance. So, we had to stop, which never happened before. . . . We covered three months with our own funds, but this way we'll end up in a hole. . . . At this moment, those in charge in La Paz are not fulfilling their roles, not disbursing. . . . While we self-finance, we don't have enough for all programs. We can't continue using our own resources this way. We will run into legal and administrative problems.

GV: Is this unusual, not receiving funds?

JR: It is not usual. . . . In the last meeting with the national committee . . . they told us that back in November they made a mistake and put our budget in a place it shouldn't have been and now won't sign it. . . . I say it is inexcusable that after all these months this problem can't be solved. The real problem is INIAF. Why did they choose to start with the national seed program? Because there is money here. . . . INIAF has a slow start because they don't have money. . . . And that project is ambitious. . . . That is the reason why they are coming after us. We are preparing for that.

GV: So it is mainly a central administration issue.

JR: Local conflicts between agrarian cooperatives and syndicates also have politicised things, more now than before. Syndicates are governed by politicians in top-down ways. Leaders sign agreements to vote for a position or not, to encourage loyalty. There is a vote of fear directed by politicians so that individuals don't work with the system. . . . We want to work with those that want to work. . . . There is a high level of miseducation. And a need for a state policy of production. It seems they didn't learn anything from the 50s.

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More than movement(s): understanding smallholder politics in the Brazilian Amazon

Brenda Baletti

In 1971, the Brazilian government cut two unpaved roads across the Amazon forest to bring 'men without land to a land without men'. Landless peasants moved into the region followed by more powerful interests such as loggers, ranchers, land speculators, and most recently, industrial soy farmers who compete with the peasants for land. Colonisation programs were instituted with the goal of distributing land and securing the country's northwestern border, but the programs largely failed to provide the land tenure, infrastructure, and economic security that they promised. Land reform and land politics more generally in the Amazon have continued to be fraught with conflict, corruption, and violence to a greater extent than anywhere else in Brazil (Simmons *et al.* 2008). Smallholder farmers have often been framed as either perpetrators of environmental destruction, or as passive victims in a violent struggle for land (Hecht and Cockburn 1990, Schminck and Wood 1992, Campos and Nepstad 2006). While some environmentalists have condemned them, social justice oriented movements, and more recently, non-governmental organisation (NGO) programs and networks, have advocated for the rights to land and livelihood for Amazonian smallholders. For every smallholder working with, in, or represented by a social movement, there are many more who are not.

Most Amazonian smallholders are neither indigenous people, nor considered to be 'traditional' Amazonian peasants. They are migrants from the Brazilian south or northeast who began to migrate to the region during the official migration programs of the 1970s and have continued to come in large numbers since then.⁸ Typically, they have moved between rural and sometimes urban locations, worked on the land, in the mines, and in the cities, and do not necessarily share a group identity according to any affiliations common in the region – ethnoracial, regional roots, or productive relations (Cleary 1993). Drawn to the Amazon by the prospect of free land and a better life, these migrants confront a reality defined by lack of infrastructure and services, insecure land tenure, and conflict. The threat of violent conflict permeates the region, but daily life is equally shaped by the idea of the

⁸With a population of over three million, smallholders of this sort outnumber indigenous and traditional communities by a ratio of six to one (Campos and Nepstad 2006).

‘frontier’ as a place of possibility, where the potential for new opportunities always exists further along the road. The coupled imaginaries of violence and possibility make the region a highly fluid space, where people often establish only tentative roots and frequently shift their social and spatial locations. I argue that this dynamic poses a challenge to the state, which has difficulty fixing people in this region in order to govern them and monitor their land use and environmental effects. It also poses a challenge for social movements, who find it difficult to ‘frame’ such a heterogeneous and mobile group of people in order to militate for particular ideals.

In this essay, I work through an interview with Paulo (a pseudonym), a settler in an agrarian reform settlement project near the city of Santarém in the central Amazon.⁹ Paulo does not consider himself part of any of the region’s various social movements, nor is he part of the local rural workers’ union, although many people in the settlement do belong to the union and he has been a union member in the past. He is aware of social movement activity for various types of smallholder rights in the region but does not seem to find it particularly compelling. By analysing Paulo’s interview we can begin to understand how and why agrarian reform continues to be a major challenge in the state of Pará, and to see the complicated links and even interdependence between smallholders and those people who are usually constructed as their enemies – the logging industry and industrial agriculture. In interviews with actors more commonly highlighted in research on contentious political issues in the Amazon, such as large landholders or social movement leaders, the interviewees’ opinions and positions tend to be carefully articulated because the arguments that they make in interviews are more intentionally political. Interviews with non-leaders and those who are not movement members are valuable for helping us to begin to see the complex conjunctural factors and personal experiences that contribute to the way that people make decisions about land and livelihood. Through attention to partial, contradictory, or non-explanations for decisions and life trajectories by such people, a more complex picture of smallholders begins to emerge. They cannot, for example, be reduced to passive victims of violence or simply economic actors carelessly destroying the environment in pursuit of their economic needs. In presenting this particular interview, I do not mean to suggest that Paulo is necessarily representative of all smallholders. Rather, his interview illustrates some of the situations that smallholders confront and negotiate.

July 2007

I met Paulo on my first visit to the settlement I call Castanheira, located about 55 km outside of the city of Santarém. The settlement is less than two hours from the city by car, but it takes closer to five hours when taking the old school bus that passes through the settlement approximately four times a week. Paulo is a slight man, in his early fifties, and a father of seven, although only two of his children live in the

⁹This interview is one of approximately thirty semi-structured interviews conducted with smallholders living in different agrarian reform settlements (whose names have been changed in this article) during the summers of 2007 and 2008. I conducted these interviews as part of a pilot study for a larger project examining social mobilisation for land rights in the context of agribusiness expansion and road development in the region. Representatives from the Santarém Rural Workers Union, the CPT, and the Forum of the Social Movements of the BR-163 introduced me to people negotiating these issues from several settlements, which I visited and where I interviewed settlers.

settlement with him. He lives in a four room cinderblock house with his wife, his youngest child, and a grown daughter and her family. Two of his other children live in Santarém with relatives so that they can attend school, as there is only a primary school in the settlement. The grown children have moved away to the city or nearby settlements. I interviewed him as we sat in his yard, in front of a house that he had purchased from another settler approximately six years ago. Buying and selling plots of land in the settlement is not technically allowed, although it is common practice and has sometimes been sanctioned by the federal agency that oversees the settlements, the National Agency for Colonisation and Agrarian Reform (INCRA). Behind the house was a field of corn, rice, beans, manioc, and black pepper, and behind the field was the forest. It was a leisurely Sunday afternoon and several neighbours stopped by to listen or interject as we sat in the shade and talked.

Paulo came to the state of Pará in 1979 when he was 22 from the southern state of Paraná. Paulo did not come to the Amazon as an official ‘*colono*’ sponsored by one of the government programs, but as one of thousands of individuals and families who came because of what they had heard on the radio, or based on rumours of the good fortunes of friends who had moved away. Paulo said that he came to Pará because

my father had land in Paraná, but not enough, you know? For all of his children ... [when I arrived] I got a little piece of land but there were no roads, no electricity, you know? It was very hard. ... We could not survive in those conditions, so soon after we arrived in Pará we moved again.

As colonisation of the Amazon progressed and the government’s promises of infrastructure failed to materialise, the Catholic Church became an important mediator for marginalised people. Activists with the Church mobilised for social issues and built alliances among the communities that stretched out along the Transamazon Highway, one of the two major arteries of colonisation. This activism translated into social movements such as the Movement for the Survival of the Amazon, later the Movement for the Development of the Transamazon and Xingu, which incorporated both social justice and environmental issues into a regional development agenda (Campos and Nepstad 2006). This period also saw the rise of the Santarém Rural Workers’ Union (STR-Santarém), which continues to be one of the most important advocates for the rights of smallholders in the region (Leroy 1991). For as many families that stayed in their initial settlement communities and eked out a living as smallholders, there were many more that did not. For those who had settled in the south of Pará, far from the social networks of the Transamazon, it could be even more difficult. Paulo ‘worked for a mine, transporting gasoline in the south [of Para] while I waited to find some land where I could live with my family, plant, raise animals, and all that’. Although Paulo liked his job driving a truck for the mine ‘more or less’, he had grown up on a small farm and what he really wanted – the reason that he had come to the Amazon in the first place – ‘was a piece of land’. ‘In my work transporting gas I realized that there were a lot of problems getting access to land there – assassinations, speculation and, land title forgery (*grilagem*). So we moved here, you know? To this region here [closer to Santarém]’.

Even after moving to the Santarém area, which he perceived as being a more stable place, Paulo and his family continued to exhibit a mobility that is common among smallholders. From their point of view, living conditions are difficult, and if it

seems that there is a better opportunity elsewhere, it makes sense to move on. Paulo moved 'quite a bit (*bastante*) in the beginning' – occupying a few different plots of land and trying to farm, and even a few short stints in the city working construction, before settling in the settlement project where he lives today. He was not one of the original settlers in the settlement, which was established in 1998.

Most of the settlement projects in the region are created not by expropriating and redistributing privately held land, as is common in much of Brazil, but rather by regularising informal land occupations that already exist in a given area. Castanheira is located close to some older, more established settlement projects for 'traditional' Amazonian peasants, but this settlement consists of a loose community of settlers 'from the northeast, from the south, from Santarém, other parts of Pará, from everywhere'. Paulo described the settlement's establishment,

Some of the settlement was part of a large farm [*fazenda*] that had 40,000 hectares and people came and invaded it. Some of this land was undesignated government land [*terra devoluta*] ... people just took what they wanted, some lots were bigger, some were smaller. The first place people invaded was the part with water. Then the places without water. ... We get our water from a well down the road ... about one km that way. The water in it comes from 100 meters below the Tapajós [River] ... it is very difficult to get water here; the water is very deep. That is why we have no well, it is very expensive to dig a well. So we have to walk every day. The children walk ... it is very difficult ...

Lack of infrastructure and secure tenure in the settlement projects is a historic challenge to life in the settlements and is a primary reason that people leave (Futumma and Brondizio 2003). While the causes of such situations are complex, the settlers often blame INCRA for failing to make good on its promises. Paulo explained,

INCRA came and wanted to put everything in order, but they can't because it is very chaotic, you know? The lots [individual plots of land] here are different sizes and so it still hasn't been well delineated. Sometimes the settlers fight over the boundaries. ... When this settlement was created there were a lot of people ... [who] wanted land here but a lot of them are gone now because the infrastructure never arrived. ... people sold their land and left ... but the land here is good ... [people] come here from the city and they want land but they have no experience with smallholder agriculture (*agricultura familiar*). They come here because they can't find jobs, but they don't know how to work ... on the land, they haven't ever worked with black pepper, corn, rice, beans ...

I asked why he came to this settlement if he was not one of the original settlers and he explained,

I have another plot where I was doing a coffee project but it didn't work out; the land wasn't good for café.¹⁰ It didn't produce. ... You know what I think? I think that INCRA should make a map of where it is good to plant and what is good to plant where, and put settlements in the places where it is good to plant. If they do that, and they give the infrastructure they promise, like electricity and water, then people will do well. They will survive. ... Because when you take PRONAF [see footnote 10] and you have a project and it doesn't work out, then you are in a bad situation. You have no money and no infrastructure and no coffee, you know? When I did that project it was the only time that INCRA ever came. So I took the money and I didn't pay it back

¹⁰A 'project' indicates an agricultural planting project that is funded through PRONAF (Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar), a program to provide settlers with small loans to begin subsistence or small scale commodity production.

because the project didn't work, but then they didn't want to give new money for another project.

'Is that why you moved?', I asked. 'More or less', he answered.

Paulo sold his land in his previous settlement to a soy farmer. Industrial soy production, which has been expanding in the region since the late 1990s, intensified significantly after the transnational agribusiness corporation Cargill built its port on the Amazon River in Santarém in 2001. Soy farmers often directly compete with small farmers for land, either buying them out or forcing them off of their land. The STR along with the Pastoral Land Commission (the CPT, a Catholic organisation that advocates for rural people's rights) and others launched a campaign to stop smallholders from selling their land, but the practice is still commonplace (Seward 2007). Paulo explained,

He [the soy farmer] was the brother of a woman who worked at INCRA. She made him a false document [*documento falso*]. He visited people in their houses and asked to buy their lot and for them to go away, you know? He came to my house five times. I didn't want to sell it because my lot was 50 hectares and it had valuable hardwood [*madeira de lei*]. This lot here is only 25 hectares. I told him I would trade that lot for another one so he tried to find me one but he couldn't find one. In the end I sold him my lot.

The narrative that has developed around this practice of smallholders selling their land to soy farmers is that they are offered very large sums of money that they spend quickly, so they become impoverished and move to informal housing on the urban periphery. I asked Paulo how much he was paid for his land:

\$14,000 reais [less than approximately US\$5,000 at the time]. I paid my debt to the bank and bought this lot. This house was here already from when they first made the settlement. The settler who sold it to me had a debt from building the house and from the first planting. I inherited his debt when I bought the land. Then I went and registered with INCRA and the land passed to me, well to my daughter, it is in her name.

I asked Paulo why the land was in his daughter's name, and he said 'because I want her to have a better life', although it was also likely difficult for him to get land in his name if he had been registered in a different settlement.

A lot of visiting happens on Sundays in the settlement, and an American researcher visiting people to ask questions also attracted a lot of attention. Several neighbours stopped by during our conversation and Paulo always identified them in terms of where they were from. 'Damião is a Gaúcho, you see how light his skin is?'. 'João can tell you about the logging', he said as João approached, 'João is the son of *colonos*. He is from Ceará; there are a lot of people from Ceará here'. João told me,

My parents were *colonos*; we moved here when I was ten. My parents live in Mujuí dos Campos (a community on the nearby BR-163). Me and my brother and my uncle tried to move back to Ceará because there was no land for us there [in parent's settlement], but there was nothing for us there [either] . . . so we came back here.

I asked if many children of *colonos* lived in the settlement and Paulo responded,

Yes, a lot, because they lack a lot. That is why they come here. The *colono* settlements don't have any more plots of land. Many of them want to settle here [in this settlement]. The land here is very rich. [We are] poor people but we know how to work.

In other settlements nearby, he pointed out, life is easier and the people are wealthier because they sell valuable hardwoods from the forest.

There is a community nearby . . . the land is very good, and because of this the lots are all only 25 hectares but the people live well because they have good land and if they need something, when they need something they go into the forest and they sell a tree.

In Castanheira, the settlers do not sell wood anymore because, Paulo said, 'there is no valuable wood left here'. João interjected that there is 'some but not much'. I asked, 'how do you sell wood? Do you take out the tree yourselves?'. 'No', Paulo responded,

loggers go into the forest. They pay the settlers to let them enter and they take the wood they paid for and they also take the wood they didn't pay for. They take all of the wood and they leave nothing but holes in the road.

This was a favourite saying of the settlers when describing loggers, although the relationship with loggers often supplies an important supplementary income. Sometimes loggers build roads, or infrastructure, in exchange for access to wood in settlements.

I asked Paulo if there was someone who helped settlers to negotiate issues such as conflict with loggers. I asked if, for example, he was a member of the rural workers' union. He answered that he was not, and when I inquired as to why, he responded:

Paulo: I don't know; what do they do? Many people here are part of the union but what does it get them? The situation is still horrible because we still don't have water, electricity. The land is more or less good, but we don't have water, we don't have title. What do we have?

Brenda: Do you ever have any contact with people from the CPT?

Paulo: They come here sometimes, one of the priests, what is his name? What is the name of that priest [to a neighbour who shrugs his shoulders]? I don't remember.

Brenda: Do you have a relationship with any social movements?

Paulo: No.

Brenda: Why not?

Paulo: Look, like I said, nothing changes here. We wait and wait and infrastructure never arrives. Nobody helps . . . a social movement is something that works for you, to help you to get the things that you need to subsist, but we don't have the things that we need. . . . we are not Catholic. We are from the Assembly of God [an evangelical sect].

Brenda: Does the CPT only work with Catholics?

Paulo: No, they came a couple of times to the association meeting and talked with people.

Brenda: Have you gone to the talks?

Paulo: No . . . a couple of times.

Brenda: What do they talk about?

Paulo: Technical things, water, land, I don't know.

Brenda: Were you ever part of the union?

Paulo: Once, for a few years.

Brenda: Why did you decide to leave?

Paulo: I don't remember.

There are millions of smallholders who live and work in the Amazon, who, like Paulo, do not consider themselves part of a social movement. Paulo's experience and comments highlight two issues that might help to explain why this is so.

First, the geographical and social mobility that characterises the lives of many Amazonian smallholders poses a challenge to the region's traditional forms of identity-based social organising. Paulo moved numerous times, changing his physical location and his source of livelihood, working as a farmer, a construction worker, and for the mines. He is neither indigenous nor traditional, does not consistently identify with a place or a job, and because he technically lives on his daughter's land, his status as a land reform recipient is in question. If we understand Paulo's situation to be commonplace, we can appreciate the difficulty in framing Amazonian 'peasants' as a singular community with common needs and demands.

Second, in this particular conjuncture an exclusive focus on social movements may preclude an understanding of the complex dynamics that shape the political terrain that smallholders negotiate in their daily lives. By studying people who do not consider themselves part of movements and who may *not* be intentionally trying to create an alternative politics, we can better understand the complexity of regional politics and the influence that the ambiguous political positions of smallholders may have on the ability for movements to coalesce. Paulo may not be mobilising to build a different vision of the world, but that does not mean that his actions are not producing 'another world'. Selling his labour to the mines, land to soy farmers and wood to loggers are economic decisions, but they have political effects. The tension between Paulo's criticism of loggers and soy farmers and the temporarily convenient or strategic alliances that he forms with them indicate a complex and contradictory politics. Paulo's assessment that the union and social movements are *not* effective vehicles for the kind of change that he wants indicates a certainty, a common sense understanding, regarding the potential for political change by social movements. His actions, however, such as attending meetings, joining and leaving the union, etc., indicate ambivalence toward movements that may also indicate an openness toward movement organising. The complex nature of smallholder politics that emerged in my interview with Paulo challenges any simple assessment of smallholders as either passive victims or environmentally destructive economic actors. Rather, the shifting terrain of smallholder politics, livelihood choices, and economic activities are products of multiple and intersecting forces that Paulo and others negotiate as individuals and collectives according to their changing needs, desires, abilities, and world views.

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Turncoat? The activist trajectory of a Philippine plantation-community leader

Rosanne Rutten

Top-down studies of rural social movements may suggest a firm coherence in membership and activist corps that belies reality. Behind high-profile leaders whose lengthy service may project the image of cohesion and continuity, grassroots activists may show considerable mobility. Villagers may move in and out of movements, switch activist networks, join countermovements, or drop out of activism altogether and pursue their goals for individual and collective uplift through other channels (religious, government, clientelist, criminal) or through individual survival strategies and everyday forms of resistance.

The twists and turns in the life careers of village activists and community leaders defy simple classification, and it is precisely this multiformity over time that reminds us of a few important lessons drawn from poor people’s politics: (1) social movements are but one of the many ‘problem-solving networks’ the working poor consider;¹¹ (2) they may switch to other networks when they find a particular movement wanting; and (3) changes in the wider balance of power may open up new opportunities for local-level activism and constrain old ones, thus producing shifting avenues for local advocacy. A closer look at this dynamic may show, moreover, that the lower-class background of grassroots activists (and hence their dependence on people and institutions of power, including leftwing power) may channel their activist engagement toward influential networks that offer a niche and influence – and that depend, in turn, on community leaders and village brokers to reach rural constituencies.

Such activist trajectories may remain hidden when researchers focus on *social movements* (as bounded and solid units that ‘incorporate’ villagers) instead of *village activists* (as political actors in their own right), who may experience, over time, many political groupings vying for their support and may grasp very diverse opportunities for advancing collective interests. Moreover, a snapshot view of rural communities may ‘freeze’ villagers into one activist mode, obscuring past involvement in a string of different problem-solving ventures. Longitudinal community studies and life

¹¹Cf. Auyero (2000), from whom the terms ‘problem-solving network’ and ‘poor people’s politics’ are taken.

history interviews may, instead, help uncover the multifaceted political trajectories of individual peasants and farmworkers.¹²

The following is the portrait of a man who, born of plantation-worker parents, served as a community leader for a sugarcane planter, a union, a revolutionary movement, a counterinsurgency army, a 'rebel-returnees' association,¹³ and a labour union of a rebel breakaway faction – and who saw no discrepancies in this checkered career, in which he 'changed sides' several times. I followed his trajectory in the course of fieldwork in his home community, which centred around a plantation in the main sugarcane producing region of the Philippines, the province of Negros Occidental. The community study spans a period of three decades starting 1977.¹⁴ In this thirty-year period the plantation region witnessed, successively, the growth of leftwing unionisation, a massive underground mobilisation by the Maoist-inspired revolutionary movement CPP-NPA (Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army), a state-led counterinsurgency campaign that targeted all rural communities, and a government land reform program that is, piecemeal, changing workers into small landowners. I had talks with 'Rafael' (a pseudonym) during many of my revisits. Since I took notes rather than tape record the interviews given sensitive data, the following is rather a sketch than an interview and quotes are by necessity short. The brief portrait illuminates the activist choices of a lower-class political actor, whose options to advance the interests of the rural poor (as he saw them) were shaped by the waves of leftwing mobilisation and government counter-mobilisation in the region from the 1970s up to the present.¹⁵ Admittedly, his is an exceptional case in my research for the sheer number of different and mutually antagonistic networks of power in which he operated over the course of time. But extreme cases may highlight a dynamic that operates in less visible ways among larger populations. This certainly applies to activist plantation workers of Negros Occidental.¹⁶

Rafael was born in 1949 in Hacienda Milagros (a pseudonym), a plantation covering 134 hectares owned by a planter family in town, with resident worker families forming a small proletarian community bordered on all sides by other plantations and their own clusters of worker homes. Rafael's father was a hacienda truck driver who hauled cane to sugar centrals in the area and who later became a local foreman when his hand was paralysed. His mother worked as a labourer in the canefields. Physically frail and only an elementary school graduate, Rafael's work options looked dim, though he had a keen intelligence.

He first obtained work and influence as a planter's dependent: initially as a 'houseboy' to the planter's family in Bacolod City, then as a foreman and later overseer in Hda. Milagros. Placed between planter and workers, Rafael's position as

¹²For good examples, see, e.g., Donham (1999), Fegan (1993), Horton (1998), Starn (1998), and Kerkvliet (2000).

¹³A 'rebel returnee' is a former member of the CPP-NPA who has officially 'returned to the folds of the law', as the government terms it, and has pledged allegiance to the Philippine Republic.

¹⁴Research in the period 1992–96 was funded by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).

¹⁵Parts have been adapted from Rutten (2000). See also Rutten (2008) for more extensive background information. On the insurgency nationwide, see Abinales (1996), Jones (1989), and Weekley (2001).

¹⁶For a discussion of other local activists in the area that followed a similar pattern, though in less extreme forms, see Rutten (2001).

a hacienda overseer was highly ambivalent. Rooted in the hacienda, with a large network of relatives, friends, and ritual kin among the workers, Rafael was a workers' spokesman rather than a planter's executive. He lived among the workers, joined in their palmwine drinking sessions, children's birthday parties, and Sunday neighbourly visits, chatted with workers during rest periods in the canefields, and was closely attuned to workers' problems and needs. Softspoken, he treated workers with respect and familiarity, and they generally considered him a 'good' overseer. But Rafael 'owed' the planter a lot (as a worker put it) and he sought non-confrontational ways to advance workers' interests – for instance, by manipulating the payroll, raising piece-rate income by uprating the difficulty of certain tasks. Moreover, Rafael was culturally pressured to favour his kin, friends, and ritual kin in the distribution of hacienda resources, such as light work, scarce work in the lean season, and house repair materials, which produced factional tensions among the worker population. In this period his ethos, like that of his hacienda peers, was marked by personal loyalties and reciprocal obligations – constrained by a power configuration defined by patronage and personalised access to scarce resources. His desire for community uplift and unity did find an outlet in religious form: when the planter sent his workers to a religious retreat organised by the Catholic revival movement *Barangay Sang Virgen* in the 1970s, he was attracted by the feelings of unity and brotherhood the retreat produced. As a local leader of this revival movement, he initiated the singing of the retreat songs at social gatherings in the hacienda, evoking in the worker families present strong emotions of community and solidarity.

Several key events prompted Rafael to disengage from the planter and to take the track of leftwing worker mobilisation. When the planter, pressured by low sugar prices in 1976–79, began to lower labourers' rice credits, work assignments, and wages, Rafael agonised about the bad news he had to relay to the workers each payday when they gathered at his house. He told me then that he would rather quit his job and 'pull weeds like the others'. He felt responsible for improving worker conditions but helpless to do so, and 'this makes my head reel!' Tinkering with the payroll only went so far. Organised protest against the planter did not figure in his repertoire yet. He just felt like knocking off. This was eventually forced upon him when the planter 'professionalised' hacienda management to survive the market slump, attracted outsiders with higher education, and demoted Rafael to foreman, marginalising him from the hacienda's power centre. Angered and hurt, Rafael spent his evenings with supportive kin and friends (including the family with whom I lived) in intense discussions about his plight, or got himself soundly drunk to escape the tensions.

In this period, new social networks and ideological frames were available in Hda. Milagros through which Rafael could express and address his grievances. Leftwing priests and nuns in the parish, influenced by Marxist Liberation Theology, had opened the doors of the presbytery to hacienda workers and recruited hacienda youths to organise Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) in the haciendas, including Hda. Milagros. The BCC in Milagros offered workers a space to discuss their collective problems (gospel in hand) in terms of 'oppression' and 'exploitation' during its weekly meetings, and to stage small-scale collective protests against the planter. Moreover, the newly formed Church-backed labour union NFSW (National Federation of Sugar Workers) had started to organise in the area through the BCCs. Rafael was attracted by the concepts of social justice and the collective fight against

landlord oppression, which were central to the ‘conscientisation’ efforts of clergy and leftwing union. Soon, Rafael began to invite lay leaders to hold seminars in the hacienda about workers’ rights, and signed up for the nuns’ seminars in town, bringing other foremen along. The nuns and the union NFSW received Rafael with open arms, and eventually he became a part-time union organiser in the hacienda and surroundings. He cut his remaining tie with the planter when the latter accused him of padding the payroll. Sent to jail and bailed out by the union, he quit his job as a foreman, became a full-time union organiser, and so moved from the planter’s payroll to that of the union.

As a union organiser, Rafael was instrumental in expanding and consolidating union membership in the hacienda, and he derived great personal satisfaction from the concessions to workers wrested from the planter. Banking on his social status as a former overseer, his moral status as a former religious community leader, his pivotal position in a large kin group, dense cross-community networks, and charisma as a softspoken trustworthy leader and persuasive speaker, Rafael was a skillful organiser. By the early 1980s, Hda. Milagros was one of the most solidly unionised haciendas in the municipality.

Within a few years, Rafael rose from union organiser to the position of district party boss of the underground CPP and its guerrilla army NPA, heading a district committee that covered several municipalities and included Hda. Milagros. Career paths from ‘legal’ above-ground organisations (including labour unions) towards the ‘illegal’ revolutionary underground were already laid out by revolutionary cadres who sought to link both spheres and who were actively recruiting for the underground among union organisers and other leftwing activists.

Rafael joined the revolutionary movement, he said, because of his keen awareness of *inhustisya* (injustice), in particular worker poverty and rights violations; his disappointment in the leftwing clergy, who failed to show how to change the oppressive social system; and the persistent recruitment efforts of a CPP-NPA organiser from another hacienda. His primary goal, he explained, was to improve the lot of hacienda workers by fighting landlord oppression and military repression. The CPP-NPA offered the means to do so. Under Rafael’s guidance as a local underground leader, the organisation and collective actions by the workers provided tangible benefits: better wage deals, subsistence farmplots for worker families on hacienda land, and planter respect for worker interests. Moreover, the coercive power of the NPA was used to the workers’ advantage: the NPA backed workers’ demands by burning canefields or hacienda trucks of planters who were unwilling to give in. When Rafael successfully negotiated worker demands in his home plantation, Hda. Milagros, he exempted the planter from forced CPP-NPA taxations and protected his property from destruction. He also helped coordinate livelihood projects with NGOs and other ‘legal’ organisations, thereby tapping such organisations (often without their knowledge) as quasi line-agencies for the movement. His personal sacrifices were considerable, however: like all fulltime cadres, he left home and family for security reasons, moved around in small teams in organised rural areas, and depended on trusted villagers for food and shelter. His wife worked in the canefields to feed the family.

Eventually, as a mobile political cadre in a vastly expanding underground movement, Rafael’s influence in Hda. Milagros (and in a wide area beyond) was that of a party boss heading a local section of a shadow state: taxation, recruitment of personnel, ideological work, moral engineering, protection, policing, intelligence,

and the administration of justice (including the authority to issue the death penalty on perceived enemies of the movement). He was supported by the hacienda-based underground party branch, which consisted of male and female worker activists. Rafael's power was backed up by the NPA's armed force: he could send armed fighters to unwilling supporters in the haciendas to threaten them into obedience (a standard procedure in the movement) and to neutralise opposition by overseers. Though poor and propertyless, he was widely viewed as a man of power.

His *exit* from the revolutionary movement in 1988 was prompted by a mounting conflict with the regional leadership which, in his view, sacrificed the immediate interests of the poor to the interests of the armed struggle. It was a matter of 'food' versus 'arms', he said, and he squarely chose the first. For him, the main goal of the CPP-NPA was 'to solve the economic problems' of the people. The movement had offered him and fellow local cadres some room for experimentation in the early years. When the regional and national leadership called for a 'total war' against the government in 1987 after the collapse of a ceasefire agreement with the newly installed regime of Corazon Aquino, it ordered cadres to cut their ties with politically moderate NGOs and other organisations that had supported community-based development projects under covert CPP-NPA control – ties that Rafael had been instrumental in shaping, and that had helped diffuse anti-movement tensions. Instead, the leaders called for sharpened polarisation, and for channelling most of the underground's resources to the guerrilla army.

Rafael had joined the movement as a broker between workers' interests and the interests of the movement. Its regional leaders now forced him to become an agent, strictly limited to carrying out party directives, not reshaping them as he saw fit. They branded him and fellow cadres 'reformist' for attaching central importance to workers' livelihood and for exploring non-confrontational forms of action at the community level, including negotiations. According to Rafael, the regional party leader 'wanted to incite the conflict between workers and management, rather than help improve the situation of workers through a better worker-management relationship'. Rafael became convinced that the party shortchanged the workers. When the CPP-NPA started to 'tax' planters on a sizeable scale, Rafael 'struggled' unsuccessfully with party leaders for a workers' share in the tax income since the workers had produced the wealth with their own sweat. The tax income went to party coffers, however.¹⁷

He deplored the fact that regional and national leaders 'have only theoretical knowledge; they have no experience of the practical life of the workers'.¹⁸ Former professionals, Catholic priests, and college students predominated among the CPP leaders of the Negros region, and Rafael was one of the few district secretaries with little formal education and with a hacienda background. The party rules by directive, he said, and memoranda by lower-level/lower-class cadres may simply be disregarded. Moreover, he resented the feeling that his superiors and fellow district-secretaries acted 'superior' towards him, and that some expected 'high-class food' even during party plenums held in poor rural communities. His estrangement from the party leadership was complete when it failed to pay for his medication when he suffered from tuberculosis and malnutrition. 'My best companion did not help

¹⁷See Putzel (1995) for an extensive discussion of similar frictions between rural activists and underground party leaders in the CPP-NPA.

¹⁸Cf. Scott (1979).

me, but my worst enemy did', Rafael said, as he referred to the government military, who eventually paid for medical treatment after his capture.

Rafael was captured and surrendered to the military in 1988, in a period when government counterinsurgency strategy was shifting from terror and violence to a policy of attraction, which, supported by an amnesty program, specifically targeted disenchanting cadres to work for the government. Rafael stayed for a year at a local army headquarters where Col. Rene Cardones, head of the Negros Island Command, ensured Rafael proper treatment. His wife and children moved in with him. At the army camp, Rafael met nationalist reformists among the military (who belonged to an influential and expanding activist network within the army at that time) with whom he discussed the ills of the country 'for nights on end'. There was a meeting of minds. Rafael found common ground in their populism, nationalism, and anti-landlord attitude. He became a proponent of a strong regulating state that disciplines planters and benefits the poor, and he saw signs that the Aquino government was moving in that direction. He anchored the views of his captors to his own reformist and CPP-dissident views.

In his own account, he started to work for the military voluntarily. After recovering from his illness, he recalled,

Colonel Cardones told me I could return home. But I answered that my wish to help the people was not yet fulfilled. I said, 'If you have programs for the good of the people, then I'll help'. Cardones was delighted, and said we would make a program together to my liking.

Rafael became a counter-mobiliser, linked to an army Special Operations Team tasked with organising community 'surrenders'. He became a regular speaker at village surrender ceremonies. In his speeches he warned villagers that the CPP-NPA does not place the interests of the poor first, and that poverty can be solved through government assistance, not through violence. He denounced the 'corruption' in the CPP-NPA, the relative comfort of its high-ranking leaders, and the CPP-NPA propaganda that hides from the villagers its true communist agenda. Besides, he sought to pressure planters to comply with labour laws, mediated in favour of government-funded livelihood projects, and offered his former constituency protection from possible military violence. His brokerage, in turn, helped military and civil authorities to make inroads in CPP-NPA-controlled haciendas in the area, and so facilitated the demobilisation of part of Rafael's former rural constituency. Rafael urged the military to discipline their ranks, treat the poor with respect, and refrain from using violence against the CPP-NPA's civilian base. The insurgency, he argued, cannot be controlled by killing civilians but by eradicating poverty, by solving the main problems of the people – food and wages. Provincial military officials, groping for ways to improve counterinsurgency methods at that time, had a keen interest in the views of Rafael and other former cadres with rank. In retrospect, Rafael credited himself with causing a decline in military atrocities in the province.

Eventually, he became overseer in Hda. Ramona, several kilometers from Hda. Milagros in the heart of former CPP-NPA territory, where he lived with his family within the compound of a small military detachment. He remained on the payroll of the military as a public speaker at mass surrenders and at paramilitary trainings. Always an organiser, he mobilised the workers in this hacienda to thresh out problems with the planter, but this time keeping union and revolutionary movements at bay.

In the years that followed, he pursued his reformist agenda in innovative ways, latching on to new opportunities created by the shifting balance of power in the region, but also suffering reversals in fortune. In 1992, Rafael participated in municipal politics as a vote-broker. He supported candidates who committed to a reformist 'people's agenda' for the political and economic empowerment of the poor, framed by a municipality-wide organisation of 'rebel returnees' which Rafael had helped to form. The supported candidates lost, however. He then entered a dismal period of poverty and social marginalisation when the planter of Hda. Ramona fired him because, according to Rafael's account, he had supported worker actions in the hacienda. Besides, the army began to skip his monthly allowances and so Rafael quit his assistance to the military as well. His wife and children left him in this period because of an alleged affair he had. By 1995, he was jobless, suffering from tuberculosis, and living in a ramshackle house in another hacienda with a new wife who sold lottery tickets to support the family. In this period of expanding state control in the countryside, planters, politicians, and army personnel were no longer soliciting his assistance in countering a (now waning) insurgency. It marked the passing of a political conjuncture that had offered Rafael, and others like him, some bargaining power for negotiating local reforms.

The successive nationwide splits in the revolutionary movement since the 1990s offered Rafael a new power network within which he could operate. By 2006, he had connected to former fellow-cadres who had split off from the CPP-NPA and who had formed, with others, a new underground political party (RPM-P), a labour union (DALO), and a guerrilla army (RPA)¹⁹ that entered into a peace agreement with the government in 2000. He became, again, a union organiser in his home municipality, and lived in a bamboo/thatch-roofed house in one of the unionised haciendas. Labour issues and land reform were again on his agenda. Eventually, he moved back to Hda. Milagros when this hacienda was covered by the state's land reform program and Rafael was able to avail himself of a plot of his own. He soon immersed himself in problem-solving strategies for the land-reform beneficiaries, who lacked capital of their own and were leasing their land to capitalist entrepreneurs.

Though Rafael changed sides repeatedly, he differs from the turncoat common in Philippine factional politics who shifts sides because of expediency and personal power play. Throughout his activist trajectory with many twists and turns, Rafael perceived himself persistently as a social reformer. In his own view he was simply using, to the full, the opportunities available for lower-class organisation and empowerment, be they backed up by the Catholic Church, labour unions, a revolutionary movement, a counter-insurgent state, or a rebel breakaway faction.

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¹⁹RPM-P stands for Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawang-Pilipino (Revolutionary Workers' Party-Philippines), 'DALO' for Democratic Alliance of Labor Organizations, 'RPA' for Revolutionary Proletarian Army.

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Peasant occupations within war veterans-led land occupations: grassroots conflicts and state reaction in Zimbabwe

Wilbert Z. Sadomba

Although land occupations in Zimbabwe have a long history dating back to the last decade of the nineteenth century, when the country was colonised by the British, the most significant occupations were started in 1998 by veterans of the 1970s liberation war. The liberation war was characterised by the intensive mobilisation and participation of peasants, farm workers, and combatants whose visions of liberation were based on repossession of lost lands. Veteran-led occupations took place over four years, from 1998 to 2002, with the climax occurring in 2000, when a dramatic nationwide campaign commenced (Sadomba forthcoming).

Although war veterans were the main catalyst for these occupations, the latter took on a variety of organisational structures and actor composition, with some led

by peasant and farm worker groups (exclusively), others led by the war veterans, and yet others led by assorted groups. Veteran-led land occupations mobilised peasants, farm workers, and the urban working class – including professionals from both private and public sectors – to struggle against settlers, domestic and international capital, ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) elites and the state (Andrew and Sadomba 2006).

The occupation period was followed by government intervention through a program code-named ‘Fast Track Land Reform Programme’ (FTLRP) that aimed to bring the land movement under its control using a mixture of persuasive and coercive methods. The FTLRP became both a means through which the state ‘heeded the call for land redistribution’ (Utete Report 2003, 35) after resisting it for two decades and a means of sustaining political power by the ruling elite. Tactically, the FTLRP had three options to deal with the land movement: co-option of the movement, creating competing structures to antagonise it, and finally, to smash it if the first two failed. The interview shows how these options operated on the ground (Sadomba forthcoming).

The FTLRP was imbued with conflicts between the state, land movement actors, and ZANU PF elites, revealing the class character of occupations. From 2004, military-style operations code-named Murambatsvina (Restore Order), Chikorokozwa Chapera (End of Illegal Mining) and, later in 2008, Mavhotera Papi (Whom Did You Vote For?) were carried out by the state, targeting the veteran-led land movement which was then a threat to the power wielded by the ruling elite.

The interview that follows was held with a peasant woman named Rhoda (hereafter R) who was a cross border trader before she joined the land occupations.²⁰ When nationwide occupations exploded in 2000, peasants from the Hwata/Chiweshe and Zumba dynasties, then scattered around the country, organised themselves to occupy an area called Gomba on autochthonous grounds. These occupations are a typical example of occupations specifically organised and led by peasant groups and not directly by war veterans, and were therefore based on unique peasant traditions, history, and organisation, dispelling the myth that land occupations in Zimbabwe were state organised and initiated by ZANU PF or President Robert Mugabe. This interview reveals contradictions within the movement as well as conflicts between the movement, the state, and ZANU PF elites.

The history of Gomba reveals that sometime in the seventeenth century three sons of Chief Nyashanu (Shayachimwe, Nyamhangambiri, and Gutsa) fled from their angry father who ruled Uhera (now Buhera) in eastern Zimbabwe. They sought refuge in Chief Seke’s area south of Harare and from there they launched an attack on the Zumba clan, taking over Gomba. At a later time Charwe, living with the Hwata clan, served as the medium for a great regional (female) spirit of Nehanda and was captured and hanged for leading the anti-colonial war in 1896–97 (Beach 1994).

The interview was part of an anthropological study that started from 2000. I myself took part in the land occupations as a war veteran from 2000, observing, interviewing, and analysing the content of various documents and processes. This particular interview with Regina, one of about thirty that I conducted in Mashonaland provinces with female peasant occupiers, is important in showing that the land movement of Zimbabwe was much more complex than is often presented in the media and by neo-liberal, anti-land reform scholars. It illustrates the independent organisation of peasants for

²⁰This interview was part of PhD research (Sadomba 2008).

occupations – based on African peasant jurisprudence legitimising occupations – inter-dynastic conflicts of the land movement, and above all, the struggles between the state representing the capitalist class and the land movement.

State violence and peasant agency are both illustrated in the interview. However, despite state violence the movement achieved one of the most revolutionary land redistributions in contemporary times (Moyo and Yeros 2005). Approximately 127,000 households were distributed to small-scale peasant farmers for peasant agriculture. About 1672 large scale commercial farms were distributed to the black elite and bourgeoisie (Utete 2003, 39). Therefore, contrary to propositions and assertions by the international media and anti-land reform academics (Raftopolous 2003, Raftopolous and Hammar 2003, Alexander 2006), land was indeed distributed to the landless, but the ruling elite also rode on the wave of the occupations movement to benefit the rising bourgeois class.

The interview illustrates these conflicts between the elite-led state and more broadly, the ruling oligarchy and the land movement, which can best be understood as class struggles. The interview shows that occupations were neither instigated nor propagated by ZANU PF, or by President Robert Mugabe, but they had an uncontrollable momentum generated from below, spurring the ruling elite to reluctantly respond by distributing the land widely.

WZ: My name is WZ. As I have said before I am researching the history of Mazowe. Up to now I have interviewed very few women. As I promised, I wanted to come and talk to you. What I want to know is – as people of the Zumba clan, what are your experiences with the land issue? What I have noticed is that the Zumba clan is one of the ones that has a long history as the inhabitants of Mazowe, according to written and oral history. I ask that you tell me to the best of your knowledge about the land issue. But before I get to that, would you please introduce yourself?

R: I am called R. I am of the Zumba clan. We are here because we have always been told that this area belongs to our ancestors. We are in Gomba right here and I am actually facing the Shavarunzw Hill where the remains of our ancestors are buried. According to history it is said that our people were removed by the White people because Whites had noticed that the land is fertile, flowing with milk and honey. The Whites then conquered our ancestors and killed them, but others ran away. So our people found it necessary to come back. We came here in 2001, and we constructed our shelters at Chobanga (about five kilometres from the place of the interview). We then formed a committee to represent the Zumba people, whose main function was to communicate with the Governor, the District Administrator (DA), and the Ministry of Lands, informing them of our return and our intention to reclaim our land and Chieftaincy. When we came we were not very many people [but] more than twenty. Then we constructed houses at Chobanga.

W: But I want you to tell me how it really started. How did you leave home? Where did you come from?

R: We came from Madziwa. We left after receiving a radio announcement that Mbuya Nehanda²¹ was saying that the owners of the land should return, meaning

²¹This is a medium of Nehanda spirit, a national female spirit which led the war of resistance when the British invaded the country in 1890. The medium of Nehanda in the 1890s was Charwe, who was living at Gomba during colonial invasion. Charwe was captured in 1897 and hanged in 1898 in Salisbury (Harare).

the Zumba people. This said, our elders came to see Mbuya Nehanda. So our elders who are more familiar with our religious customs came here.

W: Did you actually listen to the radio announcement or were you given the news by someone else?

R: I did not get the news from a third party I heard it straight from the radio itself. I listened to it.

R: Three of the elders went. They are the people who do the rituals in our clan. They met with Mbuya Nehanda and they were told to go and collect the clan to come and occupy. That was in 2001. Then they came home and gathered the whole clan and told us that we had to come [back] to this original home of ours. People of my age do not participate in the traditional rituals but when the old men came with the news that we had to come here we followed them.

...

W: How did you live [before you came here]? Did you live in one village or not?

R: We were just scattered. Some are in Mt. Darwin, others in Madziwa and Mupfure, others at Mupfurudze near Bradley, others are at Chiriseri and yet others at Bushu. We are just scattered like that. These old people sent messages to those areas and people gathered at Mupfure, others were in Chiweshe when they heard about it.

W: Were you there when all this happened?

R: No, I was in town. Those who were at the communal home attended. I was phoned by my brother about that meeting. Then we came here in Mazowe and were given details about the issue. We met at this place, the residence of Mbuya Nehanda. So when people gathered they were told that this is their area and they were told to settle. That is when a committee was formed to go to the District Administrator (DA) because it was decided that people could not just follow the words of a spirit medium while there were people who are considered to be rulers of the land (government). People had to go to the DA so that he would be informed that people were settling. We came here in February but we started to do these communications in May, 2001. We [the whole committee] went to see the DA.

W: Can you give me details of what transpired when you got at the DA's?

R: We had phoned the previous day to make an appointment. Chikomo phoned him. We then went there the following morning so that we would get there before eight o'clock before starting work. When we got there [the DA] was going out of the office to attend to a police case at one of the farms where people had assaulted each other. So he left us to talk to Mrs D, his assistant. We then told her our history, that we are the original people of the area. She looked surprised about this because all along she thought that the Hwata were the first to live here. She then scribbled notes, presumably after appreciating our point of view. Then we requested that the DA arrange a meeting for both the Hwata and Zumba people to discuss the history of this area so that they appreciate who really are the original inhabitants of this area. We then wrote a letter to the DA to support our request, and we left this with the secretary. [The DA] did not call for the meeting. We pursued the issue further three times but we discovered that he was not interested in talking to us and he was hiding something from us because whenever we got there to see him he would say he was too busy to see us and then he would immediately go away and only return when we had left. So when we came back to live in our shelters, we were pained [to find out] that the Assistant DA to whom we had told our story was the one who led the Police (the Black Boots Unit) to burn down our shelters. They said we had trespassed and

illegally settled on the area. We were given ten minutes to take out our belongings from the shelters.

...

R: All this time that we were going to the DA we were busy constructing shelters because we were already living here (occupying). I could say that the objective of going to the DA was to inform him that we had arrived so that he could then do the necessary procedures to resolve the issue. We expected that from the discussions we would hold with the Hwata clan they would be in a position to decide where we would be settled. So this is when they came to burn down our shelters. It was on a Wednesday when we went to see the DA and he sneaked away. No more than two or three days later they came.

W: How exactly did they come and what did they do?

R: We suddenly saw police vehicles arriving after lunch time. Then we were angrily commanded out and called to gather at one place. We followed the instruction. Then they asked who we were and what we were doing at that place. They then said we were settling ourselves illegally. Mrs D was quiet but she was there. We were given no time to respond and they said they had told us long ago that we were supposed to have left that area. When we tried to answer them that we didn't know about that message, Mrs D called out for the police to hurry up and burn the shelters. Then we were given ten minutes to take out our belongings. And of course we only managed to take out a few items, the rest were burnt inside including fertilizers, clothes, seeds, blankets – just a few things were not burnt.

W: How many shelters were there?

R: They were many. We were twenty but some had their families with them. So the shelters were then about fifty. They started with the shelter next to mine going upwards. They commanded us to leave the area but we did not. We had to inform the other members of the committee in town so we waited in the rain the whole night. That rain just fell in the winter season and we never had any other rain until the rainy season finally came. Then we were ferried by M (our committee member) and brought here to Ingleborough Farm. Then we erected shelters. Then we vowed to solve our issue of land and chieftainship from there because we were sure that this area belonged to us. They continued to harass us and we were not compensated for our loss of property by the government. Governor Manyika came and was bitter to us. It was about three o'clock and it was in 2002. The people who came were Governor Manyika, the Provincial Administrator, and other war veterans of this area who first got here, like TK and DW. Then they asked what we wanted here and we told them that we had come to our land.

W: Were you the only committee member there? And were you the spokesperson for the whole group?

R: Yes. Then I explained how we had arrived there. Then Mr Manyika vowed that even if everything turned red as blood, we would never be settled here and we had to leave immediately. We told him that we were not going to leave because our houses were already destroyed. We came here because this is our home. We demanded to know the real reasons why we were being ordered to go back where we came from and why we were allowed here in the first place. He continued with his bitterness, and he transported some of us in seven vehicles and dumped them at the tarred road. He did not select them. Some people just chickened out after witnessing his bitterness. Remember he is *Chief* Mr Manyika. He said, 'If you appreciate that I am

Governor of this Province, then listen to me, there is no place for the Zumba people here. Pack your things and go now. If you want land, register your names there and I will show you where you can get it'. We registered our names. And he said those who wanted could then go with him and that is how some of us went with the Governor's crew.

Myself, my brothers, and a few others refused to go and we remained because we wanted to see the logical conclusion of this issue. I did not see the reason for going away because I am confident that I am on our land. I might be forced or oppressed but the truth that is known even in recorded historical texts will always hold. This is what gave me the power to resist eviction, that is why I am still here up to this day.

We then ploughed for the season. They then sent the police again and we were thoroughly beaten up here. It was around nine in the evening when we were about to sleep. When they got here they started shouting at us from afar saying things that should not be said in public [*zvinonyadzisira*]. Then they shouted for us to open the gate, which we did, and they got in and beat up everybody here: children, old people, women, and everyone. I had one ton of maize that was packed in those 90 kg bags. They rolled their vehicles over the bags and they cut them open. I never got the maize back, that is why I am buying food now. This was done by the police using vehicles from Chidamba village. Then we were forced into the vehicles that same night with little children in the open trucks and we were taken to Malborough Police Station and we were there for three days. For all this time we were cooking in the open at the police station. They were howling words at us all the time.

W: So where did you get cooking utensils?

R: Yes, we carried everything. They told us to take our things. What I left were only my chickens and the eggs, which I did not find when I came back. So when we were there for the three days, some of the committee members ran around to have us released and we were and we returned. We managed to plough the last season.

...

R: From our discussion we noticed that we as the Zumba clan did not have any relatives in government. The Hwatas have got relatives in high posts in the government. So we were weaker because we lacked representation at the top in the government. That is what we concluded. Having discovered that, we decided that despite that, we were going to be resolute because the truth would never succumb to falsehood. We vowed to stay put until things are right. Otherwise the President is for everybody. We realised that those who were doing this were not instructed by the President, they are people far down. If it were possible to just go and see the President like the way I go to my uncle, I would go there to present our grievances to him. Unfortunately it is a no go area. It is a place that can be reached by going through procedures and protocol, but those procedures could be the ones that are oppressing me. So I can't get to the President. If I could, I would tell him that this is what is being done to us here.

W: How does your committee work? What is the structure of your committee? Do you have posts for Chairperson and so forth? Or you just have an adhoc committee?

R: There is W, who is the Chairman. The Secretary is Z and Treasurer is C and the rest are committee members.

W: So do you have times that you meet or you just meet when there is an incident, what happens?

R: Even without an incident we have times we meet and discuss strategies. I cannot disclose exactly the content of our discussions because that is confidential and organisational secrets.

W: Now did you approach any other office besides the DA?

R: We went to the Governor's office; we followed it up by going to see him. I went there with M, W and P. When we got there, we told the Governor our side of the story and told him the reason why we were staying put. We said although he shouted at us and had not given us the opportunity to say our point of view, we still felt that the correct approach to solve 'family' affairs was dialogue; we considered him as a father in this issue. Then we said that we wanted to go back to our land.

W: What history did you tell him and whom did you say you were?

R: We told him about our chieftaincy and showed him on a map. We have a map for Chief Zumba's area. We also showed him some letters that we had from our seniors, whom I shall not disclose. After seeing these letters, he was then willing to discuss the issue with us until he said Gomba could not have settlements because it is part of Harare and there would be only allowed 20 families each from Hwata, Zumba, and Mbare who would remain as the only custodians of cultural heritage there. He said the rest of the people were going to be removed and settled on farms between Bindura and Glendale where the Zumba chieftaincy could be claimed. We agreed to this. Then we made an appointment to effect the removal of people but he did not come. We followed it up with him and he told us to wait and not to plough, but he did not turn up. We grabbed whatever land we could and ploughed for the season.

Up till now the Governor has not yet fulfilled his promise. The truth is well known, but I think there is one powerful person who has decided to suppress us (*kugara matunduru*). When I look at this area as a Christian, I recall the enslavement of the children of Israel in Egypt. Their return to Canaan was difficult because it was flowing with milk and honey. Now, this region of Mazowe is the bread-basket of the country, it flows with milk and honey as well. There are many people who are eyeing it, too. So they think that if they can harass the weak clan, they gain access to this land. Their idea is to frustrate us away and come back to take the land if we give up. So it is difficult to give up, at least on our part, it is difficult. As we were growing up we were told that we belong here although the white man drove us out. Even my clan praise poem actually says this.

What I want to say is that if we are saying that the country is liberated, I expect that we should be free people. There should not be any person who should oppress anyone because the oppressors should only have been the Whites who colonised us. Those are the people whom we fought against to liberate ourselves. After fighting them and driving them out, it means we as the Black people should live in freedom – all of us – and we should enjoy the wealth of the country without being oppressed. There should not be anyone who takes the mind of the British and uses it on another person like her/himself.

I also plead that Father, Mugabe, ought to have designed a way to give those in need the opportunity to get to him and present our grievances. I reckon if this was the case we would always be at his feet presenting our grievances. Unfortunately he is surrounded by the powerful who deny us access and these powerful lie to him and tell him untruths. We cannot, despite our yearning, manage to get to him because we are so deeply low on the ladder. So I will perpetually moan, groping in thick darkness with no one to hear me until I perish with my children, yet he is there.

I know that President Mugabe has a good heart but the people he surrounds himself with and those in the ruling circles are the corrupt ones like some of these who are now being apprehended . . .

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Struggling with the ANC in South Africa

Sharad Chari

DM was a rank-and-file anti-apartheid activist during the 1980s. In 1986, he was propelled into the media spotlight after the arrest of his son for blowing up a popular bar on the Durban beachfront and killing or hurting several civilians. Nobody had conceived of an 'anti-apartheid unit' linked to the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the banned African National Congress (ANC) and South African Communist Party (SACP), coming out of their working-class, 'Coloured' ('mixed race') neighbourhood, Wentworth. DM spent time in prison on the infamous Robben Island. He has since left the ANC and returned to his neighbourhood, where he has been a tireless activist for a range of concerns, including pollution, police

corruption, and state racism. A political maverick, DM shot to notoriety in the 1980s, remained outside the ANC hierarchy in prison, and returned to being a rank-and-file critic of the post-apartheid social order and of the ANC in government.

Of interviews I have collected over the past five years on the historical ethnography of racial segregation and opposition in Durban, his stands out for its non-linearity, as well as for insights on past and present struggles. I find DM's knowledge fascinating in several respects. First, in jogging back and forth between past and present, he makes surprising claims about continuities in power and struggle between anti-racist politics during and after apartheid. Second, he reaches into an *ur*-past to point to submerged histories of dispossession that put 'the land question' out of reach, particularly for people deemed 'Coloured' or 'mixed race' (terms he despises). In brief, South African history has seen waves of unfree labour, de-peasantisation, and racialised dispossession under English and Afrikaner colonialism, post-independence segregation, the white supremacist apartheid regime, and after the advent of democracy. The 1913 Land Act launched a long period of legalised African dispossession; hence 1913 was instated the cutoff date for post-apartheid land restitution claims. However, most 'Coloureds' had lost land earlier, if indeed they owned land at all, a matter that few have the archival means to know with certainty. I begin the extract where DM speaks in defence of an important legal struggle for the indigenous people of the Richtersveld in the Northern Cape Province, with whom he claims common ancestry and plight. Dispossessed in the colonial era, this community fought a long set of court struggles against a government-owned diamond mining company. At the time of our interview, they had lost their case in the Supreme Court. By October 2003, however, they were vindicated in the Constitutional Court, opening a new avenue for pre-1913 land claims using aboriginal title, a point that DM remains cautiously optimistic about. Indeed, his scepticism is tied into what he fears is a revival of Africanist racism.

Third, when he gets to 'race', DM intersperses reason and emotion in a rhetorical strategy that brings vividly to life the resonances between intimate and social turmoil. People who remember life under apartheid often recall the absurdities of the racial state, and of its blunt use of police power. Emotion provides a glimpse into the ways in which people experienced power that seemed illogical, but which pervaded public and private life. When DM spends so much time in an interview about his political life on his fraught relations with his son, he reveals the scars of intertwined personal and political struggles. It is a truism that people say they had to put their personal lives on hold for The Struggle. Former activists speak of familial relationships estranged by exile and secrecy. The toll of 'revolutionary discipline' on personal lives was in some ways compensated for by fictive kinship borne of struggle, but the emotional scars run deep. In this light, DM's fraught feelings concerning his son and wife, which frame this excerpt, speak to what Williams (1977, 121–7) calls residual and emergent structures of feeling. Sentiment draws us into DM's sense of loss and hope, as he consistently disagrees with dominant ideologies and styles of politics.

What we gain from reading an interview with DM is a very different perspective from dominant media and academic coverage on anti-apartheid activism. As a person consigned reluctantly to being 'Coloured', he is a constant critic of racism within the anti-apartheid movement and after. The tragedy of racism is literally written on his person, and he carries the scars of 'race' with him all the time. Finally, his maverick style and his forays in and out of the dominant current of

anti-apartheid activism give him a particularly challenging perspective on one of the twentieth century's great national liberation struggles. His attendance at meetings and couriering of people and/or things across borders, and his participation in the rescue of a fallen comrade, were organic or home-grown activist practices that were not directed by the ANC hierarchy. Indeed, they suggest a wider realm of activism than is registered in official sources.

The interviews were conducted with an ageing man full of fire, at his modest home or in the attached shop in which he sells cigarettes, sweets, and basic food supplies. He speaks and laughs loudly, reminding me of our past conversations. Each time we meet, he is actively engaged with a new set of issues in his neighbourhood, and in the world beyond.

In the extract below, DM begins with the land claims struggle by the Richtersveld community. He intersperses anger with the present ANC with an account of how he became active in the armed struggle. Both father and son appear to have become active at various points through their own means, though the son's organic 'anti-apartheid unit' was subsequently drawn into the ANC/MK at a time when its networks in the country were limited. The claims of chance encounter with MK cadres, ANC-aligned open political meetings at the Diakonia Council of Churches, and the extremely risky rescue of the fallen comrade detail the improvisational nature of rank-and-file activism by people drawn in very different ways into a purportedly Leninist movement with an exiled, banned, and imprisoned leadership. This eternal dissenter keeps returning to frustrations that rupture his familial relations, where much of the cost of activism is borne, and where the extract ends.

DM, Wentworth, South Africa

The present moment can be well gauged by the Richtersveld decision. I've got the whole judgment here ... Madiba [Nelson Mandela] signed the law to deprive the Richtersveld people of their land. That's why I've got no respect for that bum too... What is so scandalous is that this new government's legal representatives utilised all racist legislation and decisions made by the previous apartheid and colonial governments. The law says only land from 1913 can be claimed. Now, by 1913, all coloureds were landless already. Slaves don't own land, man! And it was just 70 years that they had moved out of slavery. I've got a whole paper on that ...

As I said I was the only person [in the ANC in Wentworth] ... You know, at every ANC meeting, I'd make suggestions ...

SC: Where would you go?

DM: At Diakonia [Council of Churches], Monday Forum was the most progressive ANC meetings. They gave you up-to-the-minute report on what was happening in the country. You could go there and you'd know more about the ANC than even some of the people in the ANC in higher up ... Monday Forum, I don't know if it's still there. When I resigned in 1992, I never wanted to go again.

I always believed that the only organisation that could overthrow apartheid was the ANC, because of the international reputation they had. I never believed that the revolution could have been hijacked, 'cause I believe now that it has been hijacked.

The inner circle group always believed in violent overthrow of the government. It's like a lot of people believe old Marxist kind of theory, of overthrow of the government, of capitalism, by violent means. What do they call it, the . . .

SC: The dictatorship of the proletariat?

DM: *Ja!* You know I didn't believe it would happen any other way, so that now when we got this kind of negotiated settlement, I never ever accepted it.

When I worked in Richards Bay I met a few MK [short for Umkhonto weSizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) and South African Communist Party (SACP)] people. In 1972, I worked in an aluminum factory. . . I had two or three periods in Richards Bay. The first period, some guys had a [automobile] breakdown, and I was travelling empty cause I had some business to do. Anyhow, these guys were there, and they exposed the AK [the AK47 that they were carrying, which he implies was clearly a sign that they were involved in the armed struggle against the apartheid state], and they were very terrified now that I had seen it. I told them, 'don't worry, you people are safe with me and what you got there is also safe'.

They said, 'Man look, we got a problem getting through from Matubatuba [where they arrived from Swaziland]'. I said, 'No, if it's on a Friday, I can do it with ease, to fetch people from Matubatuba'. Then we had this kind of agreement. I used to take them there, and fetch them back. From Matubatuba to Durban.

When I got sick I never worried about this. I never worried with that, because I was more interested in the business. [He stopped being a courier for unspecified cross-border trafficking, and started a workshop in Wentworth in the late 1970s.]

Then one day R [his son] came in. R was apolitical, eh! I could give you some descriptions of the arguments we had about this. That time R was 21. One day he came to me and said 'Daddy, I'm going to join MK'. I said 'What? If you want to, I'll put you in touch with the right people. You must go study there, because you don't know who you're dealing with. It could be a person that's enticing you into this and you get arrested. Let me rather go and put you in touch with people that I know can be trusted'.

You know, R said, 'You had your opportunities'. R used to be very rude to me, eh. 'You've had your own opportunities and you fucked it up'. I said, 'Anyhow, when you need me, I know a lot of what you're going to do, when you need me, don't hesitate to ask for advice'. I just left him. I had quite a lot of problems of my own.

So anyhow, one day he came to me and said 'I want you to drop me somewhere and just leave me there'. So I just took him there. Then he came and he started bringing in weapons, and I was really cross, not that he brought in weapons but he had to travel so far for a few limpet mines. He had to go right to Botswana for six limpet mines. And I said, 'Who is there?' He told me he was working with . . . he didn't give the name, but I found out afterwards it was Chris Hani [head of MK, and later of the SACP].

I was stopping R from coming there, unless you can give a proper supply to justify travelling that distance. Anyhow, one day R and them went with a caravan, he and G [his girlfriend]. G and her sister J were good activists, but they were very naïve politically. There was a thing here called Cora . . . that was a project of the sellouts, of people in the system. It was the rehabilitation of Austerville [central Wentworth]. . . I used to keep check on what was going on with the material. And when R came back this time, he came back with a caravan full of material.

It was easy to hide things [in the caravan]. They usually don't want to search the caravan, unless they got information. I waited about three or four days for him to return. That was 1986, February or March, I can't be sure of the date. I had just got into the garage when he came. When I came in the morning to open the garage, I had to just shut it. There was a pile of material.

He was busy with GW. GW had come there quite a few times to the shop. . . . Then I found out this is the one R's associating with, you know. I don't know how these people had been so careless, because GW was a very careful person. Incidentally, GW's also living in conditions of abject poverty in the Transkei. He's hardly got any means of survival. I've been fighting with the special pension people, and they've now decided to give him a pension. He's been shot several times eh, and beaten up. And he's one that should have been cared for.

One day, R came. . . . I used to know there, when there was an explosion, I used to check. . . . He came and said, 'I'm sure that my friend has been shot'. And he was fearful that GW would give him away. I said, 'In that case, leave the country, and come back only if you know it's safe'.

He said, 'No, I'm a go fetch him'. I said, 'He's under police guard, man, how you going to fetch him?' He said, 'Daddy, help me'. That was my role in this escape. You know about the escape? GW was in Pietermaritzburg [Edendale] Hospital. The friend that he was with was going to join the police force, two days hence. GW was also accepted into the police force at the end of that month, so they'd have had two MKs in the police force . . . it was good to infiltrate like that.

Anyhow this [other] guy got shot and killed. GW described very vividly what happened there; I don't know if you want to hear that. GW stopped to urinate, and patrolling police passed there and said, 'Well, open your boot', and when they opened the boot, there were the limpet mines and AKs [AK47s], and these guys got so bloody frightened they just started shooting at these guys. This other guy, he must have died straightaway, but GW made it to the fence, that's why they shot him . . . that's why he has so many bullet injuries. Some of them they still haven't removed. That's GW's story.

Then R asked, 'Will you come and help me'. I said, 'I'll only help if I know more about the thing. I want to go and see where he's kept'. So we went to Pietermaritzburg, to the hospital. I think we went about three or four times. One time I went alone and I got quite a lot of information from the nurses. All the nurses were just giving the information out of courtesy, but there was one who was giving me really more information than I needed. . . .

When we had arranged everything, Robert said he had a crew. I said I'd like to speak with them. I'd like to know who they are. That day, when I walked into the place where they had the map, I saw it was all youngsters, man, and I said to myself, what the bloody hell I've got myself into. I told Robert, and he said, 'don't worry, everything's going to be alright' – you know, that kind of confidence. Anyway, I was very sceptical about them. I was very certain about myself. I knew that hospital inside and outside. I knew everything.

When we went there, things never worked out properly. Everybody disobeyed the instructions. Going in was quick, coming out was quick, and we came out with GW. Only problem, GW was very heavy, and he was naked. He didn't have stitch of clothing on him. Anyhow, R drove, and it was a beautiful piece of driving.

When we came out of the hospital, we had to carry this heavy chap. GW's a big guy. . . . Oh yes we had guns. R had a shootout with a white policeman. The black policeman pulled out and he ran like hell. I just threw one shot at him and went to go

get the trolley. GW was holding the AK in a laundry trolley. You know how clumsy that is, eh. Anyhow we transferred GW into the ordinary trolley, but because he was naked he slid off the trolley. We carried him down two flights and put him on another trolley. Then we had about 40m to go in a trolley, and a flight of stairs, must've been about 30 steps, broad steps that we had to put the trolley up and carry GW, put him in the van and then we drove away.

We passed the first roadblock. They didn't expect we could have been there so fast. The second roadblock was almost complete, but they never suspected us. They thought it was an ambulance; that's what the newspaper reports said. Then a police intercepted us, but they saw blacks [Africans] in the other *kombi* [van], and they went for the blacks, so we managed to escape. My place was next to the police training college, and they knew me very well. When I arrived they were all waving.

He stayed there about three days and then he was moved every day to a different place, and he was taken out with a caravan to Botswana. From Botswana he went to the Soviet Union for further surgery.

I've got no regrets even now, under the conditions in which I'm living. I only feel that they could have played the game with my family. When we got arrested, my wife got fired . . .

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Paradox and persistence: Brazilian women's fight for rights in politics and at home

Jeffrey W. Rubin and Emma Sokoloff-Rubin

For rural women in Brazil today, the struggle for economic and political rights takes place alongside the battle for voice and decision-making power at home. Both battles began in the 1980s, when Brazil became a democracy, and a group of young women in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul defied their fathers and brothers, many of whom were active in the state's union and squatter movements, and formed an autonomous women's movement.

Mônica Marchezini participates in the rural women's movement (MMTR) and also makes everything her family eats except sugar, salt, and coffee. Three times a week, Mônica takes the bus ten kilometres from her small farm into the centre of Ibiraiaras, a town of seven thousand, to attend women's movement meetings and events. Before she leaves, she milks the cows, makes all the day's meals, and takes care of the housework.

In its first major grassroots campaign, in 1988, the MMTR fought for pension rights for rural women. Until then, only men were recognised as workers on farms and given pensions by the government. The MMTR's historic victory, following

takeovers of state legislatures and massive demonstrations in the national capital, Brasilia, established rural women as workers in the eyes of Brazilian law.²²

We began researching the Brazilian women's movement as a father-daughter team in 2001, returning four times between 2002 and 2008 to attend regional and local meetings and visit women like Mônica in their homes and workplaces. We encountered women active in political mobilisations on a national scale who at the same time spoke thoughtfully and directly about the challenges of changing daily life at home. Our interview with Mônica began and ended in her kitchen, the central living space of a weathered wooden house, once bright blue, that overlooks rolling hills. Like many women we met, Mônica literally made the trip from farm to town, from the inequality of daily life to the activism and visions of the women's movement, several times a week, and we were struck by how deeply she had a foot in each world.

When we asked Mônica to describe a typical day, she began by walking us to the milking shed.

M: We milk the cows, then we take care of the calves, and after that we take them to the pasture that you saw down there.

At what time in the morning is that?

M: Six in the morning . . . at six in the morning, it takes me one hour to milk four cows – by hand, that is. I sit on the little stool over there, put the bucket between my legs, and milk the cows.

Do you like doing that?

M: I like doing that. Always, since I was little, my mother did that. We learned it from our parents, and now we carry it on.

What do think about while you milk the cows?

M: Oh, I don't know. It's something we can do . . . it's a way of working, and it can also help the family, the income, the budget of the family – that's what the milk does. It's a job that you do in the morning and in the evening, and during the day you have time to do other things, to work. And I also think of my family, the milk for them, milk for the kids, milk for the family. And the cheese I'm making later, we can make butter and sell it. And the cream, we also take the cream from the top of the milk, the fat that settles there.

When you think of your family, what do you think about? About the present, the future, the past?

M: Yes, and that we need this work to survive. We don't have much land, and this is what we know how to do. And for the land we do have, we can't afford crops like

²²Since its inception, the MMTR has successfully fought for maternity leave for rural women, run a documentation campaign to secure birth certificates and identity cards for women who were invisible in the eyes of the government, and fought for women's health services and sustainable agriculture. In all of these efforts, the MMTR has maintained complicated relationships with the other social movements in combative Rio Grande do Sul, as well as with institutions such as local governments and the church. Women activists have entered these arenas, recognising their force and influence as evidence of the MMTR's success, but they have also seen other movements and institutions withdraw their support for women's goals or seek to control the MMTR itself.

corn and soy. So it is another way to contribute to the family income, and it helps a lot, we sell and make some profit. We buy other foods that we don't have, that we don't produce. It helps the family a lot... [then] I come back to the kitchen, have some coffee, cook lunch, make cheese, do the laundry.

And in the afternoon?

M: In the afternoon we [Mônica and her daughter Milena] mainly go to that vegetable area over there. And when it is near nighttime, I go to the cows again, milk them, come back, prepare the milk to make cheese, cook dinner, we eat, then the kids do their homework, the school work, then they go to bed and I stay in the kitchen doing all the work, washing up, clearing the table, making cheese, ironing the clothes, folding, putting them away.

A lot of work!

M: It's a lot of work. I always go to bed really late, around midnight or one in the morning.

As she led us around her farm, weaving between the organic vegetable plot, the fish pond, the milk shed, and her house, it was clear that Mônica lives immersed in two worlds simultaneously – the world of protests and women's movement meetings, and the world of housework and family life. Mônica envisions a future of economic justice and equal gender relations that contradicts her daily experience. And like others in the women's movement, Mônica holds this paradox – this distance between the present and an imagined future – neither turning from the responsibilities of daily life, nor rejecting the pleasure and challenge of the fight for change.

In the kitchen, Mônica stood by the sink washing dishes while her husband Jacinto, who had accompanied us on our walk around the farm, took a seat on the couch.

M: We have to set an example [for the children], and he doesn't like to do the work much. He sits on the sofa and stays there; it's his own special place. He likes watching TV there, to lie down, to have a snooze. The kids see him doing that, so they don't like helping much. They don't get involved. They don't like doing the chores. They don't care much about helping.

Does your daughter help more?

M: It's not that it has to be the girl, but the girls have that woman thing... it doesn't mean that the girl is the one who has to help – it would be nice if the boys helped, too. But as a woman, I expect her help, and when she grows a bit older, that she will help more with the chores. It doesn't mean that the housework has to be done by the woman, the man can do it and do it well... Here it's the women, but we hope to make progress, so that the men too, so that we are able to engage the men, so that men and boys help in the housework. We are working so that they get involved, but it's not easy...

[Turning to Jacinto] What do you think of this idea of men doing more chores at home?

J: Well, one of the boys is more inclined to help her. And two of them, the oldest and the youngest, prefer to go with me to the fields.

Would you like to do this work around the house, or do you prefer not doing it?

J: Not the milking job.

M: He doesn't like milking.

J: There are also days when you go to the fields and stuff and you get back home and you don't want to do any chores . . . you go to the fields, and you have to carry this machine on your back, and a lot of the work is done by hand. Then when you get home you are barely alive.

M: The work in the fields is very hard, very tiring. Then they get home tired and don't want to do any chores around the house. But me – when we didn't have any children yet, and even when we had the kids, I went to the fields and came back home and did all the chores. I worked in the fields and also at home.

M: It's that thing of being a woman, having that drive, that enthusiasm, that strength, the joy of doing things, the pleasure of doing. But in the movement we work a lot to make our partners participate in the process. Helping in the fields, helping at home; sharing happy moments as well as sad moments; sharing the difficulties and also the joy, also the victories. So that men can be involved in this way.

We heard echoes of Mônica's words in the back room of a union hall, where eight women gathered around a table laden with herbs and lotions. The women meet weekly to make natural remedies, joining women's movement participants across the state to form alternative pharmacies as places of healing and conversation.²³

In a training session for the pharmacies, women broke into groups to prepare skits about family life. The first group, depicting a traditional family, gathered around a long wooden table, and the wife and children sat silently while the husband spoke. In the second group's performance, each person shared a story about his or her day, creating an animated mealtime scene meant to represent an ideal family. As it got dark and the flow of trucks on the dirt road outside the church slowed, we watched the women prepare a communal meal in the kitchen and then throw pieces of paper inscribed with hopes for their families into a bowl of fire. The number one hope was for more dialogue.

Around the table in the women's pharmacy in Ibiraiaras, the eight women we interviewed discussed the difficulties of achieving this hope.

Maria: We don't have any statistics, but so many women say they are victims of violence at home, mainly at the hands of their husbands. This situation of violence is something very . . . we were saying that there's a great deal of alcohol abuse, and it blows up at home. So it's a chain, one thing pulling another. We had lectures in 1999 where the speakers talked a lot about women's pain. Normally, when women come together they talk about this; 'it hurts here, it hurts there, it hurts everywhere'. These pains actually show us a reality, they tell us something.

Isadora: Some women joke saying that it was much better when they were not participating in the movement, because at least before they didn't see things. Now that I see, I want to change and I feel anguish. We start looking at things in a different way. I don't accept it when things happen the way people say they're supposed to, and I end up suffering for that; it creates conflict, tension. Sometimes the commitment is so big that we feel like leaving the world and all that, but then we go back and say,

²³Women in the pharmacy are identified using pseudonyms.

'No, I'm getting there'. In my case, it feels like I can't live without this anymore, without participating in the alternative pharmacy, in the movement, without being someone of the movement. So despite the difficulties, I still feel like I have a commitment, a love for things; I can't turn this part of me off, as difficult as it may be.

Fernanda: The most difficult part, in my opinion, is this part that is in the blood, that says that making bread is a woman's thing, that everything has to be spick and span so God forbid if the neighbour comes round to find an untidy home. How do you change that? Everything is on women's shoulders. Whether she is an important leader in the community, whether she is a minister, an entertainer, whether she is part of the women's movement... She will have to deal with all of this work, and with being an activist as well, without stirring things up at home. But it's impossible not to stir things up, you have to stir things up, and the way I see it, that is the hardest thing.

It's all fine and good if a woman wants to participate, but she'd better leave everything perfectly arranged at home. If there's going to be a meeting in the afternoon, then you leave the food prepared, the bread. If there's a weeklong protest in another city, then you leave beans cooked for the whole week. Then she is overloaded, and she tells us there is no way for her to come. Of course, she would have to turn herself into ten people to come. Remember Mônica at the last meeting, when she had gone to bed at four in the morning? Why? Because she worked, she ironed, she did the laundry, she baked a cake, she baked bread, she was cooking beans until four in the morning. And at eight in the morning she had to go to the meeting. How productive was she at the meeting that day? She couldn't keep her eyes open. Because a human being who stays awake day and night without any sleep is not going to produce, work, think.

'We know the world, and we read the world', Izanetti told us, talking about the work of the alternative pharmacy in her town of Ibiaça, 'and things go on from there'. It was winter, a time of less work on the farm, and Izanetti sat in a straight-backed chair by the stove, her jet black hair framing her face with a crispness mirrored in her speech. Izanetti's work in the women's movement is to visit her neighbours and persuade them to come to meetings, a job she continues even when women shut the door, not always because they disagree with her, but because they feel tied down at home or join traditional mothers' clubs instead. We know the world as it is, Izanetti was saying, and we know to read the changing landscape, so that when we knock on women's doors, we know where they stand.

Izanetti: I think the women's movement is important in many ways, but the most important thing is that I feel important inside the movement. I feel like a person, like a full person. More than anywhere else, in any other place... It is an incredible difference. In any other organisation a woman is not – let's put it this way, the woman is not valorised. The movement is where we feel valorised. That's where we feel like we can do something.

And when you have discussions in the movement, what kind of questions do you ask?

Izanetti: We take up issues like genetically altered crops. This is also an issue that divides the women in the group. They believe that genetically altered products are not good, that we shouldn't buy them. They are aware of that. But they don't always manage to change their husbands' way of thinking. And he's the one in charge of the crops, he plants whatever he wants and the women do not have decision-making power...

So there's the difficulty of convincing men about genetically altered crops . . . Are there other issues?

Izanetti: Yes, there are other issues for sure.

Which are the most difficult ones?

Izanetti: I think one difficult issue that women face is sexually transmitted diseases, which are a huge taboo here in the countryside. The thing is, husbands don't accept, for example, using condoms. If the women try to impose that on them, they don't accept it. And it will make them think the women don't trust them, and we know that happens a lot. It's incredible the things that happen, and I think this is a big problem that women face.

Are women beginning to talk about these things in the movement and to each other?

Izanetti: Yes, they talk about this. We even organised a discussion, we brought materials to help us talk about it. During the discussion women have the awareness, it's just that they aren't able to change things in the moment of action. The men don't understand.

The women are aware. All of them. I think that virtually all of them are aware, even the ones who don't participate in the movement. But they are not able to change the mentality at home, inside the home. They are not able to decide things there, and then they back away so they don't have to live with the contradiction.

Some of the changes the MMTR fights for are visible on a national scale, while others, often the ones closest to home, happen slowly, if they happen at all. One of the major successes of the MMTR has been to validate what women do each day, to recognise household tasks, like milking the cows, as real work. Izanetti's persistence in 'reading the world', in knowing the world as it is and as she wants it to be, and Monica's immersion in two worlds, in movement visions and daily responsibilities, show us that activists must be willing and able to hold paradox. In the space between the future they envision and the present that surrounds them, women in the MMTR feel uncertainty, pressure, discomfort, and hope, and as a result they act to make change. For many of us, it is easier not to undertake the pain of holding. For others, this holding can bring strength and pleasure.

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Interview with LS, Cremin, South Africa

Cherryl Walker

In the following edited extract from a much longer interview conducted in 2002, Cherryl Walker asks LS to reflect on the struggle waged by Cremin landowners for

the return of the land from which they were moved by the apartheid state in 1977–78, as ‘black spots’ in a countryside reserved for white ownership.²⁴ Cremin was one of a small number of black rural communities that were able to acquire freehold title to their land in the early twentieth century; their subsequent mode of struggle was strongly influenced by their standing as members of a relatively privileged land-owning and mission-educated rural elite.²⁵ LS is the wife of a prominent member of the committee that spearheaded the campaign for the return of their land after the release of Nelson Mandela from prison had launched the country into its transition to democracy in the early 1990s. Initially encouraged by the activism of other ‘black spot’ communities in the area, the Cremin leadership was supported by a land-rights NGO, AFRA (the Association for Rural Advancement), which drew them into a wider network of activism around land restitution in post-apartheid South Africa. Their struggle included a failed legal challenge by one of their members (Hadebe) to the original expropriation of his land and a symbolic reoccupation of the farm by community leaders, which led to their arrest. Cremin was one of the first land claims lodged with the post-apartheid Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, in early 1995. It was also the first land claim settled in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, in 1997, leading to a ceremonial handover of restored title deeds at a function attended by both President Mandela and the Zulu King the following year. LS herself was not at the forefront of the Cremin struggle, but was deeply involved in developments, as well as an acute observer of what was happening. The interview points to the significance of her background role in sustaining her husband’s activism, as well as her deep commitment to social order as an underlying norm.

CW: After you were moved, when was the first occupation when people from Cremin went back and tried to take the land?

LS: It was 1992. We had already started with fighting. Yes, it was 1992.

CW: How do you remember starting to fight? How do you explain it?

LS: The hope started in 1992. From 1977, we were just . . . it was upside down, that we won’t go back to Cremin anymore. That was the problem. But then that *smalanyana nhlansi* [small light] started, and then they tried to sit down and say, ‘What are we doing people, let’s go back, now let us try and *mzabalazo* [struggle]’. If I remember, the start was the day when my husband heard about these other people who were struggling to go back to their land, and then he met Mr M- from there. That’s the man who encouraged him to struggle. He even came to my home, that day, and they stayed outside discussing this matter. That small light started that day. My husband stayed with him for about two hours. He tried to give them the light, where to start and how to go. Then they started. They worked with those people until AFRA came in.

CW: What year was that? Had Mandela been released?

²⁴For an in-depth account of the Cremin land struggle, see Walker (2008). Walker served on South Africa’s post-apartheid Commission on Restitution of Land Rights from 1995–2000 as Regional Land Claims Commissioner for the province of KwaZulu-Natal and in this capacity presided over the finalisation of the Cremin claim. This interview was conducted after she had left the Commission.

²⁵When Cremin was expropriated, large numbers of households who were tenants of the landowners also lost land rights. They were relocated separately from the landowners and were not party to the subsequent land claim, even though attempts were made to inform them of their options. The Cremin leadership favoured their acquiring a separate farm.

LS: I remember he was out by that time. It was 1991. Then they started to connect with these people, they even went to their meetings. And from there, right, he came back and organised the Cremin people.

CW: Your husband?

LS: My husband, yes. He organised these Cremin people: '*Wemadoda* [hey, men], we are sleeping, people are working outside here. M- has told me that this is the law, we must go this way, this way and that way'. They started then. And in 1992, they were in full force, starting this *mzabalazo* to bring the land back. They even went to the court, and then they failed. After that, they decided, 'No, we must go back to Cremin now'.

CW: At the time when your husband was talking to M-, what were you as women thinking?

LS: We were just sitting that time. We were just sitting, folding our arms. There were some women who were involved, but others were saying, 'These people are mad, they won't go back to Cremin, they are mad, they are blooming mad, they won't go back to Cremin'.

CW: What did you think?

LS: No, I was ... from that time that *nhlansi* started to grow with me that we are going back, because I had heard my husband saying, 'M- told me, we must go this way, that way'. And others had already done that. AFRA helped them, you know, a long way. Those people, I honour them. That helped them a long way, going with AFRA, here and there, here and there, until they failed at the court. The leaders started afresh then, with the Land Commission. They even went to jail for Cremin, because they went back there saying, 'No, we are tired now, we are going back on our own'. What I remember is that people were saying, 'These people are blooming mad, they are really, they won't get it'. I remember the day when the men were arrested at Elandskop police station, having forced to enter Cremin. People said, 'We told them; they've got what they wanted. We told them that they would be arrested'. It was a joke that day. It was a joke that they had been arrested 'Yes, we told them that they are going to be arrested. *Yebo* [yes], they have got what they wanted, yes, they think they are clever'. People even said that.

CW: Were you discouraged?

LS: No, I wasn't discouraged. In fact, I remember the day they were arrested, that day I made *jeqe*. Do you know *jeqe*? It's dumpling in English. Yes, I made *jeqe*. I slaughtered a fowl, and then I cooked it, and so we were taking the food to them in the police station. There were about four or five men who were arrested that day.

CW: And your husband was one of them?

LS: He was one of them, yes. The boy said, '*Obaba* [the fathers], they are in jail, they were arrested last night'. 'Oh, is that so?' '*Yebo*'. So, we had to make food, *jeqe*, and then we went to the police station. When we came there, it was just like a joke. They were laughing. They were sleeping on the floor, just on the floor. People were going, '*Hawu!*' [Goodness!] But they said, 'Here we are, *silwela indawo yethu* [we want our place], we don't care'. We gave them that food and we left them. It was a Saturday, and we left them there. On Monday they were going to court. So we went there and the case was adjourned that day. It was postponed until Tuesday, the following Tuesday if I am not mistaken, and then they were released. We came back with them. The following time, there was nothing, they went out free. So we were happy. Then they came back and started another *mzabalazo*. They started from where they had left off. I think that's where the Commission started to act with them. So, from there

they went straight. And we are now back at Cremin, just because they didn't lose hope that they had failed and been arrested and so on. They started afresh.

CW: Before we come to the Commission, in the earlier stage, were you not frightened? Were there not times when you felt worried that this might be dangerous?

LS: Yes, there was that time when they started this struggle. The lawyers said there must be one person who will stand for Cremin in the court case, who will be alone, representing the claim. It was Hadebe. And as the case goes on, when we think about him, we feel sorry that we have been a burden on him. Because he sacrificed himself to take the claim, this Hadebe. And when he lost the case, we were at the back. And there was that feeling, 'Hey, maybe Hadebe is in for the high jump'.²⁶ And we were so sorry, and we were feeling for that man, 'Hey, what will happen to Hadebe?'

CW: And your feeling when your husband and the others were arrested for going back to Cremin?

LS: No, the case was dropped. We just went, 'Oh, well, there was no fine'.

CW: Why do you think Cremin was moved [i.e., relocated] and Matiwane [another black-owned farm in the district] was not?

LS: I think Matiwane was meant to be removed. But by then the government was also in trouble. So the Matiwane people were fortunate, that they were the last. But they had numbers²⁷ already, *ja*, they were going to be moved.

CW: Do you think Cremin just happened to be first on the list?

LS: Yes, we were first on the list. I think it's because we were surrounded by these white people, in a white area. That's why we were the first to be removed and Matiwane was to follow. And Matiwane is bigger than Cremin.

CW: Do you think the people at Matiwaneskop fought harder than the people at Cremin?

LS: No. But I think the Cremin people had more white enemies than the Matiwane people. And Cremin isn't as big as Matiwane, it was just a small farm. So, I think that was the problem. And they would have moved Matiwane, but by then [the early 1980s] the government was in trouble. The riots, they were open by then, and it was seen that, no, the government – it was their house that was being bulldozed now. So that helped Matiwane. Because now the water was coming into the house of the government and they saw that, 'By doing this, we are creating more enemies; we [i.e., whites] are staying with these black people, and now we are turning all of them into our enemies'. That is what I think. The government saw it was useless. They had been blocking the black man and now it was too late. It was too tense. Just look at those people who gave themselves up for arrest. It's not easy for people to say 'Arrest me'. It's not, it wasn't easy in those times, but by then people were no longer afraid of the gun.

You know, God is great, because by that time, I didn't have that fear feeling. In fact I had that little hope that, maybe what they are doing, maybe there is a light in front of them. Although, as time goes on and when they lost Hadebe's case, I did lose hope. I said, 'Oh, it means we were not meant to go back to Cremin'. Until they started afresh. But from that time when they started afresh, from that time I had that hope that, 'No, we are going back. We are going back to Cremin now'. The fear went away. From the time when they started afresh, that fear went out. I said, 'No, we are

²⁶Colloquialism, meaning to be in trouble.

²⁷'Numbers' refers to the numbers that apartheid government officials painted on people's houses as part of a pre-removals census.

going back, *ja*, we are going back'. And from that time I said I must not do anything to our place at Ezakheni,²⁸ because we are going back.

CW: So what makes Cremin special?

LS: What makes Cremin special?

CW: Yes.

LS: Oh, I think it's the way they did it. *Ja*, you know, they didn't *fathuza* [act blindly] like others. Cremin was trying – whatever these people did, they were trying to follow the right channels. That's why Cremin is so special. Even the President, Mr Mandela, said Cremin is a special place. They followed the right track, when they were claiming the place. We didn't *fathuza*. We used the correct tools. We followed all the right channels. And we are the first people to get our place back, here in KwaZulu-Natal. Am I wrong? That's right, we are the first. And the King, too, was at the celebration. Hey, hey, for the very first time and, I think, for the last time, to shake my hand with the King, and with Mandela. I won't do it again. We followed the right channels, yes, up to the last minute. And the President came, and King Zwelithini was there, to hand the titles back to the landowners. That's important. Is there any other place where the King and Mr Mandela went together?

CW: If you think about the land claims process with the Commission, which parts do you remember the best?

LS: Well, I was not an active member, because my husband was there. But whatever he did, I knew about it, that they are going here and to that person, and that one. Even the phones – now he is phoning the Land Commission, now he is going for a meeting with the Land Commission, and so on, every day. I think the Land Commission did the best. As I say, AFRA helped too, but then the Land Commission took over and from there we got our land back.

CW: Were you at the meeting that was held at the church?²⁹

LS: I was at the meeting; I was there that day. Because the land was coming then, so I was interested, I was at the meeting. I could see that that day, everybody was holding her breath, if that white man will ever sign the agreement. You know, our life was hanging by that thread of a spider to that white man who needed to sign that: 'I agree that the Government must buy the land for you, from me'. You know, if he knew, I think he would have refused.

CW: Why?

LS: You know how when you are boxing, if you can understand what I am saying now, you think, 'I will just give him one blow, he will be on the floor'. You can hold on, even if you are shaking. But I don't think he knew that the place was hanging on a spider's thread because it was up to him now. Otherwise, the government would have done the alternative, to buy another place for us. It was even said, 'How about if you get another place?' And we said, 'No, we want Cremin'. Not that the place was more wonderful than other places, but it had turned out to be wonderful, because of the way we had been taken from it. So we would feel proud if we can get it back again. You see, it was just that. It was so precious because the way we were removed made the place precious and we wanted to go back. To show the government that we have got our place, finish. And do you remember that old lady at the meeting in the

²⁸Ezakheni is where the Cremin people were relocated.

²⁹At this meeting the son of the deceased farmer who had bought Cremin from the apartheid state in 1988 signed an agreement that he was prepared to sell the farm for restitution. From there the claim had to be referred to the Land Claims Court for final approval.

church who was walking on three legs – with a walking stick? You remember? You remember what she did? She just kissed the white man. She just grabbed him and – she’s short, you know – she just grabbed him, pulled him down and kissed him and hugged him and hugged him!

CW: What did you think when that happened?

LS: I saw that, really, she was hanging on a spider’s thread. *Ja*. Well, of course, what she did, she did for us all, but I could see that if this man had refused, this old lady would have died, really. And she’s back at Cremin already. She was the first one. She’s back already. You know when Mandela said, ‘Yes, today you can start’, the following day she was there. No, not even Mandela, it was the day when the judge said, ‘You can now go to your place’. When Mandela came, she was already there.

CW: And then there was the Land Claims Court hearing. How do you remember that?

LS: I was there. And that man, the judge – what was his name? He was on our side. He could see that that lawyer from Pretoria who was representing the government, that white man, he was pressing hard. And then the judge could see that we are now in a tight corner and he would say, ‘Let us adjourn for tea’ and then, while they are gone, he would say, ‘Now what are you doing?’³⁰ And the Commission people were helping. We had many people on our side. Anyway, you see what makes the place precious? It not the place itself, but the way we fought. *Ja*, the fight makes it so precious. Just like Mandela – he is an ordinary man, you know, but because of the way he stayed in jail, even when the government said, ‘I will release you as long as you stop doing these things’, and he said, ‘I would rather die here’, that is what made him so precious.

CW: But are you saying that Cremin is only precious because of the fight for it?

LS: No, but I am saying the fight made Cremin wonderful in the heart. But of course there are those who are unfortunate. People are not the same. Some have lost their husbands, their children are drinking, nobody cares, so they can’t afford to rebuild. So they’ve got that problem. But there are those who are trying, like ourselves, doing the farming, the chickens. And for us . . . even now, us old people, we can’t walk. As for me, I am worse, and when we go to the farm, I stay in the van, I can’t walk. But just to be there! We are busy building castles.

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³⁰She is referring to a number of legal technicalities that were raised during the hearing, which threatened to delay the ratification of the claim.