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Land Reform in the Brazilian Governments of Presidents Cardoso and Lula:

Challenges for Agrarian Geography

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Abstract: This paper analyses one of the challenges facing agrarian geographers of Brazil: explaining land-tenure. In light of increased land occupations by landless peasants, the development of agrarian reform projects by the presidential administrations of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) and Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-present), and the expansion of agribusiness, the agrarian question presents geographers with various difficulties. To describe these challenges, the paper examines the actions of families organised in the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Terra (MST -- Landless Rural Workers Movement) and the land reform policies of Cardoso and Lula. It discusses how the history of large landed property in Brazil shaped political power and continues to impede the solution of the agrarian question.. As a consequence, the paper argues, that by the 21st century conflictuality had become a persistent part of Brazilian social life, one that is unlikely to go away.

Key – words: Agrarian Geography -- Agrarian reform – MST – Land occupation – Settlements – Land-tenure Structure – Landless families - Agribusiness

I - Introduction

The topic of agrarian reform presents a great challenge for Brazilian agrarian geographers. Agrarian reform remains on the political agenda due to land occupations by landless peasants and the concentration of land by latifundiários and large businesses. Data collected by the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT -- Pastoral Land Commission) show that in the last ten years 563,000 families participated in land occupations (CPT, 2005). The Cardoso government declared it would implement the “largest agrarian reform in the world,” and succeeded in settling 565,000 families between 1995 and 2001 (Graeff, 2002: 29). And yet, the Ministry of Agrarian Development confirmed the persistence of land concentration with a Gini Index of 0.843 (MDA, 2001: 37).

To research the land question, geographers typically consult two government databases. The official source to study the land-tenure structure is the Sistema Nacional de Cadastro Rural (SNCR -- National System of Rural Registration) of the Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA -- National Institute of Colonisation and Agrarian Reform). The official source to study agrarian reform settlements is INCRA’s Sistema de Informações dos Projetos de Reforma Agrária (SIPRA -- Information System of Agrarian Reform Projects). However, the information collected in these sources present several challenges for researchers.

The statistics create uncertainties about the number and area of large properties, especially those in the Amazon region, where some areas overlap, because of the process of *grilagem de terras*¹. Some

¹ *Grilagem de terras* is the process of falsifying title deeds to disguise the sale of large areas of public land. The lands that are *griladas* (grabbed) are divided into parcels and sold. They become private properties whose owners hold titles of doubtful origin.

registers of false titles indicate that two or more private properties are in the same space, making it impossible to know the correct total area of properties in a given municipality. The dates when many of the agrarian reform settlements were created are also uncertain, due to the cloning of settlements². Settlements existing for more than a decade appear as new ones, hindering the work of the researcher who, if not alert, can credit to one government the projects implemented by others.

Because of these uncertainties, many are the difficulties faced by Brazilian agrarian geographers who seek to understand the process of land-tenure change. Explaining agrarian reform using these sources has become even more problematic in the last 20 years as they have witnessed both the expropriation of large landed estates and the simultaneous growth of latifundio areas.

In order to understand the paradox of simultaneous territorialization and deterritorialization of large properties it is necessary to explain the Brazilian process of territorial formation of property in land.

II – Territorial formation of landed property in Brazil

The formation of the large private property in land is the result of a process of conflictuality among large landowners and big businesses, Indian nations and landless peasants. This permanent state of conflict for land offers a key reference for understanding the Brazilian land-tenure system. Following the colonial period, in which all land belonged to the Portuguese Crown, private property in land was introduced in 1850 by Law no. 601. The law specified the necessity of purchasing land in order to claim proprietorship. Thereafter, however, landgrabbing (*grilagem*) became one of the main means of forming large landed estates throughout Brazil. From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 21st century, landgrabbing came to define the territorialization of large properties and constitutes one of the biggest problems of Brazil's land-tenure system today.

The term *grilagem de terras* arose to describe a stratagem used at the end of the 19th century. Brazilian literature reveals how title counterfeiters placed their falsified deeds into drawers with crickets (*grilo* in Portuguese). The drawers were kept closed for several weeks. During this time, the insects decomposed on the paper, emitting a tobacco-brown fluid which the falsifiers used to reproduce the characteristics of antique paper, making the title appear as if it had been produced many years before (Lobato, 1948). The terms *grilagem* (landgrabbing) and *grileiro* (landgrabber) are entries in leading Brazilian dictionaries.

During the 20th century land-tenure conflicts characterized expansion of the western agricultural frontier as landgrabbers established latifundios on Indian territory and public land. The formation of small properties occurred with the normalization of lands occupied by peasants, colonisation projects and, predominantly, land occupations. Each decade had its history of conflict for land. Indeed, conflictuality is the main characteristic of the formation of the Brazilian agrarian territory (Welch, 1999; Fernandes, 2000).

Conflictuality is the perennial process of confrontation that makes explicit the paradox of the contradictions and inequalities of the capitalist system. It is inherent to the process of formation of both capitalism and the peasantry and happens because of the contradiction created by the simultaneous destruction, creation and re-creation of these social relations. The concept of conflictuality comprises: 1) complex social relations that have built up in diverse and contradictory forms, thus producing heterogeneous spaces and territories; 2) history and spatiality that stimulate rather than determine social processes and conflicts; 3) political construction of a relational perspective of social classes in diverging trajectories and different strategies of social reproduction; 4) recognition of the polarization rule/conflict as a contradiction contrary to order and “consensus”; 5) positioning oneself against globalisation's effect on society and the economy, on spaces and territories, especially the exclusion caused by the neoliberal policies that produce inequality and threaten democracy (Fernandes, 2005a: 3).

At the beginning of the 21st century, landgrabbing in Amazonia became a sophisticated procedure involving the use of state-of-the-art satellite imagery and GPS devices to delimit large areas. In a few short days, conventional burning was then used to deforest and thus transform *terras griladas* (grabbed land). The false registration of property by corrupt land title officials (*cartórios*) completed the process. The incapacity of federal inspection agencies to keep track of land that belongs to the government in this vast region contributed to the advance of landgrabbing in Amazonia (FOLHA, 07 and 14 of March 2005).

² Settlement-cloning was a resource used to change the dates of creation of agrarian reform projects by the Cardoso government. State governments had settled families on these lands up to 15 years before Cardoso took office. In the late 90s, however, they were registered as projects created by Cardoso's government.

The process of landgrabbing gave rise to the formation of new municipalities and cities. Controlling vast territories, the landgrabbers founded their own towns and thus established political as well as economic power. Elected as mayors, city and state representatives and senators, the self-entitled ruralistas placed obstacles in the way of official inspectors seeking to confirm the origin of false land titles. The political control of land, territory and votes facilitated the political negotiations necessary to discourage the government from interfering in the landgrabber's game. Thus, landgrabbing became "institutionalised" as an illegal yet tolerated means of acquiring land, a practice so powerful that it drove governments into a state of complicity and dependency.

From 1850 to 1995 no agrarian reform policy or social movement effectively challenged the tendency of the Brazilian land-tenure structure to concentrate wealth and power. Attempts by Indians and peasants to defend their tenancy were repelled with violence, including the Armed Forces's participation in peasant wars in the Northeast and South³. The few cases resolved peacefully to the satisfaction of subaltern groups had little to no impact on land-tenure structures even in a local scale.

III – The Cardoso government and the agrarian reform

After twenty years of military dictatorship (1964 – 1984), an indirect election for president and the impeachment of a president, Brazilian democracy was consolidated with the election of the sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who first took office in 1995. In the Cardoso government, agrarian reform was treated as a problem left unsolved in the past and formulated as a compensatory policy in line with a conservative model of agriculture modernisation. The ruralistas, with the strong support of the national media, propagate the idea that change in the land-tenure structure could harm agricultural development.

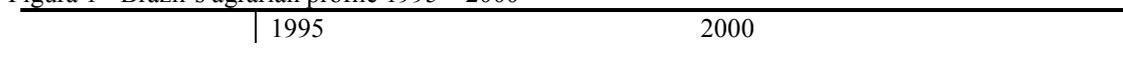
The compensatory policy is a form of minimizing socio-economic problems without solving them. Agrarian reform as a compensatory policy consists of partially meeting the demands of the families who have occupied land by expropriating land in regions of intense conflict. The land expropriation process can take as long as five years. After being settled the families need to create new forms of mobilisation to claim from the State basic infrastructure for the settlements such as housing, electricity, education, health care, and agricultural credit. Some settlements existing for more than ten years still have few public services available. Thus, compensatory policy means the government only partially fulfills the needs of the excluded and never fully meets them.

To avoid confrontation with the ruralistas the Cardoso government adopted a policy of solving conflicts for land locally, settling a portion of the families occupying land in the Centre-south and Northeast regions. In the Amazon region, where thousands of landless peasants live in areas that belong to the federal government, INCRA established settlements and normalised occupied areas. The Cardoso government also implemented a policy of land-tenure credit called market agrarian reform in a partnership with the World Bank (Buainain, 1999; Pereira, 2004).

Without confronting the land-tenure problem, the Cardoso government undertook the greatest agrarian reform in the history of Brazil. With the policies of settlements and land-tenure credit, 524.380 thousand families were settled and 20 million hectares of land were expropriated during Cardoso's two administrations (1995-1998 and 1999-2002) (MDA, 2003: 20). These figures motivated the economist José Eli da Veiga, who worked in the Ministry of Agrarian Development during Cardoso's second term, to postulate that the land-tenure system would become less concentrated.

According to Veiga's analysis (2003) in the period between 1995 and 2001, 20 million hectares of land were obtained by means of expropriation because they did not comply with their social-function as set forth in the 1988 Federal Constitution and by purchase through programs of land-credit. Based on the 1995/1996 Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE – Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) agricultural and livestock census, Veiga calculated the area of corporate farms and family farms in 1995. For the year 2000 Veiga estimated an increase of 20 million hectares for family farms and a decrease of 14 million hectares for corporate farms. His calculations showed a difference of 6 million hectares between the total area of farms in 1995 and the total area of farms in 2000, suggesting the incorporation of new lands due to an expanding agricultural frontier. See Figure 1.

Figura 1 - Brazil's agrarian profile 1995 – 2000



³ Some examples of these battles include Canudos in the northeastern state of Bahia (c. 1897), Contestado on the border between the southern states of Santa Catarina and Paraná (c. 1914), and the Grass War in São Paulo (c. 1960). See Fernandes: 2000 and Welch 2004.

	(million ha)	%	(million ha)	%
Corporate farms	224	63	210	58
Family farms	130	37	150	42
Total	354	100	360	100

Source: Author's estimate based on the 1995/96 Agricultural Census (Veiga, 2003)

By comparing Veiga's estimate with data from the National System of Rural Registration one must conclude that Veiga's conjecture overestimated the impact of the transfer of 20 million hectares from the corporate group to the family group. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2 – Changes in the Brazilian land-tenure structure 1992 – 2003

	1992 (million ha)	%	2003 (million ha)	%
Corporate farms	245	74	297	71
Family farms	86	26	123	29
Total	331	100	420	100

Source: Atlas Fundiário Brasileiro, 1996; II PNRA, 2003 (Org. Bernardo Mançano Fernandes)

It is important to consider that this comparison is an approximation since there are differences between the areas of farms researched by IBGE and the property titles registered by INCRA.⁴ We should also consider that the data of the National System of Rural Registration refer to data collected three years before and three years after the period compared by Veiga. What this comparison allows us to do is to analyse the relative data and their respective orders of magnitude. In these terms, we see that Veiga was right about the tendency of corporate farm participation to decrease relative to a small increase in family farm participation

What is really interesting – and what Veiga's estimate did not predict – is the discovery of a significant increase in the area occupied by both family and corporate properties. In little more than a decade, Brazilian agriculture expanded by 89 million hectares. For family farming, 37 million hectares were added. The growth in family properties can be explained partially by considering the incorporation of 20 million hectares through agrarian reform settlements and land-tenure credit. However, this leaves 17 million hectares to be accounted for still.

The finding of an increase of 52 million hectares in corporate farms contradicts Veiga's conclusion about the relative growth of family farms. His interpretation sought to confirm the reformist character of Cardoso's policies, arguing that they had affected Brazil land-tenure system.⁵ If this is confusing, it is even more confusing to explain how the portion of land devoted to corporate farming that should have gone from 245 million hectares to a lower figure had actually experienced a fabulous increase in size. If we estimate that the area should have been around 225 million hectares in 1995, dropping to 210 hectares in 2000 due in part to the expropriation of 20 million hectares, what explains the 87 million-hectare jump to 297 million hectares in 2003?

Recent findings by the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (IPEA -- Institute for Applied Economics Research) demonstrate that there has been no expansion of the agricultural frontier towards the Amazon rainforest. The IPEA studied a ten-year doubling of the area dedicated to soybean production. Soybean territorialization happens with the conversion not of virgin forest but of latifundio already used for extensive cattle-raising (Brandão, A. S. P., Rezende, G. C., Marques, R. W. C. 2005).

Unable to document an expanding agricultural frontier in the Amazon region, geographers are challenged to explain the increase of 72 million hectares in a decade. One hypothesis has it that this increase is associated with three processes: a) large landowners started to accurately declare the area of their properties to combat land occupations and avoid the risk of being caught by the Judiciary when claiming the repossession of areas larger than the registered ones; b) landlords incorporated unclaimed land in frontier zones by means of landgrabbing and c) landgrabbers made overlapping claims to areas in Amazonia.

For all these reasons, land occupations have gained a certain efficacy, making concrete a reality that the databases and censuses reveal only in an irresolute and differentiated manner. To geographers it

⁴ INCRA data include property titles and the names of their holders. IBGE registers the occupation of this space by rural producers.

⁵ This ten year increase in the corporate farm area -- 52 million hectares -- is an area a bit larger than twice that of the United Kingdom.

seems plain that only the practice of physically occupying land makes agrarian reform happen since 90 percent of the twenty million hectares expropriated were first occupied by landless peasant movements (Fernandes 2000).

IV – The Cardoso government and land occupations

During the eight-years of the Cardoso government, the MST and other peasant movements carried out 2,953 land occupations, with some two million people participating in 421,275 families (DATA LUTA, 2004). The evaluation of Cardoso's achievements has been challenging for geographers and merits attention. The land occupations were organized several months before the families cut the fences that circle the latifundio (Fernandes, 2000). Land occupations begin at the grassroots, with a process of gathering together those who might want to participate. Organizers go from house to house in the poor, marginal areas of towns small, medium and large, including metropolitan regions like greater São Paulo, to invite interested people to learn more about land struggle and agrarian reform. Those interested meet together in various settings, from church and union halls to the schools and homes of participating families themselves. These meetings inaugurate new spaces of political socialization. The initiates there debate the potential significance of land struggle and agrarian reform. In these "communicative spaces", participants share their stories, get to know one another, debate their life courses, and speculate about their futures. A future constructed with the MST - a farm life beginning with land occupation - appears at first as an image both hopeful and fearful. Through the examples of many people like themselves, they see hope in those who fought for and gained land. The struggle can also cause fear, since confrontations with landlords and police have resulted in the beating and death of people just like themselves.

The experience of gathering, meeting and discussing creates another spatial dimension of political socialization called "interactive space." The interaction happens as participants come to understand and appreciate how similar their lives are: they are often migrants from other states, poor, unemployed, and motivated to change the direction of their lives. The interaction also occurs because the space makes it possible for them to construct new perspectives on life through knowledge of land struggle. The cycle of grassroots meetings takes place over the course of months before a specific land occupation is planned. Ideally, they conclude only when the families decide to occupy one or more properties presented to them for possible action by MST leaders. Deciding to occupy land, the group of families begins to create a new dimension in the space of their political socialization: the space of resistance and struggle. The struggle and resistance space becomes a reality when the families occupy land, whether it is public, private, or in the right-of-way along the side of a highway. Through the act of occupation, the organized families transfer the political socialization space from their neighborhoods to this new place where they are now united.

This new space of struggle and resistance is called an encampment (*acampamento*). The families are no longer dispersed but joined together in many tent cabins constructed of poles and black plastic. This form of spatial organization causes a physical impact on the landscape, demonstrating to one and all that here are gathered people who are taking responsibility for changing their lives. In this way, the landless politicize the space of passing motorists, involving those who would rather ignore Brazil's tragic inequalities. Suddenly, no one—neither the statisticians, politicians, nor the theorists—can ignore these people joined together to demand dignified living conditions. While the visible camp makes it impossible to ignore the landless, it makes possible reactions against them. Here begins the conflict, one of the oldest repressive conflicts in Brazilian history, the landlord against the landless. The large property owners, the *latifundiários*, want to keep their traditional privileges as a matter of right while those without land seek their due through conquest in the name of democratizing land access (Fernandes, 2005b).

The conflict, then, involves a defense of privileges, "rights" and rights, claim and counterclaim, demands and struggle. The qualified institution to solve this problem is the State. By means of land occupations, the landless workers retain the agrarian reform question on the political agenda. Since land occupations have become one of the main means of access to land, the practice has become a form of creating and re-creating the peasantry in Brazil. Besides that, the political pressure of land occupations obliged the State to look for solutions to the conflicts, either with the settlement of families, or with political repression.

During the Cardoso administration, however, there was little political tolerance for land occupations. The occupiers were typically forced to disoccupy the land through evictions which were often violent and almost always damaged the peasant's few possessions. But the repressive action of the State almost always produced the contrary effect of generating more conflict as the peasants carried out

the occupations again and again until the families were either settled or too exhausted to renew the struggle. The force of repression against the occupations also weakened in part because society showed little tolerance for the practice of landgrabbing and the high level of land-tenure concentration. In 2003, just 1.6 percent of landowners controlled 43.8 percent of Brazil's land, i.e., almost half of the properties belongs to less than 2 % of the landowners (MDA, 2003). Thus, as the 1990s unfolded, occupations became standard fair in the press, a consistent part of the Brazilian routine, with everyday's news bringing accounts of new land occupations and conflicts.

While the physical violence practised against landless workers by large landowners and the State did not succeed in ending the occupations, some political measures were more effective in retaining them. These measures included controls on settlement residents, the withholding of benefits, and the criminalization of land occupations. These restraints did not create a solution for Brazil's land problem. Since the executive orders Cardoso issued sought only to control popular struggle, the State forced changes in the nature of peasant movements' actions but did not succeed in demobilising the movement and the agrarian question remained vital.

While the Cardoso government imagined that by creating settlements it was reducing the pressure for agrarian reform, the peasant movements operated on the opposite presupposition. They associated an increase in the number of settled families with an increase in the number of families who occupied lands. In fact, geographers can document that for each settlement created, the number of landless workers carrying out grassroots actions multiplied, demonstrating that the settlements created spaces of political socialisation that spatialised the struggle for land. Indeed, the Cardoso administration eventually noticed that an increase in the number of settled families and investments made through agrarian reform credit-lines strengthened the MST as an organisation. Many occupations were carried out with the support of settlement cooperatives, which lent tractors and trucks and helped finance various land occupations. The administration then interpreted the settlements as a political apparatus for the MST and cut off the flow of State financial and material resources.

In his second term of office, Cardoso administration intensified the offensive against the MST and succeeded in reducing the number of occupations in 2000. Encouraged, Cardoso produced an executive order that criminalised the land occupations. The May, 2001 Provisional Decree (No. 2109-52) made land occupations illegal and protected landowners by stimulating that occupied land would automatically be excluded from expropriation until at least two years after the occupation. In the case of a re-occupation, the decree extended the cooling off period to four years.

The Cardoso government rigorously policed land occupations and used the judiciary to control them. The preliminary judicial orders for repossession of land and eviction of families were issued in less than twenty-four hours, and often resulted in the imprisonment of peasant leaders. During this "judicialisation" of the agrarian reform struggle, some judges issued arrest warrants as a form of prevention against occupations (Fernandes, 2003). With the number of occupations decreased, the number of settlements also decreased. In order to "demonstrate progress" in the number of settlements established over previous years, the Cardoso government "cooked the books", counting settlements implemented by state governments and even including families the government had only promised to settle. Thus, the Cardoso government created "clones" of settlements and "imaginary settlements" that only existed in its data tables (Fernandes, 2003).

The Cardoso government's agrarian reform policy is best described by the paradox of settling a great number of families and simultaneously outlawing the most common practice for creating settlements, the struggle for land. Because of political differences with the MST, the Cardoso government cut off the settlements from credit lines, technical assistance and other professional services. These policy decisions produced precarious conditions in the settlements and about 18 percent of the families settled gave up. By abandoning the government's own reform program, Cardoso caused many families to leave the settlements or sell their lots due to the decapitalisation and the lack of infrastructure.

V – The Lula government, agrarian reform and agribusiness

The repressive policy of Cardoso's second administration restrained the militancy of about 200,000 encamped families between 2000 and 2003. The inauguration of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2003 brought great hope for implementing agrarian reform since Lula was the first president to come out of the working class. However, Lula's election also reflected the support of the ruralistas. In the struggle for political space in the government, geographers have found it challenging to evaluate the competing powers of peasant movements and agribusiness interests.

In the second semester of 2003, the Lula government presented the National Agrarian Reform Plan, projecting the settlement of 400,000 families by means of land expropriation and 130,000 families by land-tenure credit policy. In 2003, the Lula government settled 136,000 families. From this total, 27,000 families were placed in old settlements and 9,000 in new ones. In 2004, the Lula government settled 81,000 families - 51,000 in old and 26,000 in new settlements. Given these results, Lula will face difficulties to fulfil its goals by the end of his mandate in 2006. To accomplish what was promised in the plan, the government will have to settle 413,000 families in two years.

In fact, agrarian reform has not advanced during Lula's tenure. Not even the promise to settle all the encamped families was fulfilled. In September 2004, the government gave up this idea, calculating that the grassroots work of the movements would produce an inexhaustible supply of landless workers to settle. On the other hand, the Lula administration's political relationship with the peasant movement is much improved over the Cardoso administration. Although the provisional decree criminalising land occupations remains on the books, the Lula government has not used it against the landless workers with the repressive intent of the Cardoso government. In the first two years of the Lula government, the settlement's credit-lines were restored and a new policy of technical assistance implemented. The intensification of literacy programs, schooling and access to university projects enhanced the professional formation of settlers (Fernandes and Molina, 2004).

The first years of the 21st century brought new challenges for agrarian geographers to interpret. New obstacles to land occupation and the progress of agrarian reform were created by the dramatic expansion of agribusiness interests and ideology. Agribusiness proponents territorialised Brazil's heartland, converting land previously used for extensive cattle-raising into huge soybean plantations, arguing that latifundio were being transformed into productive lands. The present territorial control of agribusiness multinationals seemed to be as strong as latifundio territorial control in previous periods.

The agribusiness-complex presents itself as a modern, technologically advanced, progressive force in Brazil and its advocates claim that the productivity achieved eliminates unproductive land and thus the need for agrarian reform. This positive image has been challenged by agrarian geographers who argue that the agribusiness-label merely hides the same power-concentrating, predatory, expropriating and exclusionary attributes that characterised the latifundio (Oliveira, 2003)⁶. Agrarian geographers have helped identify the persistence of the same painful and uneven development patterns that have pursued Brazil since colonial times. From the end of slavery in the 19th century to the harvester controlled by satellites in the 21st century, the domination and exploitation process changed form yet endured. Land concentration and peasant destruction still exist. The development of knowledge that caused the technological changes was built from the point of view of the capitalist production framework. Thus, the process improved, but did not bring a solution to the political and socio-economic problems: the latifundio excludes due to slack productivity, while agribusiness promotes exclusion due to intense productivity. Capitalist agriculture – agribusiness -- cannot overcome what belongs to its logic: concentration and exploitation.

The justification for agribusiness brought to the public by the media, agribusiness advocates and the State has protected the model from critical analysis. For proponents, agribusiness is an agricultural totality. It produces more and brings more wealth to the country, emancipating workers, paying down the national debt, using the land in clean and efficient ways, bringing pride and progress to all Brazilians (Neves 2005). Agribusiness appears as a productive space par excellence, the supremacy of which should not be allowed to be threatened by land occupation. Whereas latifundio territory can be expropriated in order to implement agrarian reform projects, agribusiness territory is sacred, a space that cannot be violated.

Challenged by this representation, many agrarian geographers have argued that agribusiness is a new kind of latifundio (Andrade, 1994; Oliveira 2003; 2004; Thomaz Júnior, 2004; Gonçalves, 2004; Mazzeto, 2004). This model of development not only concentrates and dominates land it also drives the production of new technologies and development policies. The agribusiness model expanded the space of conflictuality by increasing its control over territory, social relations, the media, political authority, and scientific inquiry, doing so in ways that defy social injustice. Unlike latifundio, it creates conflictuality because of its extraordinary capacity of production. The increase in productivity dictates its central contradiction: inequality. The use of new technologies has made it possible to produce more and more in smaller areas. This process brought concentration of power, and, consequently, of wealth and territory. This expansion has as its central issue the control of technical knowledge by a globalised scientific agriculture.

⁶ - Oliveira is one of the most important Brazilian geographers who studies agrarian questions.

The Lula government has welcomed and funded the expansion of agribusiness. The administration's most untouchable cabinet member sits atop the Ministry of Agriculture. Prior to joining the administration, he was president of the Associação Brasileira de Agribusiness (ABAG -- Brazilian Agribusiness Association). For him, all forms of agriculture are agribusinesses. Relative figures of export commodity production, including peasant production, are used to build this image. Thus, agribusiness is presented as the only way to develop agriculture, limiting any analyses of territorial conflictuality. With only one viable model, the concept of land conflict loses its meaning, since it appears as something which is outside of rather than part of the agribusiness model. This phenomenon impedes understanding of the Brazilian agrarian question and thus the possibility of conceiving other models of territorial occupation, which might eliminate agribusiness co-optation and its totalitarian posture.

In the second part of 20th century, the agribusiness model of development provoked a change in the land struggle. In the eighties, most of the landless families involved came from rural areas. But structural unemployment and the intensification of agricultural mechanisation forced as many as 30 million people to abandon the countryside and rebuild their lives in Brazil's cities (Martine, 1987: 63). Nowadays the encampments of the landless in the South, Southeast and Northeast are populated by urban residents, the sons and daughters of those forced to flee the land a generation ago.

In the Northeast, the MST started to organize migrants who returning from the Southeastern region where they had failed to find work. In São Paulo state, the MST and the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Teto (MTST -- Homeless Rural Workers Movement) started to organise families to struggle for housing or land. Grassroots organizing like this increase the number of urban families participating in land occupations. In São Paulo's Pontal do Paranapanema region, we registered as many as 50 percent of urban workers among the settled families (Lima and Fernandes, 2001). In Rio Grande do Sul state, the unemployed created the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Desempregados (MTD -- Unemployed Workers Movement) to occupy lands in the Porto Alegre metropolitan area, developing agricultural and non-agricultural activities as a form of resistance.

These developments showed that the Lula government's decision of settling only rural families has been ignored by urban workers. It is one of the new factors that geographers must consider in trying to explain the increasing number of encamped families in all regions of the country. It means that the process of peasant-creation is connected with the participation of unemployed workers from the cities. For this reason, the agrarian question is not just a problem for the countryside. The agrarian question is a territorial problem for both the city and the country.

VI - Conclusion

Agrarian reform is still an enigma in Brazilian political life, one that challenges agrarian geographers to develop new concepts and research approaches. The simple fix of economic modernisation in the countryside and cities cannot solve the riddle. To the contrary, economic modernisation seems to intensify the problems associated with land concentration by increasing the social exclusion generated by structural unemployment.

The agricultural modernisation promoted by agribusiness expansion into commodity export production has placed agribusiness in conflict with peasants for latifundio lands. While agribusiness interests are rarely represented by actual farmers, another new fact is that the families who take part in land occupations are rarely peasants.

The land occupations, the advance and reflux of peasant movements, the confusing land-tenure statistics, the compensatory agrarian reform policies, agribusiness expansion and the increased participation of urban families in land struggle, all these realities indicate the conflictualities of modern Brazil and the challenges for agrarian geography.

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