

## SIT Graduate Institute/SIT Study Abroad SIT Digital Collections

---

Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection

SIT Study Abroad

---

Spring 2006

# Luta: The Story of the Movimento dos Atingidos Por Barragens in the Valley of Jaguaribe

Rachel Wood  
*SIT Study Abroad*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp\\_collection](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection)



Part of the [Politics and Social Change Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wood, Rachel, "Luta: The Story of the Movimento dos Atingidos Por Barragens in the Valley of Jaguaribe" (2006). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 389.

[https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp\\_collection/389](https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/389)

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [digitalcollections@sit.edu](mailto:digitalcollections@sit.edu).

# Luta:

The Story of the Movimento dos Atingidos  
Por Barragens in the Valley of Jaguaribe

Rachel Wood

Spring 2006

Professor Francisco Amaro

School for International Training-CSA Brazil-Northeast

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Paper Structure.....	2
Methodology.....	3
Personal and Professional Motives, Literature Review, Acknowledgements, Assumptions, Importance.....	4
Who: Some Background on Those Interviewed.....	6
A Tale of Two Settlements.....	8
Caroba.....	10
Novo Alagamar.....	13
Part 2: Analysis.....	20
What kind of violence are they suffering from? How are they creating peace? And as part of their peace-creation, how are they enriching the democracy of their society?..	20
Conclusion.....	44
Indications for Future Research.....	45
Definition of Terms.....	46
Bibliography.....	47
Appendix.....	48

## Introduction

This is a paper about communities of share-croppers, landless families, and often-illiterate subsistence farmers who organized themselves to fight for their human rights after they were displaced by a dam. By organizing themselves with the national Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens, they were able overcome their marginalized position and demand changes that would protect their culture, protect their community, give them better access to education, access to work, and access to safe drinking water. What's more, they are fighting for their right to participate in politics and in decisions about their own lives, and by promoting participation, promoting education, and creating public debates, they are making their society more democratic, and creating new types of citizens. Their movement is socialist, but don't let that word invoke images military marches or authoritarian leaders. They desire equality and human rights for the marginalized, and an end to the outrageous inequalities of their country (and the world). Their means for achieving this are group discussions, literacy classes, and promotion of the right to own farmable land and have good schools through marches or peaceful occupations (pretty much like sit-ins, if the word occupation makes you squirm). Their movement recognizes that they aren't just affected by dams, they are affected by all of the structures of marginalization that operate in their society and in the world. Because of this, they want to continue growing and spreading, leaving in their wake communities who are empowered to struggle for their rights.

## Paper Structure

The paper is divided into 2 sections. Section 1 describes my methodology, my reasons for studying this group, the individuals I interviewed, the background

information on the region, and compares two communities. Section 2 describes my theoretical framework: the work of John Galtung, then uses this framework to analyze how the Movimento is working towards peace, and, drawing on the work of Miguel Carter, analyses how their actions contribute to a more democratic society (as part of their efforts towards peace). I end the paper with final conclusions of my experience with MAB.

### Methodology

My methodology for this project included open-ended formal and informal interviews, direct observation, and participant observation. I spent 17 days in the region living in the homes of those I interviewed the most (Josevaldo, Ocelio, and for one night Suerda). I had formal interviews with them which I recorded as well as informal conversations. I attended MAB meetings at various levels- including meetings within communities, meetings with all of the representatives of all of the communities and the government office DNOCS present, strategic meetings for the more involved activists in the area. I wandered around and was shown around 4 communities, two for extensive amounts of time (Caroba and Alagamar ) and two (Allegrre, Mandacaru) for less than a day each. I also visited the dam, the two regional ``cities``; Jaguaribara and Jaguaretama, and the office of MAB, located in Jaguaribara. My interviews were focused on 4 individuals, all highly involved in MAB in the region, but I also interviewed others. My participation in meetings, interviews with multiple people, and observations gave me opportunity to double-check information I gained from one source with information I gained from others.

### Personal and Professional Motives, Literature Review, Acknowledgements,

## Assumptions, Importance of Research

I went into this project with a strong theoretical background in critiques of neo-liberalism and global economic structures<sup>1</sup>, and a background in critiques of dam construction, particularly the effects of dam construction on peasant farmers and indigenous communities, most notably in Arundhati Roy's Power Politics describing India, Donalde A. Grinde's Ecocide of Native America, describing dams in the US, and Vandana Shiva's Water Wars, which discusses the effects dam construction and water privatization with examples from around the world. I major in International Relations, and my focus within this major is Peace Studies, which means that I have studied many theories of peace, and many studies of social movements and social justice, where I was greatly affected by the writings and examples of Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Gene Sharp, and Johan Galtung, and Paulo Freire. My studies of movements have tended to focus on early movements in the US (women's rights, abolition, and anti-war), peace and justice movements in Palestine, and the MST in Brazil, as well as learning about various other movements reacting against neo-liberalism around the world. I found the books Cutting the Wire, and To Inherit the Earth, articles by Miguel Carter, and countless other articles, discussions, and presentations about the MST very helpful in helping me construct a basic understanding of the social structures operating in Brazil<sup>2</sup> and the nature of the MST, which shares many characteristics with MAB. As much as any of these academic sources, though, my desire to learn about social

---

<sup>1</sup> This is the main thing I have studied at school, and I've read more authors than I can remember, but here are some that have particularly affected me: Eduarado Galeano, Vandana Shiva, Paul Kingsnorth, Oxfam publications, and all of the lectures and conversations I've ever had with Randolph Persaud.

<sup>2</sup> I was also aided in my general understanding of Brazil by the book The Brazilians, Brazil's War on Children, and Waiting For Rain, which gave an excellent introduction into the water issues of the Brazilian Northeast.

movements and my knowledge about them has come from my own experiences in activism<sup>3</sup> and the people that I have met through these experiences. My discussions and debates with these passionate people has introduced me to perspectives, ideas, and movements that have become very important to me.<sup>4</sup> I would that everyone could have such wonderful, peace-loving, anti-capitalist friends as these to inspire them!

The need to study this issue is great. As the diversity of the books I mentioned above shows, dams are affecting people in all countries, and they are often affecting the poorest the most. These big works display the contradictions of great democracies. As a movement which has successfully managed to win rights and produce positive effects in the communities who organize with it, MAB can provide an important lesson for all others who are seeking their rights.

This was the background I came with into this project. I came as an avid supporter of the MST, the group that is the inspiration of MAB. Some people who are not yet familiar with the substantial criticisms of the idea of “objectivity” put forward by scholars of anthropology and philosophy might say that my opinions and experiences would make me a bad person to study this group, because I am already “biased”. I don’t believe that there is a single person on the planet free from bias. All that we learn in books, conversations, or even in observations is clouded by our cultural frameworks, which predispose us to certain ways of thinking, not to mention the added influence of our experiences and the lessons we have been taught by the society around us.

---

<sup>3</sup> I started out with Food Not Bombs, then moved on to an umbrella group of various radical causes, where I became very involved in a movement to get a fair trade coffee shop to move onto campus instead of a Starbucks. I’ve also worked with a student-labor solidarity club on campus.

<sup>4</sup> First and foremost among these would be Michael Haack, who introduced me to the MST. The list goes on to include Theresa Miller, Gareth McKibben, Rainu Kukreja, Lizzy Lynch, Travis McArthur, Maggie Holden, Elizabeth Falcon, Erica, Nikki Rubin, Erin Bumgarner, Karen Racowski, Gene Holden, Drew Richardson, Alyssa Klein, Casey McNeil, Kat Shiffler, Professor Randolph Persaud, and Professor ????, and Jared Hall

Somehow, the US has developed the idea of “bias” into something that only people who support ideologies of the left have, whereas people who support the status quo have none. I came into this project with a desire to learn, and to compare the reality I observed with the things I had heard from books and other people. I tried my hardest to be accurate and true to the events I witnessed and the words of those I spoke with. A supporter, in general, of the work MAB is doing, I tried to be honest about what I saw, even if that meant criticizing them.

In my opinion, the biggest criticism that should be raised about my work is not my lack of objectivity (which is a concept I don’t believe exists), but my poor language skills. I speak conversational Portuguese, enough to understand people most of the time, if they are speaking slowly and directly to me, if they don’t have a strong accent or speech impediment...in short, there are way too many limits on my understanding for me to be able to do the kind of in depth, quality work these communities deserve. This is a criticism, in part, of the School of International Training, which has no language requirement for this program, yet sends students off to do independent research projects. I have truly learned a lot from this project, but felt arrogant coming into these communities with such poor language skills claiming I was going to study them when I could barely understand some of them. I found many people in the community very difficult to understand, especially the elderly. I also missed a lot of the content at the meetings I attended, and was only able to understand the general subjects brought up at meetings, and read people’s interactions and emotions at these meetings. I like my research to be thorough, with attention given to detail and nuance. I wasn’t satisfied with my ability to research here.



### Who: Some Background on Those Interviewed<sup>5</sup>

Jose (Zé) Alves da Silva: Zé is from this region, and has lived in the Alagamar (and Novo Alagamar) community the past 15 years. Illiterate until his adult years, Zé learned how to read, became a teacher, and is today the director of the school in Novo Alagamar. He is today in his early 40s. Zé was the first in the region to begin the process of organizing for rights, starting with attempts to create discussions at local religious meetings, progressing to meetings in his home and with the community, and eventually, after participating in a MAB course, to organizing through MAB.

Josef Josevaldo Alves Oliveira: Josevaldo is also from Alagamar. He has lived there most of his life in Alagamar, although he left for the Amazon for five years in search of a better job. Josevaldo is 39. When Zé first began to try to organize, Josevaldo was one of the first to join him, and together they are probably the two people who can be most credited with bringing MAB to the region. Josevaldo was often mentioned by other communities in the area as the first person who came to their community to try to organize the community. He has become a part of MAB's structure, and today is one of 40 national directors of MAB. He is very involved in the strategic planning for the region, and often also travels to Brasilia, where the national MAB office is located, or to a region of Amazonia where MAB is trying to organize communities about to be dislocated by new dam projects.

Francisco Ocelio Munis da Silva: Ocelio was born in Amazonia, where his parents had gone in search of better work. When he was still young, they returned to their community in the region. His father worked as a sharecropper and they lived on the

---

<sup>5</sup> I interviewed more than just these, including Anivea and Hecilio who I quote, but these were the individuals I interviewed the most.

bosses' land. He worked for the same boss as his father, starting when he was 12. His community was one of the first to be dislocated, and was relocated to Caroba in 1996. In 2002, Josevaldo and another national MAB representative came to organize his community. Ocelio became the leader of a Base group, and continued to volunteer with the organization and go on courses with them. Today, he works full time, often working on organizing communities and connecting MAB with other groups. He receives a monthly stipend from MAB for his full-time work, and is given a lot of responsibility. He is 24. (O 58-59, 89-90).

Maria Suerda Almeda: Suerda, 21 years old, is the daughter of sem-terra, who were given expropriated land in the settlement of Allegre. Neither she nor her parents were direct "atingidos". Later, the government also located atingidos in Allegre. In the beginning of 2002 Josevaldo and a national representative from MAB came to region and organized people to occupy a government office in Fortaleza. She didn't participate, but became interested. She began to attend meetings, conferences, and courses of the movement. She began to work in the Base groups, and soon after MAB opened an office in Jaguaretama, she began to work there doing secretarial work, coordinating, and working with finances. She married and had a son with another local MAB activist also from Allegre, but continued to work full time in the office. She and her husband rent a house in Jaguaretama in order to be closer to the office. She is involved in all of the important strategic MAB meetings of the region. (S 96-99).

### A Tale of Two Settlements

This is a tale of two settlements in the region of the Valley of Jaguaribe. But before I describe these settlements, I should first describe the region. This is a region in

the middle of Ceara, a state in Northeast Brazil. This region, like much of Northeastern Brazil, is the region of the Sertão, the semi-arid scrublands. For half of the year, the rains fall and bring life to the trees, brush, scrub, cacti and weeds that cover the hills, as well as to the fields of beans and corn located around the homes of the tough farmers who spend their lives here. For the other half of the year, there is nothing in the region other than the sun, the rocks, and the omnipresent dust, nothing, that is, except along the rivers and ponds, the life-blood of the region. Many small communities live along these ponds and rivers, and many lived along the Rio Jaguaribe, which was the biggest river in the state. As the waters receded with the end of the rainy winter, the farmers would plant on the lush banks of the river. Located five hours away from the capital of the state, Fortaleza, this region epitomizes the interior. It is underdeveloped, `pre-capitalist`, as one interviewee described it, and many people still barter within their community, or get paid by the boss in food. The two “cities” of the region I was visiting, Jaguaribara and Jaguaretama, had populations of 10,000 and 16,000, respectively. It is a region of subsistence farmers, sem-terra, sharecroppers, small towns, and senhors. This used to be the land of pistolage, described in many books written about conditions in Brazil, where landowners who own land that could feed hundreds of families rule with their pistols. Their power has diminished only recently (in the 1990s), and their era isn’t quite over yet. This is a region where there are 3 different words for sharecroppers.

In the mid 80s, the federal government, along with the state and local government, decided to build a dam on the Rio Jaguaribe. Construction on the Castanhão dam didn’t start for another 10 years, starting in 1995 (Prof Amaro). This dam is the biggest dam in Ceara, and it provides water to the capital, Fortaleza, to be used in industrial production

(Amaro). The official line was that the dam would be built to bring development to the region, that the accumulated water could be used for irrigation, would produce jobs for fishermen, and would be able to generate electricity (Josevaldo-35). The government would of course pay people for their land and their homes as they were displaced by the dam. But what of those that didn't own their own land, and who lived in a house belonging to the patron?

The communities I lived with were the communities that were relocated to new settlements because their indemnities were less than \$11,000. I am going to tell the story of what happened to them by comparing two settlements; one which was organized early on with the Movimento dos Atingidos Por Barragens (MAB), and one which wasn't.

### Caroba

Reassentamento Caroba is located 8km down a highway from Jaguaribara, one of the `cities` of the region. It is located 15 km from its original location. Many people who live there used to be sharecroppers. Today, Caroba is home to about 50 families. Many of these families moved here in 1996. They were one of the first communities to be affected because they lived right near or on the land where the dam was constructed, on the riverbanks of the Jaguaribe. They planted on the riverbanks year round, got their water from the river, and swam in the river. They had a culture that was very tied to the river. Some of them had electricity in their homes and some of them didn't (Ocelio-56). Agriculture was central to their community.

An inhabitant of Caroba and an activist ("militante") with MAB, Ocelio describes the process of leaving;

“For the small landowners, the moradores, it was really terrible. They had to leave their houses, not knowing where they were going, and it was an

experience that as very painful...A lot left for the capital, Fortaleza, or went to their parents' house. Some families tried to resist at the last minute by staying in their houses even when the water came. They weren't organized but that was their way of resisting. Some families didn't think the water was going to come to their houses. There were some that waited until the water reached their legs to leave, a lot had to leave by boat...They said they were going to construct the houses for relocation and then close the dam but they closed the dam before finishing constructing the houses, before people thought they would." (Ocelio-53-54).

Ocelio estimates that about 30% of his community moved away rather than be relocated to a settlement. This correlates with an official survey of the rural population of the region, which said that 28% of the rural population of Jaguaribara emigrated<sup>6</sup>. Those who received more than R\$11,000 in indemnities were not allowed to move to the new settlement, which was to be built only for those farmers without enough money to buy their own land and house. Those that received less than 11,000 had the choice between being resettled in a city, in a settlement or an agrovila. Those hoping to move to the settlement had a three month wait in between the destruction of their old community and their resettlement. They went wherever they could. (Ocelio 54-56)

The settlement of Caroba is located up a hill from the highway. There along dusty dirt paths are houses, nestled among the hills, rocks, bushes and weeds of the area. In the settlement there are 5 man-made ponds, most of which were created long before the settlement was created. Along the ponds edges there is more greenery, including some reeds and many morning glories. The largest pond is for drinking water and other human use. At least one of them is used for watering animals, and in at least two of them they plant on the banks in the dry season, planting food (rice, potatoes, etc) for their family to eat (they limit it to these two because the pesticides and fertilizers they use contaminate the water) (Ocelio-72-3). Water for drinking, bathing, and clothes washing

---

<sup>6</sup> For this statistic, as for many others, I am much indebted to the work of a former student, Kristin Lyons, who got it from a news article by Veronica Freire.

all comes from these ponds. Many people also fish in these ponds. In their driest summer, two of the ponds dried up, but the one for drinking has never dried up. It does, however, become much less safe and much more easily contaminated in the summers. The government provides each household with chemicals with which to treat the water. Most families use it, but a few don't.

The houses are spaced 50-70 feet apart, and wind along dirt roads and along the edges of the ponds. In their yards, some people plant corn or tall plants with white flowers used in making tea. Others have planted banana trees or other trees. Its only enough space to plant for their own consumption, and this is only in the rainy season (obs 75-76).

Eleven kilometers away, they were given land to plant on. For these subsistence farmers and former sharecroppers, affording transportation is difficult. This land is not irrigated and therefore is only productive in the rainy season. Each family was given 3 hectares of land, which is enough to plant to eat and to sell (Ocelio-73).

The houses were built in 1996 by o Instituto Nacional De Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA) (Ocelio72). They include an entry room, two bedrooms, a kitchen area, and a bathroom. There is no running water in this community. There was, for a short period of time, but at one point the dam overflowed and destroyed the pipes. They've been waiting for years for it to be fixed. The houses are made of cement, and the walls are wearing at the tops. The houses have no porch. (obs 75-76)

There is a school in the community for children, but not for the teenagers, who must take a truck to go to school. The school building has two rooms, a small entry room with an attached kitchen area, and a large classroom. One class meets in the small entry

room, and the 3 other grades all meet in the large classroom together (school is half-day here in Brazil, so there are two shifts of school). In the evenings, the school is used for adult literacy classes. Ocelio estimates that of the adults and elderly in his community 80% are illiterate. The government resources for paying the teachers of the adult literacy classes were obtained through a national MAB struggle, which they participated in by occupying a nearby highway in 2004 (I will explain more about this adult literacy program later in the paper).

When the people of Caroba left their communities they were not yet involved with MAB. In fact, there was no regional MAB presence yet, and the local resistance that would later join MAB was just beginning in community far away.

MAB's presence in Caroba started in 2002, when Josevaldo held a meeting there (Ocelio 58). In 2004, through an occupation of the highway, MAB won for all of the local non-irrigated communities of atingidos funding and technical aid from the government to start local projects of goat raising, chicken raising, honey production, fish farming, caju planting, manioc planting, or artesanal craft-making. The community of Caroba participated in this occupation, and they are one of the communities to receive the projects (Ocelio 91-92, Hecilio 81). Government technicians came to their communities to discuss and give advice on how to carry the projects out. Each family was able to choose which project they wanted to be a part of (Ocelio 91-92). Today, in Caroba, there are 10 families involved in chicken raising, 10 in fish, and 12 in goat projects. The chicken projects are in families backyard, the goat projects are on the edge of the settlement, and the fish projects are in the Castanhão reservoir (Ocelio 72). Hecilio, a member of the community, says they are working today because of resources obtained by

MAB. Without these projects provided by MAB, he says a lot of people would have had to leave for lack of work, and the community would have been broken up further.

### Novo Alagamar

The community of Novo Alagamar came largely from the community Alagamar. Novo Alagamar is located on land directly next to old Alagamar, which is part of the 68,000 ha now underwater because of the dam. As I stand on Josevaldo's porch I can see in the water downhill a roof of a white building. It used to be their community's high school.

Alagamar was a community that was affected much later in the process, because they are much further away from the location of the dam structure. They did not have to leave their community until 2005. They were also the first community to organize for their rights in this region, and later they became the first community to organize with MAB.

Alagamar was a community typical of the region. Josevaldo, who has lived here most of his 48 years of life (except a period of five years when he went to the Amazon in search of better conditions in the droughts of the 1980s, along with a lot of other farmers in the region), estimates that of the population of Alagamar, 80% were without their own house and ninety-something percent were without their own land (Josevaldo-103). The majority of the people worked as sharecroppers, and did subsistence farming on the rich alluvial soil of banks of the river, growing vegetables, potatoes, squash (Josevaldo-102). People farmed without a lot of technology, and Josevaldo describes the area as pre-capitalist, saying that bartering produce and bartering labor, was and still is common



among the community here.

Josevaldo says he didn't have a political consciousness until 1996, when the community learned that they would be dislocated by the dam, and a few members, starting with Zé Alves, began to urge organization to secure rights. Upon hearing that the dam was going to be built, he started to worry, and started to meet with other members of his community, including Josevaldo, to try to organize the community. (I am going to describe this process in more detail later in the paper, because I think it is important).

When the water arrived, they went to government provided barracks to live. They had to live there a year (for some members two) before they finally moved into their new community. Its noticeable right away that the houses here in Alagamar are different than the houses in Caroba. They have a big front porch, a main room of a similar size, three bedrooms, a bathroom that has not only a toilet but also a shower and a sink, a kitchen with a sink, and running potable water inside their house.

Their houses are different from those in some of the earlier settlements (such as Caroba, Mandacaru, and Alegre) because on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003, 500 members of regional atingido communities occupied the Castanhão dam, coordinated through MAB to occur in concert with other dam occupations by atingido communities all over Brazil on the International Day of Dams (Ocelio-92). It was a national MAB action, but each group who occupied presented their own local demands. Here in the region of Jaguaribe, they presented many demands, including many related to houses. Other communities in the area had had many problems with houses, saying that they were poorly made (Suerda-97), they were too small, and that the local communities were unable to choose the model of the houses, and found the model to be inappropriate to their lifestyle, their culture

(Nivea, Josevaldo 51-52). Finally, they didn't understand why the government didn't pay them to build the houses themselves- many of them were out of work because the land they used to work on had been flooded, and they wanted the opportunity to build their own houses, saying they could do it with greater care and less cost than contracted companies (Josevaldo 47-48). At the time of this occupation, the community of Alagamar was still without houses. Through this occupation, they won the right to change the design of the houses from the design used at Mandacaru to include a bigger porch and three bedrooms instead of two, and to be generally bigger in size. They also obtained the right to build them themselves, and managed to do at 50% the cost (Josevaldo-48). They also got the government to give them bigger plots of land on which to situate the houses, each house has about two times the area given to Mandacaru, Alegre, or Caroba. They use this area, which is 70mx30m for subsistence farming, grazing, or the planting of some fruit trees (J 103).

They demanded irrigation as well, and demanded that the government help them obtain the infrastructure to irrigate the 3 hectares given to each family, so that they will be able to farm year round (J 105). Their farming land is right next to their groups of houses.

Their community has two types of houses. There are some, which I described above, which have red shutters. There are others, with blue shutters, which are grouped together and which are slightly smaller. These are the houses for the retired people. The government was not going to relocate the families headed by retired people to the same settlement, because they only wanted to put in the settlement people who would work the land,

“Us in the settlement made the decision that we wanted the retired people, who are our parents, our grandparents, to be able to keep on living in the settlement with us...we continued on with this struggle...we won the resettlement of a lot of elderly families, those that wanted to stay. It was really hard, the government didn't want to set a precedent, and they didn't give them irrigated land, just the plot their house is on.”(Josevaldo-104)

The government built a school at Novo Alagamar. It has 6 spacious classrooms, an open center area which is used by the community for meetings (such as a mother's day celebration), a girl's and a boys bathroom with multiple stalls, and a kitchen. It also lacks classes for high school students, they must take a truck 18km away to Jaguaretama. Like Caroba and other MAB communities, the school is used to teach adult literacy classes at night.

The settlement of Novo Alagamar has a health post, and a sports club, two things demanded by the movement for the community. They don't exist yet in many other communities but the communities are going to struggle to get them (O 91).

These are the two communities. My goal in comparing them is to demonstrate in real terms what MAB's involvement with these communities looked like, rather than to just tell you that MAB has been a good thing. Caroba, the first community to be drastically affected, serves as a good example of how the government would resettle communities without the involvement of MAB. Caroba, a community accustomed to farming in the banks of the river year round, was moved 15 km away. Their new community does not have very many prospects for work, other than their farming land which is 11km away and only productive half the year. They were given culturally-inappropriate houses which they had no input in designing. There is a project in their community to bring them drinking water, but it has been broken for years. They, who were displaced so that a dam could be built to make water available, were given five

ponds and packets of chemicals with which to treat the water that they must carry by mule in barrels back to their houses. They were given a sub-standard school with only one big classroom. Through the involvement of MAB, and only because of this, they were given the resources to develop work projects that they can do in their community to earn a living year round. Through the involvement of MAB they were also given the resources to fund adult literacy classes because the public education system of Brazil failed to teach 80% of their adults to read.

Alagamar is the community most involved with MAB in the region and was built 9 years later than Caroba, after MAB had become a powerful voice for atingido rights in the area. They obtained through their organization with MAB the right to be relocated close to their own community, and on quality soil (J 41). They obtained the resources to irrigate their land so that they can work year round. They were able because of MAB to make some decisions regarding their houses' design, and won the right to be able to build them at a time when their livelihood had been taken from them, and to build them with quality and care. They won, through MAB, the right for their grandparents and parents to live in their own community. They obtained, through MAB the right to have a school with enough room to accommodate their students. They have, through MAB, an adult literacy course. They have treated water running inside their houses. They obtained, through MAB, government resources to build a health post and a sports field in their community.

These are the results of these communities' decision to struggle for their rights by organizing through MAB. It was through struggle, and only through struggle, that they obtained the right to work year round, to live in a simple home that they liked, to have

safe drinking water, to live in the same community as their grandparents, to have schools that all of the students could fit into, and to have classes for those who the education system failed in their own childhood. But I want to look beyond just these obvious things and analyze in what other ways MAB has achieved peace in the region.

## Part 2: Analysis

To analyze this, I will be using the tools of peace research as mapped out by Johan Galtung. Galtung starts with the premise that peace is the absence of violence (a common definition) (Galtung 1969, p.167). But he is not content with the current definition of violence, which he feels is too limited, and which limits definitions of what can be called a peace action (an action to promote peace). He notes that “ [if direct physical violence were viewed as the only form of violence] highly unacceptable social orders would still be compatible with peace” (1969, p.168). He expands the definition of violence, classifying it into three categories: direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence,

“We shall refer to the type of violence where there is an actor that commits the violence as personal or direct, and to violence where there is no such actor as structural or indirect... whereas in the first case these consequences can be traced back to concrete persons as actors, in the second case this is no longer meaningful. There may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances.” (1969, p.170-171)

He gives some examples of structural violence which show that he is indeed broadening the definition of violence;

“Resources are unevenly distributed, as when income distributions are heavily skewed, literacy/education unevenly distributed, medical services existent in some districts and for some groups only, and so on. Above all the power to decide over the distribution of resources is unevenly distributed.” (1969, p. 171)

Galtung developed the idea of cultural violence later in his work;

“Cultural violence is defined here as any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form. Symbolic violence built into a culture does not kill or maim like direct violence or the violence built into a structure. However, it is used to legitimize either or both, such as the theory of racial superiority.” (1990, p.291)

It is with this broadened definition of violence that Galtung hopes to broaden the definition of what peace means, and what actions can be labeled peace actions. I will be using Galtung’s broadened definitions of violence and peace to analyze what types of violence the atingido communities suffered from and what type of actions they took to create peace

What kind of violence are they suffering from? How are they creating peace? And as part of their peace-creation, how are they enriching the democracy of their society?

The most obvious type of violence to analyze would be the direct violence these communities faced as a result of the dislocation. One form of direct violence that the communities faced in the process of their dislocation and relocation because of the dam was the destruction of their community. This happened through government rules about who could and couldn’t relocate to the new settlement. For example, there was a rule that those who had their own house but were retired would not be relocated to settlements (J 104). Also, there was a rule that those who received more than R11,000 would not be allowed to live in the new settlement (O-57). Still others, uncertain of the future, chose to live in nearby cities or with relatives (O-57). “Communities break down and extended families are broken up in the process of relocating” (Zé-25). As mentioned earlier, MAB won the right for the elderly of their community to relocate with them, and in this way stopped this aspect of community destruction and family destruction from occurring.

Also, given that the construction of the family in Brazil is such that family members take care of the elderly in their family (as opposed to nursing homes), the ability of an elderly person to live near their relatives will have a profound effect on their health and well-being. Were they to be relocated to the nearest city, it would become much harder for their relatives to check up on them or provide for them.

Another related form of direct violence which resulted from their dislocation was the destruction of culture.

“But there [in my old community] we had culture. Here we’ve lost a lot of that . We had the culture of novena, it’s a 9 day celebration, it’s a catholic festival... Today this doesn’t exist anymore in any of the communities affected by the dam. There are some communities which don’t exist anymore at all.” (O 56).

He goes on to describe a different festival where people made promises to saints, and a tradition where the youths of the community swam in the river at night (O56-57).

Another way that culture was destroyed was that the community members were not asked for input on how they wanted their houses constructed, and so the houses were culturally inappropriate, because in some of the communities (like Caroba), they didn’t have a porch, which is a central part of Brazilian social life and community.

Besides these two examples of direct violence, which are directly linked to the dam, there are many more examples of structural violence, direct violence, and cultural violence which affected these communities both before and after the construction of the dam.

Brazil is home to some of the most offensive displays of inequality in the world, and the Northeast is one of the areas where the inequalities are strongest in the country. The people of this region suffer from structural violence built up over the ages. Imperialism, colonialism, slavery, and the destruction of indigenous peoples all play a

part in their conditions today. The root of many of these problems was the unequal wealth/ unequal power distribution in the area. Because people didn't own their own land, they were forced to work grueling hours and to make their children work as well just to be able to have the minimal necessities of life,

“Many people go to bed hungry every night because even working long hours during the day does not assure them of making enough money to feed themselves or their family”. (Wright 120).

Many schools were substandard, and were poorly attended by children who had to work. The UN estimated that 40% of adult males and 20% of youths were illiterate in 2000 (Wright, 120). People were without access to treated drinking water, which can lead to diseases and death, especially in infants. People had a lack of protection under the law from the local property owners. People had a lack of political rights, a lack of a political voice. I am going to explore some of these in greater detail in the next few paragraphs, and look at what kind of peace actions MAB has taken.

The lack of clean drinking water that many communities faced is a clear case of structural violence, given that the ability (the technology) and the resources (the technology, the financial resources of the government) exist for every person to receive treated drinking water, but because of the unequal distribution of wealth and power, some communities do not receive it (Wright 121). The communities are pursuing peace by demanding treated water for their communities. Many already have this, but in some, like Caroba, the water system has been long broken. MAB will continue to demand water for their communities until the government finishes implementing it in all of the communities.

One very central cause (and, in a cyclical fashion, result) of structural violence is the unequal distribution of the means of production (which in the case of rural Brazil, is



land). When the government dislocated and then relocated these communities, they were also engaging in land reform, because all of those who had formerly been sharecroppers were given their own land to work. In this way the government was engaging in a peace action.

Unfortunately, not all of it was good land, and because it was not irrigated land, many people could only work their land half of the year;

``We are working with people transferred to areas without the prospect of life, without water, without production. People had to sell a cow to feed themselves, they had to sell them to live, the areas where the government sent them they don't have the conditions to live. They didn't have other options because they weren't organized before to say where they wanted to live, what way they wanted their land to be.``(J 45).

Because of this, the community organized a highway occupation through MAB in order to gain resources from the government to create work projects for those communities who did not have irrigated land. These work projects include projects in goat raising, honey production, fish production, and chicken raising, among others. These work projects are going to make important contributions to these families' well-being and survival. Other communities, including Alagamar and Mandacaru demanded resources from the government so that they could irrigate their land (J 45)

``We started demanding to have water to consume during the dry period and for production as well, to show that the government didn't have the right to say that the dam brought development when people were hungry and dehydrated right next to a dam with water`` (J 48).

When these small communities demanded access to water for production, they were doing it so that they would have the ability to produce year-round, which provides for their needs and helps them not have to seek poorly paid employment elsewhere, and allows them to stay in their community instead of leaving to search for work (Hecilio 81) They were doing it for the ability to keep their animals (which often provide income or

sustenance to their family) alive. Thus, their actions to demand water promoted by avoiding the breakup of their community, the acceptance of unfairly paid employment, and helped ensure their well-being and nutrition.

The unequal distribution of wealth and power leads to inequalities in education. Schools in poor, rural areas are often substandard. Moreover, they are often poorly attended, especially when poverty demands that children work as well. Ocelio describes his childhood;

``I worked for the same boss as my father. I started when I was 12 years old, my dad worked in livestock, and I worked in the ceramic factory. I worked 9 or 10 hours a day. I would get up at 4 in the morning, I would finish work at 7. I went to school at night, but sometimes I didn't have time. I was supposed to only work until 4 or 5 but sometimes I would stay until 7. I would work how many hours the boss wanted. I had a quota of how many I was supposed to make, and so if I wasn't done yet I would stay...He paid me, sometimes. It would be overdue a lot, sometimes 3 or 4 months without pay, only in credits to his general store.'' (Ocelio 89).

The inequality in education is violence in itself, because it fits the definition of the actual being below the potential (Galtung 168-169). But inequality in education is also a *cause* of violence. When groups are less educated than other groups, in a society where academic knowledge is highly valued, their knowledge will not be valued (cultural violence), and their lack of education will be invoked to justify unequal opportunities (structural violence). Moreover, when this lack of education expresses itself as illiteracy, people find themselves more easily taken advantage of (if they cannot read official documents, or are trying to vote) and find themselves barred from even more opportunities. Ocelio describes this when he discusses his community;

``Most of the adults and the elderly never had a chance to go to school or learn to read. Or they went to school but never learned it. We have about 50 families and probably 80% of the adults don't know how to read or write.'' (O 57)

The communities recognized these problems and sought peace by demanding that

schools be bigger to accommodate the number of students (as won by Alagamar). They also, as part of a national MAB movement, won the right to resources for literacy classes for the adult population. They weren't content to stop with just literacy, though. They recognized that the education system most commonly used is itself a form of cultural violence, because it is 1. disempowering (the teacher knows, and fills the students, empty vessels, with knowledge), 2. incomplete (to teach people to read will not rectify the structural violence that made them illiterate in the first place, nor does it challenge the cultural violence which justified their oppression.) 3. segmented (By separating knowledge into unconnected categories, the education system hides and obscures the systems of oppression.) (These critiques of the system are a rough summary of the work of Paulo Freire).

They therefore decided that the literacy programs in their communities would be taught according to the methodology proposed by Paulo Freire, so that the students would find empowerment as they developed the knowledge they already have, and political consciousness, as they use the knowledge of their daily lives to unveil the cultural and structural violence operating in their society,

``We social movements think you shouldn't just teach literacy, we should raise people to understand reality, to political consciousness...The conventional system separates everything...We use a method where people can associate things with each other...We're trying to create different types of citizens.`` (J 50-51)

``We use the methodology of Paulo Freire, his methodology of liberation. Liberation comes hand in hand with learning how to read and write`` (O 58).

Their type of education acknowledged the wisdom that even the unschooled have.

When I asked Ocelio who taught the regional MAB courses, he replied in surprise "we teach them. Whoever has been in the movement the longest". On a similar note, when Suerda and her husband were proposing setting up a meeting/course about MAB for

youth in her community, I asked her who the teacher was. She was quick to say “there is no teacher, it’s a meeting, not a course”. She was uncomfortable with the hierarchy implied by the word teacher, they were going to learn together.

One of the causes of the violence these communities face is their position in the periphery. By this I mean both literally, in terms of their distance from major cities, and figuratively, meaning their distance from the center of political power. By organizing with a national organization (MAB), and through this organization organizing with other national (MST, MPA) and international organizations (Via Campesina), they are building connections and networks which make their physical distance from places of power less of a problem and brings them in from the periphery of political power. I believe that it is because of the power they gained as a movement committed to action and linked to a national movement that Josevaldo said “We didn’t want to speak as a community, we wanted to speak as a movement.” (J 44).

There was a lot of cultural violence that legitimized the community’s marginalization and encouraged them to not organize. One example was individualism, and on a similar note, anything that obscures class as a defining factor in people’s life experiences. Zé Alves notes that it was difficult to get people to organize on a community and class level at first, because many people were not used to thinking this way, and the religious meetings at time encouraged people to react to the dam on an individual level (Zé 31). The communities found a new sense of strength when they began meeting as a group defined by class (Zé 31). This sense of strength grew as they changed from a community united by class to a movement.

Other examples of cultural violence are religious ideas that current social conditions

and suffering are things that are part of God's plan, therefore people should continue to suffer under these conditions while working to make their heart accept it, as some of the religious meetings of the time were doing ``Her [the woman leading the meetings] evaluation was that the dam was a sacrifice but was a good thing...people should accept it...it was always brought back to the individual level, and didn't bring people together`` (Zé 30-31). Another manifestation of this was encouraging people to be passive and wait for god to fix the situation.

``[The population was hard to rally against the dam at first because] some people thought that even if the dam was built the waters wouldn't reach their home. They thought that God was going to protect them from the waters`` (J 40)

``The tone of the meetings had been `we're going to pray that God will change the minds of the politicians, to illuminate them and make them do good things`` (Zé 30) .

He and the others decided to change the discourse by choosing to use religious ideas that encouraged people to fight for their rights.

``We decided to take a different approach and we would take the bible and try to use the stories of the bible to encourage the people. Because the bible is full of stories of war, of the struggle of the people`` (Zé 30).

Changing the discourse to fight against this form of cultural violence was in itself a peace action, and it was through this that they were able to rally their community to engage in peace actions against other forms of structural and direct violence.

The community's lack of political power before organizing was a serious problem. When the government was proceeding with its plans for the dam and the relocation the communities, the communities were not recognized as participants in the discussion of how the dam would be conducted, in the discussion of their own destiny.

``At the end of the 1990s there was an official working group that was supposed to coordinate all of the actions of the dam. The group was composed of the state technicians, the mayors of the four municipalities affected, some entrepreneurs, a priest from the church, and didn't include a representative of the people. They obtained a closed status. The people were separated. They met the whole day, they

sat separate from the people, and at the end of the meeting they let the people speak. It was for three minutes` (Zé 9).

They were not included in the discussions about the process of relocations, and because of this a lot of structural violence affecting them was reproduced when they were relocated (such as the inadequate education, the lack of workable land, the lack of treated water, all discussed above). Their lack of political power manifests itself in three main ways: 1. they were not recognized as a group which deserved to be negotiated with (cultural violence) 2. they were not negotiated with (structural violence) 3. they were not considered people who know enough about their situation to make decisions about their life (on account of being rural, poor, and barely educated) (cultural violence).

They addressed each of these through their self organization. First, with their strategy of ``confront to demand negotiation``(Zé 26) they have won the power to negotiate with the government both in the context of their specific confrontations and also in that the department of the government (Departamento Nacional des Obras Contra Secas) which is in charge of relocating them now meets with them regularly, and recognizes them as a group that they have to negotiate with. I was able to witness this firsthand, when I visited a meeting between them and DNOCS. I found it interesting to note that DNOCS now comes to them to meet (to their location) (obs 19,20, 21), considering that DNOCS at one time refused to talk to MAB (J 44). At this meeting with DNOCS, any member of the communities who wished to speak could do so, and the meeting took the format of an open forum (obs 19, 20, 21).

By organizing and making demands, they have identified themselves as humans with the right to make decisions about their life and the knowledge necessary

to do so, instead of just being subjects. They did this by choosing to begin speaking for themselves, instead of using intermediaries like politicians or church representatives. By organizing, they have demanded that the government acknowledge their existence as a group that has a right to decision-making power about issues of their own community.

As mentioned in the last paragraph, they were initially encouraged to rely on intermediaries, which was problematic for multiple reasons.

“Those who were able to participate in the discussion about the dam were very distant from the experience of the workers. Often, workers, leaders of the community couldn’t participate in the discussion about dams” (J 35).

“The government made an agreement with the leaders of the region with the church deciding which communities would receive indemnities...and the people did not resist. The people didn’t stand up to the government and say no.” (J 39).

“The power of the church fell as people started to gain consciousness and started to realize that the work of the church was insufficient, and that instead of organizing the people it was doing everything for them. People realized they were in a worse situation because they weren’t organizing for their rights, whereas MAB doesn’t conduct itself like that. Because MAB isn’t me, its not a person, it gets everyone involved, includes everyone, and its conducted by a group of people. When the church was conducting everything the people were left out, they couldn’t say if they liked or didn’t like the way things were being conducted.” (J 49).

As this quote above discusses, even when the intermediaries were looking out for the interests of the people, as Josevaldo says the church was (J 35-36) for part of the time before it changed, their actions as intermediaries were disempowering to the people of the community, who weren’t encouraged to join together and enjoy the power they deserved to decide how they wanted to be treated. “[The nun who acted as an intermediary] didn’t have the *conscientização* of the people in mind” (O 61). Moreover, this left them in the precarious position of hoping that the intermediaries would continue to correctly interpret and represent their interests.

“...In 1998, Jose and a group went to a MAB course, and realized that the work

here was being done by a religious group whose work was really conservative, and who concentrated things, everything was really centralized, and the people were treated like people who didn't know anything, like people who didn't have the capacity to organize` (J 42).

As the community started to organize, and later joined with MAB, they found a structure where they could involve the entire communities and hear all of the complaints and ideas of the community. As the people joined together they discovered their power as a group with rights.

Although many of the discussions above are related to the problems of the church acting as their negotiator, the communities also suffered at the hands of the politicians supposedly representing them. This once again ties into the discussion of how accumulation of power went hand in hand with accumulation of wealth in a cycle, as those from rich backgrounds are more commonly the ones in power. The entire region of the northeast has a history of opportunist politicians. Many politicians have used the droughts as a means of controlling and manipulating the population, because they could decide when and how the relief resources or access to water would be distributed. This phenomenon is so common that it has been given the name ``the politics of the drought``, and has been written about in many books and articles<sup>7</sup>.

The communities started to question why the politicians weren't bringing up their interests.

``The mayors didn't want anything from the dam other than that they ended up looking like they promoted development and were progressive and did big works`` (J 36). ``The coronels have developed a politics that they have the power to give the pipes... We have a lot of water accessible, we've made a lot of dams and reservoirs, there is water on one side, and on the other side of the dam people don't have access...So we started to bring up questions about how the people who lived on the side of the dam could go hungry, go thirsty, don't have the capacity to

---

<sup>7</sup> Waiting for Rain, a book about drought in the Northeast of Brazil, is a good source of information about this.



produce, they are malnourished`` (J 49).

Seeing their communities suffer like this, the groups realized that to protect their communities and their livelihood they needed to organize;

``The process always goes like this; the intermediaries who negotiate don't change anything if the people don't participate. We're conscious of the fact that nothing changes injustice in Brazil but confrontation. Nothing else has ever won anything`` (J 47).

As mentioned above, their strategy in participating in these confrontations is to force the government to negotiate with them.

The discussion of the necessity of confrontation needs careful explanation, because it goes against a very common idea that I would identify as a form of cultural violence: the idea that electoral politics in a capitalist system are democratic and adequate for securing the rights of all. Because many people believe that electoral politics are sufficient, many people view road blocks, non-violent building occupations, and other forms of direct action as unnecessary, threatening, or undemocratic. But as the example of the contrast between Caroba and Alagamar, and the paragraphs above show, electoral politics left these communities voiceless in the process of constructing the dam and caused them to face much direct and structural violence. Even when they won the rights to certain projects, they need to constantly continue struggling to see them implemented;

``Some of the things we won but the projects have stopped and aren't moving forward. The fish creation project is stopped, the construction of the new school here [in Caroba] still hasn't started. We're still waiting for the plan to bring water to the community to start, for 15 settlements the project to bring them treated water still hasn't started. These were projects that were won but construction on them still hasn't started. So we will be struggling for all these things in the future`` (O 93). To win the rights to these things, MAB had to struggle. To make sure they are fully implemented, MAB will have to continue struggling.

Miguel Carter, a professor of development at American University, comes to this conclusion when studying the claim that the tactics of the MST (the same tactics that

MAB uses) were anti-democratic or anti-state;

“The MST’s contentious edge has been necessary to advance agrarian reform and improve the quality of Brazil’s democracy...In light of the crude realities of Brazilian rural politics and the traditional powers accrued by its large landholders, it would be naïve, at best, to expect the MST’s struggle for land reform to require anything less than a ‘tough touch.’” (Carter, 6)

“MST mobilizations have done much to extend and fortify civil society in many rural areas by organizing and incorporating marginalized sectors of the population into this societal arena. Moreover, its protests on a range of issues...have enriched Brazil’s public debate and drawn attention to the country’s deep problems of social injustice” (Carter 20)

In these ways, he argues, their actions are in fact strengthening democracy. His analysis of the MST could just as well be for MAB, which shares the tactics, goals, and ideology of the MST (not to mention sharing courses, struggles, marches, and starting soon, will share its structure, although its structure now is already very similar).

“One will find very few hardcore proponents of liberal democracy within the MST. In fact, MST members are far more likely to wear a Che Guevara T-shirt than one emblazoned with the figure of John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, or Alexis de Tocqueville. Within this movement, however, one is apt to find some of democracy’s most fervent grassroots practitioners in Brazil” (Carter 25).

On a similar note to what Carter wrote (Che Guevara T-shirts were in fact omnipresent in the MAB meetings and communities as well), the members of MAB rarely use the word democracy (which may be in part a reflection of the loss in meaning this word has suffered after its constant use and misuse by the Bush administration). They frequently mention, however, that their struggle is not just a struggle for atingidos, but a struggle for a new type of society:

“We have a conviction that we have to change a lot of things, make them better, to advance a process..” (J 50)

“I started to understand that people aren’t only atingidos por barragens- (affected by dams), but that the whole population suffers. Those that stay in the movement understand the struggle, not only of atingidos but also sem-terra, women peasants, farmers, small agriculturalists, the struggle of the working class...Its not only a struggle against dams, its also a movement for another model, another model of energy, another model of Brazil, a model of a different society which incorporates all the people” (O 59).

“There are people who want to use the movement to make their personal circumstances better and then leave and forget the movement. But I say no, its for changing the type of society we live in today” (S 99).

When asked about what vision of society they want, a vision of a participatory, democratic (not in the sense, necessarily, of being a liberal democracy but in the sense of a society in which the people participate and decide together, and their human rights are respected), and socially just society unfolds;

“Its important to discuss projects with people and only do it if they accept. If people accept something out of ignorance that is an injustice. We think dams should only be built if people understand the process, participate, and think it’s a good idea and worth the damage it will cause” (J 51)

“[We want] A socialist model, a model with participation. Its not just a question of whether or not to build a dam. If you are going to build a dam, discuss it with the people. We want a socialist model where you ask the people if they want it, how they want it.” (O 60).

Their desire for this type of participation is evident not just in their words, but also in their actions. The best examples of this are the structure of their organization, and the atmosphere of the meetings I witnessed. The structure of their organization is similar to that of the MST. At its core essence, MAB is built out of the communities it is involved in. In these communities, families are grouped into groups of 5-10. Each of these groups (called Grupos de Base) meet at least once a month (more if there are pressing issues). At these meetings, people bring up their concerns and ideas. Each group chooses two people to be the coordinators. MAB encourages these groups to pick one man and one woman. It is the job of the Base coordinators to report the decisions and feelings of their Base groups to the MAB volunteers who come regularly to the communities. There is a two way flow of information, as the volunteers come to meet with the coordinators both to receive information from the Base groups and to give information that they received from regional and national MAB offices to the

communities through the Base groups. When there are regional MAB meetings (such as the one I attended), anyone can come. Often, because transportation is difficult, communities try to send at least one representative. This is often whoever in their community volunteers to go, whoever has chosen to be the most involved with MAB. At these meetings, these representatives bring up the concerns of their community in an open discussion (obs 18-19). The meeting is facilitated by the regional people the most involved with MAB, in this case, Ocelio, who works full time for MAB, and Zé, who was the first to start organizing people in this area. The facilitators listen to what the people have to say and try to organize it into general themes to present to the government. They decide by consensus what to bring up with the government in the meeting which will follow directly after (the ability to meet with the government was won through a struggle). At this meeting, which takes place at the same place as the last one; the Rural Workers Union office, the format is the same (with opening and closing speeches from the government and MAB). The community members speak up in a free discussion.

The regional office of MAB, mentioned above, is what connects the local communities to the state and national office. One of the local community members, Josevaldo, is one of 40 on the national board of directors of MAB. It is in the MAB office that the more strategic meetings take place. These are meetings between those who have chosen to become very active in the movement. People bring up their opinions and concerns, and those who have been in charge of making alliances with other groups (such as with the MST) report back on their progress. When they are making a decision (such as whether or not to begin the process of rallying the communities to participate in a direct action to achieve something the communities need), they make an effort to ask

everyone in the group their opinion. This group of volunteers (militantes) are often youths, but not always. These volunteers spend a lot of time working with the Base communities.

Thus, their meetings feature an atmosphere that allows a variety of people, including men and women, to speak freely. Their structure is a structure that reaches from the Base communities all the way up to the national directors, with information flowing both ways. People are involved based on how much they want to be involved, and new people are constantly being encouraged to get involved. In their fight for a more just and participatory society, their means are reflecting their ends.

Another way that the actions of MAB are positively contributing to democracy is that through participating in the mobilizations, debates, and conscientização<sup>8</sup>-producing classes, people involved with MAB are finding a new sense of empowerment. This is especially important because those involved with MAB are those that are the most marginalized in the area (and have been for generations); the landless, the sharecroppers, the peasants, the illiterate populations. This relates to a similar point made about the MST by Miguel Carter:

“In fact, the sense of character and dignity forged through long years of MST struggle has nurtured more conscientious citizens and fostered greater public participation in local affairs. By enabling people to use their political rights, the MST has helped integrate hundreds of thousands of poor and historically marginalized Brazilians into the democratic process” (Carter, 21).

One example of this is the meeting with DNOCS. There I saw people who have been marginalized- former sem-terra, former sharecroppers, rural peasants, women, the elderly- boldly speaking their mind to shiny watch, shiny shoes-wearing government

---

<sup>8</sup> This term, which comes from Paulo Freire, refers to the consciousness that allows one to see the contradictions between how reality is presented and how it is. It is the goal of his education system.

officials. I saw people who may or may not be able to read addressing college-educated professionals with confidence in their own words and confidence in their right to be speaking (obs 20-24). This is the empowerment that comes with MAB. Before, many of these communities had hung with meek awe to the words and the promises of government officials and religious workers (J 43), the result of which was that they found themselves leaving their destroyed homes by boat only to be relocated to land without hope of steady production and without even safe water.

Another example of this empowerment comes from an interview with Suerda, a MAB coordinator who works full time in the office in Jaguaretama and is involved with all of the strategic planning of the region. She is 21 years old, is married, and has a son. In this area, it is not normal for married women, especially married women with children, to work. She surprised many people, including herself, when she continued to work there even after she married, and after she gave birth to her son. “But because I had *conscientização*,” she says, “I knew I could do it” (Suerda 98).

Whether they it is through the act of a mobilization, through the *conscientização* of a MAB course, through finally learning how to read, or simply through the slow process of becoming used to discussions where their opinions matter, people engaging with MAB, traditionally marginalized, have been realizing a new sense of empowerment. This new sense of self-empowerment leads people to stand up for their rights, to express their opinions, to demand that they be given a voice, to persevere through difficult situations. What could be better for democracy than to have communities of self-empowered people who will no longer be passive as their rights are trampled on?

One interesting point about their vision of society is that they mention the

negating effect of ignorance on true participation. In light of this, their commitment to education and conscientização can be seen as a commitment to a more participatory, democratic society. At one point, I asked Ocelio if MAB faced resistance when it started organizing in his community. He replied that they didn't have resistance- just ignorance (O 60).

Another part of their fight against ignorance can be seen in their determination to start debates and to share their experiences. This determination is affecting two related forms of cultural violence operating in Brazil; the silencing of the experience of the marginalized, and the false claim of a consensus on issues of development. These forms of cultural violence, which obscure alternatives and hide the reality of situations, are subtle aids to an authoritarianism whose weapons are silence and glossy news coverage instead of secret police and execution squads.

The first of these two, the silencing of a certain group of people (the poorest, the marginalized) happens in a direct way (direct threats of violence) and in a structural way, where even the fact that they have been silenced is secret. The first way is common in Brazil, where landowners and others in power still operating in the era of pistolage enact use direct violence or threats of direct violence to stop the those who speak or struggle against them . A short while after he first began to have meetings, Zé Alves experienced this. ``It was dangerous because we were discussing the expropriation of land`` (Zé 31). Local property owners paid some members of the next community over to vandalize his house one night, and another night they fired 8 shots into his house (he was not injured, but the shots caused something to come loose and hit his baby on the head, but it was not a serious injury) (Zé-32).

This had the effect of silencing some local community members, and making the government more hesitant to carry out the reforms its people deserved. ``There were two interests at work. One was of big property owners who didn't want their land to be expropriated. The other was the government who didn't want to conflict with the property owners``(J 41). The intimidation the landowners caused some to leave the movement early on, aware that they were facing real danger (Zé 30).

Zé discusses how a gathering of the community expressed their unity with him and it gave him the courage to continue (Zé 31). This leads to an important point- that through combining as a group, as a movement, the people of the communities strengthened themselves against this type of landowner violence and were able to use their strength together to create a collective voice and demand that it be heard. As individuals, they were easily victimized, but as a group, as a movement, they became a force that could demand change. In this way, as organizing as a group, they were engaging in a peace action because they were making violence against them more complicated and more difficult to do, and they were able to prevail against the force trying to silence them.

The second way that the poor are silenced is much more subtle, and manifests itself not as aggressive actions to silence those speaking, but simply as a lack. The truths that are reported are the truths of the middle class, the upper class. This can be done in a general way, such as the hegemony of soap operas which feature characters in the upper middle and upper class, as if these classes were the only to exist<sup>9</sup>. Or, this can be done in a specific way, relating to a specific situation. As Zé Alves explains, when the governor

---

<sup>9</sup> One such soap opera right now, *Cobras e Lagartos* is based on the contrast, the war, between two classes; the middle class and the upper class, as if these were the only two that exist. The existence of the poor is once again negated through silence.



of the state became the minister of integration under Lula,

“He brought with him to his new post technicians who he had worked with and together they told Lula that everything here was good and that the people in the region didn’t have any outstanding problems, and it was very difficult initially to prove otherwise. The church said the same thing” (Zé 27).

“We weren’t able to expose the lies of the government because the political and economic power of the government allows them to determine the way society sees reality, they can make the truth look false” (J 45).

In their mobilizations, people found a way to reclaim their voice and tell the world about their experience:

“We started to realize that we can show the media that not everything the government says inside and outside of Ceara is true. They have propaganda in every form of communication that says that Castanhao has been a good experience for the region, that all of the families have been relocated according to their wishes, that economically the region is doing well so everything is peace and love. One thing that makes a big impression on the minds of people is when people organize” (J 46).

“We occupied to say we have problems with Castanhao, to stop the lies, and to negotiate the problems of the affected people” (J 46-47).

On a similar note, Ocelio discusses how they used the roadblock as an opportunity to converse with the motorists and tell them their story.

Occupations, marches, and other forms of direct actions were the only way they could demand that their side of the story be heard. By bringing to light their experiences of oppression and marginalization, which they share with many other Brazilians (whether atingidos, Favela-dwellers, homeless, landless, or groups marginalized for other reasons) they were enriching the public consciousness, creating more informed citizens with a more complete understanding of their own society.

MAB has addressed the other form of cultural violence above, the false claim of consensus on the issues of development, through their determination to start debates and construct alternatives. Today, in Brazil as well as in most of the world, the logic of the

“Washington Consensus” is the undisputed (publicly, at least) logic in operation, along with its close cousin, the ethnocentric, western, capitalist model of development whose ancestors were the early justifications for all of the horrors of the colonial period.

This “consensus” was an agreement to promote neoliberalism and all of the things that come with it; including industrialization, privatization, production for export, and the global trade structures which are the current-day development of colonialism and imperialism. Those that were consenting were the global elites of the world; the people of the world, the poorest, were not asked what their vision of development looked like. The principles of this ideology have become so firmly embedded in the public discourse that many people would claim that they are not, in fact, an ideology at all but merely the logical, rational results of thought, as obvious and immutable as any law of nature.

Because it is claimed that this model is the only rational, logical model, and because it is claimed that there is a consensus about this, there is no public debate over this model of development. This lack of a debate means that people are forced to accept this model and all of the structural and cultural violence that come with it, often not realizing that there are alternatives (not to mention the direct violence of having this model forced on them even when it destroys aspects of their culture). MAB is promoting peace by encouraging conscientização, making these debates within their own communities, and then making these debates with the government .

As the poor communities of the Valley of Jaguaribe, historically abandoned by the government, now find themselves in contact with it, they are finding themselves pushed to accept all of the pieces of this development package. The changes are affecting some of the deepest underpinnings of their culture, and they have had to struggle to win

the right to hold on to their own culture, their own decisions of how they want to live. This struggle is made all the more difficult by the immense hegemonic power of the model they are fighting against.

One of the powerful pillars of the neoliberal model is the focus on production for the purpose of export. This principle has been the boat by which the natural riches of the Third World have washed up on the shores of the First World<sup>10</sup>. Many of Brazil's exports are agricultural commodities, including coffee, soybeans, wheat, rice, corn, sugarcane, cocoa, citrus, beef, but they also export some industrialized products<sup>11</sup>. This means that the fertility of the Brazilian soil, the sweat of its many farm laborers, and its waters, even the waters of its occasionally drought-stricken Northeast, have all gone to nourish the people of the first world.<sup>12</sup> Some of the community members affiliated with MAB, particularly in Novo Alagamar, which will have access to irrigation, have started to question this, but are having to struggle to be allowed to decide what and how they will produce;

“The government says ‘If you don’t grow fruits to export to Europe or the US, we’re not going to give you payments or energy because getting paid in dollars is better than getting paid in Reais” (J 106).

“Since our region has a very large deficiency of nutrition, we think that, I in particular think that, to develop this region its not necessary to grow food for Europe, for the US, the people here need to buy food too” (J 105)

They are questioning this, not just because of its policy of sending the fruits of the natural riches abroad, but because of the changes it will bring to their own community, where subsistence farming and occasionally bartering for produce and labor are the norm.

“[The model the government is promoting] is a model for big landowners, not for

---

<sup>10</sup> Oxfam’s The Trade Trap, Eduardo Galeano’s Open Veins of Latin America, and Vandana Shiva’s Stolen Harvest are books which explain this process.

<sup>11</sup> Source: CIA World Factbook, online

<sup>12</sup> For a good introduction to this issue I would recommend Vandana Shiva’s Stolen Harvest.

small. For example, in our old community, we didn't used to pay the bank for producing, we did really small scale production. Here with irrigation we're obligated to make payments to the bank to implement a project for everyone. To start up a fruit business, we would have to take out a loan that would be R\$ 35,000 or R\$ 40,000 each, to buy all of the technology, to buy all of the systems of irrigation, to put in all of the infrastructure implemented by the enterprises" (J 104).

"The mentality of agro-negocio<sup>13</sup>, of the government, is this; 'We're going to define what you guys produce, because you don't know anything, we're going to decide what you produce and bring you wealth. We're going to bring you up to the level of technology, we're going to decide using cost-benefit analysis, you're going to work a lot more than you worked before because you're not going to be the one selling, you campesinos are too backwards, someone who knows is going to sell it for you, and you're going to sell fruit for money so you can go to the supermarket and buy beans, corn, potatoes.' We think this is absurd" (J 108).

"The communities are suffering because since they've been relocated, the communities have to pay for water, which they always used to be able to collect from the river" (Professor Amaro)

The government is encouraging these communities along "THE" path of development, unable to comprehend that some people might want to develop in a different way. The government is pressuring them to take out big loans to do big-money agriculture, to grow only one thing, and then use that money to buy what they could have grown themselves. The government is trying to force them into a model where their relation to everything (food to sustain themselves, water) depends on them owning money (never a certainty for farmers in this region). The prominent model of development would call this progress, but they would call this absurd. This is because they are operating with a different conception of what progress, what wellness looks like than the government.

"We hope one day to turn this into a community that has very equal conditions. Here, only a little time after the relocation, a lot of the poorest families here still don't have a cow. A lot, the majority have a cow to use the milk for their children, now that they own land, they've already been able to buy animals. We want in the future that everyone has a cow or two to drink the milk from. We want in the future that people don't need to buy a lot of vegetables, that everyone will be able to grow them in their yard, and grow fruits, so they don't need to buy them from the

---

<sup>13</sup> Agro-negocio is the term for technologically advanced, chemical using, large-scale production, often for export

supermarket... We want this old model” (J 107).

Their vision of wellness lies in preserving their traditional lifestyle, and promoting equality and good health based on a varied diet within their community. If they switch to the model the government is pressuring them towards, their culture will change. It is for this reason that they should not be forced to accept this model, but should switch to it only if it what they desire, because the forced destruction of culture is a form of direct violence.

In their process of mobilizing and making debates, they have also started to reconsider some ideas that penetrated their communities long ago, such as the use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers in farming. Their interactions with MAB have introduced them to new critiques of the current system, and have also awakened their capacity to make critiques themselves.

### Conclusion

Up against considerable odds, the communities of the Valley of Jaguaribe have organized to reclaim their voice and reclaim their rights, rights which were taken from them in the building of a dam, and rights which were taken from them generations before through the building of unjust social structures. Organized as a movement, they have combated direct, structural, and cultural violence with actions of peace which promote their well-being and human rights, promote equality, and promote a deepening of the level of participation of civil society and a re-democratization of society. Their success has been a testament to the organizing methodology, ideology, and tactics of the Movimento dos Atingidos Por Barragens. Their goals stretch beyond the simple rights of atingidos, their goals reflect the broadened definition of peace described by Johan Galtung.

### Indications of Further Research

I spent such a small amount of time there, there is so much more to learn. Attention could be given to the progress of certain projects (the literacy project, the work project). Attention could be given to the way MAB pursues and incorporates new youth into its structures. Attention could be given to the communities who have organized with MAB, to try to see if the empowerment that the activists feel is shared by all community members. There are many more, and I am sure many new ones will come up, because this is a dynamic organization which is constantly adapting.

## Definition of Terms

Luta- struggle

Atingidos- (dam) affected people, usually people who have specifically been officially recognized by the government as dam-affected

Senhor- the landlord

Patron- the boss

Pistolage- the act of ruling through pistols, as landlords often do/did in Brazil

Agro-negocio - the term for technologically advanced, chemical using, large-scale production, often for export

Conscientização- This term, which comes from Paulo Freire, refers to coming to a level of consciousness that allows one to see the contradictions between how reality is presented and how it is. It is the goal of his education system.

Jaguaribe- the region around Rio Jaguaribe- the Jaguaribe region

Occupation- when MAB members peacefully take over a building or highway or office

Sem-terra- People who don't own land

Morador – someone who lives on the land of a patron

Reassentamento- settlement

Militante- activist

Camposinos- farm workers

## Bibliography

Arons, Nicholas Gabriel. Waiting for Rain. University of Arizona Press, Tucson; 2004.

Bradford, Sue and Jan Rocha. Cutting the Wire. Latin America Bureau, London; 2002.

Carter, Miguel. ``The landless rural workers' movement (MST) and democracy in Brazil`` Centre for Brazilian Studies, University of Oxford. Working Paper Number CBS-60-05.

Freire, Paulo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Continuum, New York; 2004.

Galtung, Johan. "Cultural Violence". *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Aug., 1990), pp. 291-305.

Galtung, Johan. "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research". *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3. (1969), pp. 167-191.

Grinde, David A. Ecocide of Native America. Clear Light Books, 1998.

Lyons, Kristina. Aguas Para a Vida Não Para a Morte (semi colon) Who Knew the Way Things Were Before the Flood? . Jaguaribara, Ceara. School for international Training Spring 2002.

Roy, Arundhati. Power Politics. South End Press, Cambridge; 2001.

Shiva, Vandana. Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit. South End Press, Cambridge, 2002.

Shiva, Vandana. Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply. South End Press, Cambridge; 2000.

Wright, Angus and Wendy Wolford. To Inherit the Earth. Food First Books, Oakland; 2003.



## ISP Monograph Appendix

I could not have done this project in the US, because it was focused mainly on interviews, and because there has not been much written about MAB in English which is available in the US. The only thing I could have done was attempts at background research.

I enjoyed learning through observation, interviews, and group participation. I felt like it was very empowering, and I enjoyed the freedom this gave me to research even if there wasn't a book on my subject, which is good because most of my monograph ended up being primary source data. The primary source material I included was material I felt related to general themes I noticed throughout my research.

In the research process, I used the skills I had gained from my community project, which was a very good learning experience to prepare for the monograph. The drop-off was like every other day in my experience in Brazil – being lost somewhere and having to rely on myself to find my way, but it too was a good preparation for the things to come.

The FSS readings about using sources and conducting interviews helped me know how to do my project.

My principal problem in this project was my lack of language ability. I think my language ability was at an unacceptable level.

There were severe time restraints on my projects, which could not be resolved because they are simply the result of the magnitude of this project and the time allotted.

My topic changed several times, much to my frustration, because I kept on finding out that what I wanted to study didn't exist.

I was lucky enough to work with an organization, who helped me immensely and gave me access to meetings and members for interviews.

My methods were to combine three types of knowledge- observation, participation, and interview, to check against each other. My observations led me to my decisions of who to interview. My interviews helped me observe with greater detail. My participation helped me double check what I was learning from interviews.

My advisor was very helpful and knowledgeable, but unfortunately I didn't meet him until the day I left for Salvador (and afterwards went straight to the ISP). My second meeting with him was after I had already started writing. Earlier contact with him would have been better.

My early research (about the transposition of the Sao Francisco) turned out to be a dead end.

My research led me to rural communities, who were in some ways quite different from the communities I knew in Fortaleza. They had hard lives, and knew how to be flexible through everything, and I learned a lot from this. I also learned a lot from their energy and dedication to their cause.

The ISP helped my integration into the culture and language skills because I was alone in the region with no other Americans around.

My principal lessons I learned were about the nature of this movement and the

experience of a group who has managed to overcome their marginalization and create this powerful movement.

My recommendations would be that this is only for the student who really cares about these causes and who will be willing to sacrifice their everyday comforts a little to show solidarity, respect, and sensitivity towards the communities in this area.

I would definitely do this project or a similar project again, if I were ever so lucky as to have another opportunity like this.