




Ploughs of land reform in the Hinterlands of the São Francisco: the experiences of Peba and Lameirão, Delmiro Gouveia, Alagoas, 1986-1989


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In the early hours of 26 February [1988], about 70 landless families from the upper hinterlands of Alagoas occupied the Xingó estate (Peba). The landless workers decided to occupy the estate due to the collapse of the National Plan for Land Reform [PNRA] and their disillusionment with the state government, which failed to fulfill its promises. For the workers, the need for land is urgent... [on the other hand] the [federal and state] government, as shown, is unwilling to carry out a land reform that serves the interests of the working class (JST, 1988, p. 9).

The narrative above, extracted from the *Jornal Sem Terra* (JST), the publication of the Landless Workers' Movement, highlights the reoccupation of the Peba estate by landless workers in the municipality of Delmiro Gouveia, in the hinterlands of Alagoas, a territory near the São Francisco River, as a social counterpoint to the political forces – local, state, and federal – that obstructed the implementation of land reform policies within the context of the New Republic, the National Plan for Land Reform (PNRA) and the 1988 Constitution of Brazil (Pereira, 2015).

During the 1980s, the resurgence of debates and mobilizations in favor of land reform were intertwined with the struggle against the military dictatorship (1964-1985), the defense of political redemocratization, and the rearticulation of social movements in both urban and rural areas. Strategies, experiences, and mobilizations ploughed by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) helped rural workers organize camps, occupations, marches, and confrontations with unproductive latifúndia, against violence, and to fight rural poverty (Fernandes, 1999, p. 8).

In this regard, Maria Yedda Linhares and Francisco Carlos Teixeira (1999, p. 16) point out that among the strategies of democratic resistance devised during the New Republic was the expansion of access to land. It was a struggle aimed at extending citizenship, income, and autonomy to men, women, youth, and children in rural areas. According to these authors, the defense of land reform should be understood as a struggle against the authoritarian vestiges that persisted, tarnishing the construction of a more just, humane, democratic, and socially grounded country.

Within this perspective, the study of the aforementioned ploughs of land reform promoted by landless rural workers in Delmiro Gouveia, Alagoas, in the hinterlands of

the São Francisco River, in the context of the 1980s, broadens the understanding of both the social tensions of the countryside and the (re)interpretation(s) concerning redemocratization, social history, and the history of the present time – due to it being a recent and delicate past (Bloch, 2001; Cruz, 2013). Centered on this interpretive angle, the analysis of the experience of the Peba settlement and the Lameirão settlement raises discussions, debates, and disputes about the conditions of access, enjoyment, permanence, and land rights in the hinterlands (Neves, 2008). In this scenario, the hinterlands of Alagoas were one of the stages of the resumption of social struggles against the dictatorship, in favor of democracy, and in support of land reform.

The temporal scope of this study begins in the year 1986. In that year – according to narratives collected from the settlers, corroborated by the records of the reports of the National Information Service (SNI) and by information reported by newspapers circulating in the region –, land disputes triggered the aggravation of conflicts in the countryside in Delmiro Gouveia. In particular, starting from the occupation of unproductive areas of the Peba estate and, subsequently, of the Lameirão estate. Both areas were identified by the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) as unproductive and meeting the criteria for expropriation for land reform purposes (Arquivo Nacional, 1987, p. 14).

The temporal scope of this paper cover until 1989, when after a series of experiences, resistances, and political confrontations, the landless workers, organized in line with the methodological strategies of the Theology of the Enxada (hoe), of the New Syndicalism, and of the Landless Workers' Movement, organized, established, and attained the first land reform settlements in the hinterlands of Alagoas. Territories located between the lands of the Xingó dam and the Paulo Afonso dam.

A historical event permeated by a series of meanings for the field of social history (Thompson, 1987; Hobsbawm, 1998), agrarian history (Linhares; Teixeira, 1999; Martins, 1999), and the history of the present time (Bloch, 2001; Ferreira, 2002). In terms of historiography, there are few studies on the social movements in the countryside in that region. As a rule, most of the research has focused on areas of sugar cane plantations, riverbanks, dams, quilombola communities, indigenous peoples and/or traditional territories of the coast, the zona da mata, and the agreste (Almeida, 2014; Verçosa, 2018; Lima, 2018; Albuquerque, 2018; Silva, 2018; Cosme, 2019). This gap further emphasizes the importance of studies of this nature regarding Alagoas, the hinterlands of the São Francisco River, and land reform in the context under study.

Around this discussion, the present paper is divided into five parts. In the first, it discusses the history of the occupations of the Peba and Lameirão estates. In the second, it analyzes how the mobilizations of these movement/experiences reached Maceió. Then, in the third part, it seeks to understand how the Lameirão settlement, located near Lake Xingó, on the banks of the São Francisco River, was organized, built, and attained. In the fourth part, it analyzes the productive organization process of the latter of these settlements. Finally, in the fifth part, it discusses the transition from occupation to the Lameirão settlement.

The occupations of the Peba and Lameirão estates

Lameirão is the offspring of Peba, we are the offspring of the evangelical churches and the freedom struggle movement (Correia, 2020).

The highlighted narrative, uttered by Manoel de Aguiar Correia, one of the leaders of the movement that resulted in the establishment of the Lameirão settlement, emphasizes that the occupation of the Peba estate was an unfolding of the conflict involving the landless workers and the landowner of the Peba estate – which occurred around 1986, and its subsequent developments in 1987 and 1988. This context coincides with the social mobilizations in the face of the slow implementation of the goals established for the 1st National Plan for Land Reform (I PNRA). The plan was signed by the then President of Brazil, José Sarney de Araújo Costa (1985-1990), as part of the Brazilian State's commitment to civil society in the post-dictatorship context in the early years of the New Republic (Fernandes, 1999, p. 97).

According to Martins (1999), the occupation of unproductive land carried out by the Landless Workers' Movement are one of the strategies that workers used to pressure the government to act for the effective implementation of land reform. This author also emphasizes that since the formalization of the Land Statute in 1964, the priority areas for expropriation were those where the existence of social tensions were proven. Thus, given the new conjuncture, brought about by the New Republic and the commitment to implement the 1st National Plan for Land Reform, land occupations became mechanisms of political pressure and denunciation of social tensions involving landowners and rural

workers.

The land dispute involving the Peba estate has its roots in the aggravation caused by the landowner regarding the farmers who cultivated their subsistence crops on that land. This disagreement evolved into personal confrontations, acts of violence, and legal disputes against the landless workers. In contrast, the workers, organized based on a set of experiences, strategies, and mobilizations, occupied the aforementioned estate in 1987 and reoccupied it the following year, in 1988 (Costa, 2016).

The occupation of the Peba estate was marked by threats, evictions, attempts at arrests, shack fires, and different strategies/experiences of resistance (Arquivo Nacional, 1987, p. 14). Faced with these acts of violence, the workers were, for a brief period, discouraged, disorganized, and compelled to leave the estate at the end of 1987. However, after a few months, they managed to reoccupy the Peba lands in February 1988. As previously mentioned, the decision to reoccupy the estate aimed to protest against the lack of interest and commitment, and the delays on the part of the authorities, both state and federal, in relation to fulfilling the 1st PNRA. Moreover, the landless workers participating in the reoccupation of Peba aimed to denounce the threats, constraints, and violence against them (JST, 1988, p. 9).

In Alagoas, these events, according to records from the agencies that constituted the SNI, occurred during the administration of Governor Fernando Collor de Mello, who at the time signed an agreement with INCRA for the implementation of the Regional Plan for Land Reform (PRRA) – this document aimed to implement the 1st PNRA in Alagoas. However, despite the agreement, the fulfillment of the goals made little progress, and the process of expropriation of the Peba estate for land reform purposes did not advance (Arquivo Nacional, 1987, p. 52).

The reoccupation, as well as the occupation experience in 1987, were marked by interventions from judicial, police, political, and landowning authorities in the region. For instance, the judge of the district of Delmiro Gouveia visited the camp and, as reported by the *Jornal Sem Terra (JST)*, informed the workers that they had 24 hours to leave the land. However, the workers realized that the court order was old and irrelevant, as it referred to the events of the 1987 occupation. In a resilient response, landless workers remained on the land (JST, 1988, p. 9).

Despite the resistance, resilience, and contestation, the eviction action was carried out. However, after a quick assessment of the situation, on the following day, 27 Feb 1988, the landless workers strategically moved from the area involved in the 1986 conflict

and the 1987 occupation to ‘the other side of the fence’, which remained under ownership of the landowner involved in the original land dispute: Miguel Gandu Dacach. In this way, the landless workers circumvented the landowner’s legal ruse of dividing the estate and placing the occupied lands in the name of a third party: the rancher Clóvis Isaías (Correia, 2020). In the 1987 occupation process, according to one of the settlers, the landowner claimed to have divided the estate into small properties with the strategic objective that it did not qualify as an unproductive latifundium (Costa, 2016).

Regarding this episode, the *JST* reported that during the reoccupation of the Peba estate, there were speculations that the landowner had contacted the authorities to have the lands of the estate acquired by the government, rather than expropriated. In this way, he could receive full financial compensation for the reoccupied lands, avoiding the risks of being partially compensated and/or losing them in the dispute established with the landless families of the Peba camp (JST, 1988, p. 9).

Shortly after the relocation of the camp, the workers reassembled the shacks and the political, social, and everyday organization of the camp, and reorganized the actions of denunciation, protest, mobilization, and marches in the city of Delmiro and, later, in Maceió. According to Maria Zilma Tavares Costa, who resided in the camp at the Peba estate and coordinated of the MST in Alagoas, the first mobilizations aimed to sensitize the inhabitants of Delmiro Gouveia regarding the 1987 occupation. Then, in the second phase, there was a movement of awareness, legitimation, and social support for the 1988 reoccupation and the camp residents. She also highlights the preparation of posters and banners with slogans and messages, as well as speeches, meetings, walks, songs (religious and motivational), among other actions, mobilizations, and strategies (Costa, 2016).

Thus, the acts of occupation and reoccupation emphasized the need to classify the area in dispute as appropriate for land reform – according to the criteria established by INCRA and the PNRA since 1986 (Arquivo Nacional, 1987). In this sense, guided by these experiences, strategies, and mobilizations, the said actions pressured state authorities to acquire rural properties in the region for the establishment of land reform settlements.

According to Fernandes (1999), land occupation is a form of struggle, a popular action that has, among its objectives, the transformation of the reality of rural workers. Furthermore, he states that the occupation is a moment in this process that begins with the creation of family groups, the grassroots work, and the mobilization process that culminates in camps, negotiations, demonstrations, and ongoing struggles for the social

rights of rural workers.

Roseli Caldart (2004) points out that land occupation can be considered the essence of the MST because it is through them that the organization of people to participate in the land struggle begins, and perhaps it is in the occupations that the organizational, political, and educational origins of the MST lie. João Pedro Stedile (2012), in turn, argues that the occupation is a strategy of struggle that expresses the political convictions of landless workers. In light of this, they, as a social movement, pressure the sectors of society to take a stand for or against it, that is, for the occupation and the land reform process.

Within this perspective, the aforementioned experiences of Peba and Lameirão represented one of the first coordinated actions by the MST in Alagoas. They also represented a social, popular, and political response to land disputes, as well as a demarcation of the struggles of social movements in the region from another political perspective. Instead of the model of struggle of the peasant leagues, the rural syndicalism under the influence of the Christian left movement Ação Popular (AP) and the Brazilian Communist Party (PC do B) – prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s (Silva, 2004) – and of the rural bureaucratic and ‘assistentialist’ syndicalism that became hegemonic in the 1970s (Cosme, 2019). The resurgence of rural social movements in Delmiro Gouveia and other municipalities near the hinterlands of the São Francisco River, in the context of the 1980s, began to be constituted, shared, and experienced through by the methodological strategies of the Theology of the Enxada, the New Syndicalism and the MST (Guedes Neto, 2014; Silva, 2021).

From the hinterlands of the São Francisco to Maceió

With the aim of sensitizing society and pressuring state and federal authorities, on 27 Apr 1988, the residents of camp located at the Peba estate moved from Delmiro Gouveia, in the Hinterlands of the Lower São Francisco River, to Maceió. In the capital of Alagoas, they occupied the courtyard of the State Department of Agriculture (SEAGRI). The protesters justified their action due to the state government’s indifference to the expropriation process of the Peba estate - which had been reoccupied two months earlier in that context.

The demanded food, seeds, planting machinery, and a meeting with Jader Barbalho, who at the time was in charge of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform (MIRAD). This political pressure resulted in several commitments signed between SEAGRI and the camp residents, including the provision of food to the camp residents for two months and the distribution of 5,000 kilograms of seeds for planting. Regarding the request for a hearing with MIRAD, the meeting only took place on 4 May 1988. The demonstration, which ended on the afternoon of 29 April, was noteworthy in that the police, under the command of Governor Fernando Collor de Mello, were not used to suppress the landless workers' protest (JST, 1988, p. 6).

Following the meeting with MIRAD in May 1988, negotiations for the expropriation of the Peba estate did not advance. During this period, speculations indicated that the landowner was trying to hinder the expropriation process, as stated in the warning from the letter released by the residents of the camp at the Peba estate (Peba, 1988, p. 1). Faced with these disputes and delays, the camp residents decided in an assembly to transfer part of the camp to Maceió in order to pressure the competent authorities (Oliveira, 2019).

Thus, the relocation of the camp was a response to the opposing efforts against land reform in the region and the state. Based on this understanding, the landless workers occupied the headquarters of MIRAD in Maceió, on 26 Sept 1988 (Arquivo Nacional, 1988). According to SNI records, the occupation of MIRAD was carried out by about 180 people, including children, who together demanded a meeting with the governor of Alagoas to demand the expropriation or acquisition of the lands of the Peba estate. During the aforementioned action, Isnaldo França Matta, at the time a representative of MIRAD, stated that the expropriation would not take place because the property had less than 500 hectares of land. Therefore, it did not fit the criteria established by the PNRA, in accordance with Executive Order No. 95,715/1988 (Arquivo Nacional, 1988).

Faced with the refusal from MIRAD regarding the possibility of expropriating the lands of the Peba estate, the landless workers continued to occupy the building of the aforementioned Ministry, while demanding that the competent authorities present solutions to the legal, administrative, and political impasse. In response to the protesters' stance, in the day after the occupation of MIRAD in Alagoas, the authorities in Brasília authorized the intervention of federal forces to demobilize the landless workers. However, the eviction did not take place due to a conversation that happened between the negotiating committee of the camp residents and the representatives of the federal body

in Alagoas (Arquivo Nacional, 1988).

After the negotiation, the landless workers transferred part of the camp to Centenário Square – a public space for the concentration of marches, mobilizations, and cultural, social and political protests. Thus, by stepping back in order to move forward, once again, the landless workers resorted to strategy of transferring the space of resistance – following the learned legacy from the reoccupation of the Peba estate – and relocated part of the occupation and protesters from the MIRAD building to the symbolic and historic square (Arquivo Nacional, 1988).

The camp lasted until 18 Oct 1988, when the workers attained the acquisition of part of the lands of the Peba estate from the State of Alagoas. According to the SNI, based on reports prepared by INCRA, the Peba estate had about 1,100 hectares, but only 200 hectares were acquired and allocated for the establishment of land reform settlements (Arquivo Nacional, 1988). In this regard, Maria Zilma Tavares Costa, as a member of the MST coordination, points out that the acquisition of part of the estate occurred due to the division of the disputed area; the already highlighted maneuver/artifice of the landowner so that the property was not classified as a latifundium but rather as a medium-sized rural property (Costa, 2016).

It is also important to highlight that in the course of the 22 days of the occupation of Centenário Square, the protesters witnessed the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution of Brazil. Despite the disputes, impasses, and negotiations, the new Constitution resulted in significant social achievements, including for the social movements in the countryside. In this regard, the workers perceived the impasses of the agrarian affairs committee, the disputes between the popular sectors, and the parliamentarians identified with the ruralists and their allies (Wohnrath, 2017).

According to Pereira and Alentejano (2014), due to the popular pressure arising from social demonstrations, the 1988 Constitution of Brazil, despite the conflicting interests, expanded citizenship rights. However, the same did not happen with the democratization of access to land. The Constitution did not delimit what constituted a productive property and did not designate the settlers as a priority group for agricultural policies – as demanded by peasant organizations.

The 200 hectares of the Peba estate were attained with resources from the Programa de Apoio ao Pequeno Produtor Rural (PAPP), a program established to support rural smallholders. This rural development program in the Northeast region was financed by the World Bank. In 1985, approximately US\$826.7 million was allocated to this

program for the nine states of the Northeast region and Minas Gerais (Soares, 1996). However, despite the existence of financial resources, the amount of land acquired, in the case of the hinterlands of Alagoas, was insufficient to settle the 70 landless families that participated in the occupation of Peba.

Of these, only eight families were established in the area made available for the establishment of the settlement. Faced with this limitation, the demonstrators remained in Centenário Square, persisting with the social pressure for the state to present a satisfactory solution. Among these solutions was the commitment to acquire other areas to allow for the settlement of other families that had been engaged in the conflict, occupation, and mobilizations around the rights to the lands of the Peba estate since 1986 (Costa, 2016).

Thus, the landless workers persisted in negotiations with the Instituto de Terras de Alagoas (ITERAL) for the acquisition of other properties. Moreover, in this way, they aimed to achieve the goal of settling the remaining families that were camped in the reoccupation. The *JST* attributed the credit for the negotiation for land acquisition to social pressure, mobilization, and political articulation ploughed by the landless workers of the hinterlands of Alagoas (*JST*, 1988, p.4). Analyzing this context, Almeida (2014) clarifies that the struggle of workers for land rights should be understood both as a possibility to generate income from agricultural production and as a synonym for freedom and the possibility of democratizing access to land, social justice, and citizenship.

The Lameirão: on the banks of the São Francisco river

After camping at Centenário square, the landless workers remained at the Peba estate. During this period, they identified other areas appropriate for land reform, with the intention of expediting negotiations with the state government for the acquisition of other properties. In an assembly, the residents of the camp decided which families would have the right to be settled in the 200 hectares attained from the Peba estate. This decision was made in favor of the resilient families from the conflict that occurred in 1986 and the occupation experienced in 1987 (Oliveira, 2019).

Once the criteria for the selection of the Peba settlers were established, the workers listed the areas selected by INCRA as appropriate for land reform, according to the criteria of the PNRA. During this survey, they identified the so-called 'exploitative

latifundia' in the municipalities of Delmiro Gouveia and Olho D'água do Casado. After these identifications, the workers visited the designated areas, analyzed the structure of the properties, the quality of the land, access to water, roads, and other infrastructure items. They also investigated the legal situation and the possible procedures for the expropriation and/or acquisition of the mapped estates by the federal or state government (Correia, 2020).

In the process of identifying the unproductive estates in the region, the MST came across the Lameirão estate, an area of 1,634.3 hectares located in Delmiro Gouveia, near the border with the municipality of Olho D'água do Casado, and on the banks of the São Francisco River (Oliveira, 2019). According to SNI records, the said estate, in the possession of José Serpa de Menezes, was under inspection by INCRA between 1986 and 1987, hence eligible for expropriation as it had already been identified as an unproductive latifundium (Arquivo Nacional, 1987). Following this recognition, the workers went to the estate and assessed that among the listed areas, the Lameirão estate presented the best conditions for the establishment of a land reform settlement (Oliveira, 2019). Regarding this assessment, Manoel Aguiar Correia highlighted that:

At Lameirão, we thought it was possible to stay, even with the rocks, because there was water, wood, and as time went on, with the arrival of electricity, it would improve because our project was to have water and energy for abundant production, and the other places had no water. We knew that one day there would be water because the Xingó dam was being built (Correia, 2020).

It is observed that the choice of the Lameirão estate was made strategically, critically, and consciously by the workers participating in the movement. In this sense, both for the workers and the MST, it was necessary to obtain a property that offered minimum conditions for the sustenance of the families in the short, medium, and long term (Correia, 2020).

The success of the social movements in the countryside that year was part of a set of planned actions whose experiences/mobilizations yielded favorable results. According to the perspective of the *Jornal Sem Terra (JST)*, that was a year of learning, resistance, and victories. It was a year in which, even in the face of a harsh, difficult, and unfavorable political situation, due to increasing violence in the countryside and obstacles in the constitutional debates on land reform, there were advancements. In 1988, 30 land occupations were recorded in 13 states, resulting in the mobilization of about 8,000

families in camps. In most of these occupations, families emerged victorious with the establishment of settlements and/or some form of progress in the processes of expropriation and/or acquisition of land (JST, 1988, p. 10).

In this regard, Genivaldo Vieira da Silva, a member of the coordination of the MST in Alagoas, in an interview granted to the *JST* during the state meeting of the movement in December 1988, made a favorable assessment of the successes and failures of the land struggle. Among them, there were advancements in the organization of the MST, the identification of territories for land reform, the formation of new leaders for the rural workers' unions – the *Sindicatos de Trabalhadores e de Trabalhadoras Rurais* (STTRs) of the *agreste* and *sertão* – as well as the establishment of partnerships with unions affiliated to the *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* (CUT) and with popular sectors of the Catholic Church (JST, 1989, p.5). Regarding this meeting, José Cazuza Ferreira de Oliveira, a member of the coordination of the MST in Alagoas, pointed out that it allowed for a better political organization of the movement, with positions adjusted based on the needs of each region, such as consolidating settlements in the hinterlands of Alagoas (Oliveira, 2021).

In the following year, 1989, the last of José Sarney as president, the goals of the 1st PNRA were still not being met, and the disregard was exacerbated by the dissolution of MIRAD. According to the MST, the dissolution of the aforementioned Ministry, at first, did not change the obstructing stance adopted by the federal government regarding the land reform cause. Despite this caveat, the MST pointed out that this measure aggravated the lack of priority for land rights (JST, 1989, p. 2).

Faced with this context of dismantling of the federal agencies responsible for land reform, the landless workers of Alagoas advanced with the occupations of land. One of these occupations took place in an area of 500 hectares on the Lages estate, in the municipality of Taquarana, in the *agreste* of the state, with the participation of about 200 workers, on 22 Jan 1989 (JST, 1989, p.7). After a series of obstacles, disputes, and threats of eviction, the MST reached an agreement with the state government to transfer the families from this occupation to the demonstration farm of the Agricultural Research Company of Alagoas (EPEAL), in the municipality of Igaci, in the *agreste* of Alagoas (Arquivo Nacional, 1990).

The landless workers remained at the EPEAL farm for about 30 days, until 21 Feb 1989. After this period, dissatisfied with the developments in the process of acquisition and/or expropriation of the Lages estate, they began to occupy the headquarters of

ITERAL, an agency subordinate to the State Department of Agriculture (SEAGRI). Faced with the persistence of impasses regarding the Lages estate and the EPEAL farm, the solution presented was the transference of the families from the occupation in the Lages estate, especially those from the hinterlands, along with the families from the Peba estate who had yet to be settled, to the Lameirão estate in Delmiro Gouveia (Arquivo Nacional, 1990). This decision was accepted by some of the families who agreed to be settled on the Lameirão estate, while the remaining families continued with subsequent occupations, in an area of a failed mill on the north coast of Alagoas (JST, 1989, p. 5).

The aforementioned negotiation between the MST and the state government resulted in the displacement of about 30 families from the occupation of the Lages estate in the agreste to the Lameirão estate in the hinterlands of Alagoas, on the banks of the São Francisco River (Arquivo Nacional, 1989). Thus, the said families arrived at Lameirão estate on 24 Feb 1989. Regarding this, according to Maria Rosângela dos Santos Silva, a participant in the occupation of the Lages estate who was born in the municipality of Jacaré dos Homens, her family was one of those who decided to relocate to the Lameirão estate. In her statement, it is clear that at Lameirão they would not face the same risks, uncertainties, and challenges they experienced in the agreste occupations because from Igaci, in the agreste of the state, to Lameirão in the hinterlands, they were “the first to arrive (...). We came during the Carnival, in February. We came to Lameirão, and during the Holy Week, the people from Peba joined us here. In here it was no longer a land of conflict” (Silva, 2016).

During this period, the Lameirão estate was in the process of negotiation between the state government and the landowner, for the settlement of the remaining families not settled in Peba. Thus, in February 1989, part of the families from the unsuccessful occupation of the Lages estate, along with the families not settled in Peba, constituted another land reform territory in the hinterlands of Alagoas: the Lameirão settlement. Until then, only the Peba settlement in January 1989 had achieved this goal (INCRA, 2017). The Lameirão estate, in turn, was already occupied during the process of acquisition of the property for land reform purposes.

According to Marcos Saquet (2008, p. 81), the creation of a territory based on social and collective actions materializes humanized landscapes, political symbols, and meanings of identity, solidarity, and involvement. Within this perspective, Peba and Lameirão, as ploughs of the land reform in the hinterlands of the São Francisco River, are examples of territories consolidated based on shared experiences, resilience and

resistance by men and women in their social making.

Occupying, resisting, and producing

After the occupation of Lameirão by the workers transferred from the occupation of the Lages estate and later by the other families from the Peba camp, the 5th National Meeting of the MST took place at the Seminary of Nova Veneza in Sumaré, São Paulo. The event, which took place from 27 February to 3 March 1989, was attended by 200 workers from 17 states, as well as delegates from Latin American social organizations, representatives of CUT, the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT), and the Workers' Party (PT), and candidates elected in the previous electoral process (JST, 1989, p. 11).

At that meeting, the MST outlined the plans, actions, and struggle agenda for the year 1989. In this regard, the slogans that guided the meeting stand out: "Occupying, resisting, and producing". At that time, the movement supported the candidacy of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva for President of Brazil, decided to support the participation of the landless workers in the strikes scheduled for March, the Special Credit Program for Agrarian Reform (Procera), the campaign against the Democratic Association of Ruralists (UDR), and the articulation for the 2nd Congress of the MST, and expressed solidarity with Nicaragua (JST, 1989; Oliveira, 2021).

Around these recommendations, the families residing in the camp at Lameirão advanced in the organization, cultivation, and production at the Lameirão estate through an agricultural cooperative initiative. Thus, in August 1989, based on the training, recommendations, and actions of the MST, the settlers established the cooperative Associação de Cooperação Agrícola do Assentamento Lameirão (ACAAL), with the objective of planning, optimizing, and improving the production and commercialization of products. Thus, workers and the cooperative were formally qualified to obtain financing and access public policies (Costa, 2016). The ACAAL, according to its founding minutes, was created with the purpose of organizing the settlers around common interests, as well as promoting agricultural cooperation among the workers, and their articulation with other settlements and institutions that would help in the economic and social development of its members (ACAAL, 1989, p. 1).

The creation of the ACAAL went through a process of discussion among workers

so that they could understand the objectives, organization model, rights, and duties. The founding meeting of the said Association, attended by 50 workers, elected the first board of directors of the cooperative for a two-year term. The board was composed as follows: General Coordinator, José Erivânio Barros; Secretary, Antônio Rodrigues Neto; Treasurer, Manoel de Aguiar Correia; Alternates, Manoel Barbosa da Silva Filho, Zilda Tavares Costa, and Maria José Vieira; Fiscal Council, José Francisco da Silva, Cristina Maria da Silva, and Jucilene Maria da Silva; Alternates to the Fiscal Council, José Renildo Moreira da Silva, Manoel Francisco de Souza, and Benedito Cizino Costa (ACAAL, 1989, p. 1).

From occupation to settlement

The acquisition process of the Lameirão estate was completed on 14 Dec 1989, when the owners, José Serpa de Menezes and Maria Java Serpa de Menezes, transferred the property of 1,634.3 hectares to the State of Alagoas, for the price of 108,875.00 cruzados novos (Alagoas, Comarca de Delmiro Gouveia, fls. 192/192-v.).

The process that resulted in the acquisition of said estate, according to SNI records and the statements of landless workers given to the Military Police of the State of Alagoas, in Maceió, on 29 Aug 1989, reveal part of the disputes, negotiations, and other nuances. Among the testimonies, the one given by Genivaldo Vieira da Silva, a member of the MST in AL, stands out, as he reports that the property was acquired based on a consensus of interests between the owners and the state government. Moreover, he pointed out that Governor Fernando Collor de Mello interfered in the negotiation of the price stipulated for the acquisition of the property with the land management agencies (Arquivo Nacional, 1990, p. 7).

In this regard, it should be added that the aforementioned negotiation process, as well as that of the Peba estate, originated from acquisitions made by the state government through ITERAL. Thus, the estates in question were not expropriated, as the landless workers demanded; they were attained as a result of acquisitions made by the State Treasury. In this sense, the prices and forms of payment were dealt with by the land management agencies of the state government and not the federal government (Arquivo Nacional, 1990, p. 7).

From this perspective, the amounts paid, as registered in the SNI reports, correspond to the interests of the state government and the landowners involved (Arquivo Nacional, 1990, p. 7). In this regard, the owners of the Lameirão estate, both doctors, also stood out because they had served as mayor and deputy mayor of the municipality of Delmiro Gouveia in separate terms – an economic, social, and political condition that explained their prestige within the society, region, and the State of Alagoas. Moreover, the consent of the landowners contributed to clearing the mortgage on the property. In this sense, the acquisition of the Lameirão estate was indeed a good deal for those already established (Alagoas, Comarca de Delmiro Gouveia, fls. 192/192-v.).

On the other hand, the acquisition of the Lameirão estate by the state government consolidated part of the demands of landless workers that had been made since 1987, still in the process of occupation and reoccupation of the Peba estate. Thus, in 1989, a year of struggles, mobilizations, and resistance ended with two settlements of land reform in the hinterlands of Alagoas. In addition, despite the non-compliance with the goals established in the PNRA, and the threats, persecutions, and physical violence, the establishment of these two settlements represented advancements for land reform in Alagoas. According to Cosme (2019), these territories are the result of the mobilization, and the political and social organization of landless rural workers against an established political project for the countryside – agribusiness. A project that results in impasses, disputes, and the hindrance of policies to democratize land access for workers.

Associated with this context, the following photograph illustrates one of the first records of the Lameirão settlement in 1989, depicting a meeting of camp residents with Sister Cecilia Soderro Pousa and the team from the STTR of Inhapi.

Figure 9 – Meeting between settlers of Lameirão, representatives of the STTR of Inhapi, and Sister Cecilia Sodero Pousa, 1989



Source: Archives of the ACAAL, made available to the authors/GEPHISC/NUPEDS/PPGH/UFAL

In the photograph – identifications made based on the contributions of José Cazuzza Ferreira de Oliveira, a member of the Rural Seminar, the STTR of Inhapi, CUT, and the MST, settled in Lameirão, and former mayor of Delmiro Gouveia – from left to right, appearing alongside Sister Cecilia and the directors of the STTR of Inhapi: 1, Mr. Deca, from the municipality of Mata Grande, who participated in the reoccupation of the Peba estate and camped at Lameirão; 2, Dona Cristina, from Mata Grande, leader of the CEBs, a midwife and healer, considered an important figure in the process of mobilization for the reoccupation of the Peba estate and camped at Lameirão; 3, Neide, from Inhapi, a member of the CEBs and the STTR of Inhapi; 4, Tonho, from Inhapi, camped at Peba in 1988; 5, Regiane, Tonho’s daughter, who also participated in the reoccupation of the Peba estate in 1988; 6, Maria da Soledade, from Inhapi, who participated in the reoccupation of the Peba estate and settled at Lameirão; 7, Lourdes, from Mata Grande, who participated in the reoccupation of the Peba estate; 8, Manoel de Aguiar Correia, from Inhapi, a member of the CEBs and STTR of Inhapi, who participated in the reoccupation of the Peba estate and settled at Lameirão; 9, José Lopes da Silva, from Inhapi, who

participated in the reoccupation of the Peba estate and settled at Lameirão; 10, Jucilene Maria da Silva, from Inhapi, catechist, was part of youth groups, and participated in the reoccupation of the Peba estate, a healer settled at Lameirão; 11, Edmilson, who participated in the reoccupation of the Peba estate and camped at Lameirão; 12, Mazé, from Inhapi, who participated in the reoccupation of the Peba estate and camped at Lameirão; 13, Tonho's youngest daughter; 14, Not identified; 15, Sister Cecília, from the Parish of Inhapi, advisor to the CEBs and rural unions in the region; 16, Cláudio, from the STTR of Inhapi and the Rural Secretariat of CUT in AL; 17, João Ricardo, from Inhapi and the STTR; 18, Antônia, from Inhapi, who participated in the reoccupation of the Peba estate and camped at Lameirão.

The photograph captures the meeting of the families camped at the Lameirão estate with representatives of the STTR of Inhapi and Sister Cecilia Sodero Pousa. The image depicts Maria da Soledade, identified from left to right as number 6, holding a document in her hand – possibly the first list of settlers of the Lameirão. In this sense, this document/image is one of the first records attesting to the access, possession, and right to the desired land, which was disputed and conquered by approximately forty settler families of land reform in Delmiro Gouveia, Alagoas, on the banks of the São Francisco River (JST, 1989, p. 14).

Final remarks

This paper highlights the collective, social, and political organization of the landless rural workers of the hinterlands of Alagoas within a context of mobilizations against the military dictatorship, in favor of democracy, and in support of land reform. It is a historical interstice marked by the advent of the New Republic, of the 1st National Plan for Land Reform (PNRA), and the new legal framework established by the 1988 Constitution of Brazil.

Within this historical-political-social context, the creation, organization, and conquest of the Peba and Lameirão settlements, in Delmiro Gouveia, Alagoas, serves as more than just benchmarks for the land struggle in the hinterlands of the São Francisco River. They clarify inquiries, developments, and relations – local, regional, national, and international – of the saga of men and women throughout time for the right to land, dignity, and citizenship. It is a struggle marked by many reversals, chapters, and ideas, as well as achievements, accomplishments, and consolidated histories.

In this saga, trajectory and experiences, Peba and Lameirão are important ploughs of land reform in Alagoas, in the hinterlands of the São Francisco River. Thus, these territories carry the symbols of struggle, and organization, as well as cultural, social and political significance – ploughed, sown, pollinated, cultivated, harvested, and in production in the hinterlands of the São Francisco. It represents a recent and sensitive past of Brazil's contradictions, paradoxes, and challenges as a sovereign, civil, and socially referenced nation. A country whose history, both in cities and in the countryside, needs to be further deepened, understood, and studied.

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