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Promotion of contentious agency as a rewarding movement strategy: evidence from the MST-paper industry conflicts in Brazil

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Abstract

The recent scholarship on social movement outcomes has called for explanations about how movements influence economic outcomes. This article demonstrates in practice how a dynamic and relational approach, coupled with a Bourdieuan analysis of social, symbolic, and territorial space, can be utilized in explaining the influence of movements in contentious politics around investment projects. Based on participant observation and comparison across the Brazilian Landless Movement (MST) groups in areas of paper industry expansion, I assess the different movement strategies and their influence on pulp project outcomes. I reinterpret the ideal 'MST model' as constructed by specific strategies promoting contentious agency: organizing and politicizing, campaigning by heterodox framing, protesting, networking, and embedded autonomy vis-à-vis the state. A Qualitative Comparative Analysis comparing the expansion of 13 pulp holdings between 2004–2008 shows how these strategies influence investment pace. When both contentious and conventional strategies were used, movements managed to slow pulpwood plantation expansion.

Keywords

- [strategy](#),
- [land conflict](#),
- [MST](#),
- [social movement outcomes](#),
- [paper industry](#),
- [Brazil](#)

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Introduction

In this article, I argue that particular movement strategies foster contentious agency, which can markedly influence economic outcomes in investment conflicts. Formation of agency and the political games where economic outcomes are defined are greatly influenced by the strategies and relations of movements, targets, and the state. What strategies secure continuity and success, even relative and transitory, for social movements? How do movements produce a growing sense of agency and self-worth, encouraging people to contest issues and seek major transformations? To answer these questions, I build on Bourdieu ([1990](#), 113–114, 1991, 43), who maintained that the structure and positioning of agents and change in society always takes place as simultaneous, relational shifts and transformations in the social, symbolic, and territorial spaces. I assess how the (ideal) social, symbolic, and territorial system of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST) emerges, solidifies, and fosters contentious agency—*sem-terra habitus*¹ in this case—while clashing in the contentious episodes occurring over pulp investment projects.

The Marxist dialectic tradition, where ‘Peasants make their own history, but not just as they please’ (McMichael [2008](#), 205), and Karl Polanyi’s ([2001](#)) work on the double movement dynamic between the expansion of market capitalism, and the reaction of civil society to that expansion, are precursors for explaining how movements influence economy. The recent scholarship on peasant movements has argued that autonomous, food sovereignty-based innovative movements such as the MST and La Vía Campesina have the potential to challenge the dominant model of large-scale, capitalist, and export-based agriculture (Wittman [2009](#), Martínez-Torres and Rosset [2010](#), Schneider and Niederle [2010](#)). I assess these claims on the movements’ capability to counter capitalist expansion and commodification through a systematic comparison across closely observed pulp conflicts, which are cases of resistance to corporate resource exploitation by the MST, La Vía Campesina, and their allies. The pulp project resistance has not been studied, even though it is central to the latest MST developments.²

The latest contentious politics research has argued that movement outcomes are the fruit of many simultaneously utilized, concatenating, and intersecting strategies, processes, and dynamics, where targets and third parties also play key roles (McAdam *et al.* 2001, Soule [2009](#), Silva [2009](#), Luders [2010](#)). Within this dynamic and relational approach, I develop the consideration of specific strategies and techniques of mobilization whose assessment, Hobson ([2003](#)) and Goodwin and Jasper ([2004](#)) argue, has been absent.

This research is based on the ethnographic case study approach, which has been a natural base for the analysis of environmental, natural resource-related conflicts (Lewicki *et al.* 2003) as well as regional, Latin American social movement-related rural conflicts (Seligmann [2005](#), 233). A strategy of collecting rich empirical material, typical of participant observation, makes it possible to develop innovative theories and ideas by induction. The methodology included process-tracing, triangulation, discourse analysis, media analysis, semi-structured interviews, and a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) of empirical cases on a large set of dependent variable outcomes, political games and movement strategies. One hundred semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2004–2009 with the key informants in MST-paper industry conflicts in Brazil and Europe, with governmental officers, company directors and social movement activists; in business and state offices, encampments, settlements, rural and indigenous communities and towns, and particularly in pulp investment areas.

Research material collected by participant observation and in-depth interviews was ordered into a dataset by a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) of resistance influence on the economic outcomes of all (13) Brazilian large-scale pulp projects between 2004–2008. The QCA methodology, developed by Ragin (1987), utilizes Boolean algebra to produce truth tables that allow for drawing causal inferences on a large number of explanative variables (strategies here) in a small N comparative case study. Although well known, QCA has not been widely used, as most social scientists opt for either non-systematic qualitative analysis or quantitative analysis instead of attempting to fit small numbers of cases into rigorously systematic analyses of key variables (McAdam *et al.* 2001, 81). The technique allows the analysis of multiple causation and interaction effects. Ragin (2009) writes:

Boolean methods of logical comparison represent each case as a combination of causal and outcome conditions. ... The goal of the logical minimization is to represent – in a shorthand manner – the information in the truth table regarding the different combinations of conditions that produce a specific outcome.

The research applies the methodology and provides truth tables for the 13 investment cases. As this is a logical and not a statistical technique, the comparable variables (in this case strategies) can have only two values (1 = active; 0 = inactive).

There were three main reasons for adopting this methodology. First, I had a relatively small number of cases (N = 13), which made it hard to perform a quantitative analysis. Second, I wanted to make a comparison of different strategies and their relation to economic outcomes as comprehensive as possible. This technique answers both of these calls. It alleviates the small N problem by allowing inferences to be drawn from the maximum number of comparisons that can be made across the cases under analysis. Third, QCA fits well with strategy analysis, as strategies are best understood as being active (1) or inactive (0). The traditional QCA followed here does not allow evaluating the strengths of variables, or their probabilistic, statistical explanatory power, but relies on logical inference based on induction. In the case of variable-based research this is a problem; in a strategy- and process-based analysis this does not matter. Normally QCA has been applied to variable-based research; the methodological novelty here is to apply it in strategy and causal process analysis.

The MST, contentious strategies, and pulp investment outcomes

At dawn on 4 April 2004, MST activists cut the barbed wire leading to a eucalyptus plantation of the paper pulp company Veracel Celulose in Southern Bahia; these activists stepped in, uprooted four hectares of eucalyptus, and planted beans and corn. The movement justified this action of 3,500 landless workers by noting that, ‘you cannot eat eucalyptus’ (*O Globo* 5 April 2004). The protest was disruptive and aimed to transform public opinion on pulp investments and industrial plantations: ‘To cut the eucalyptus of a paper and pulp multinational is a symbolic gesture as was, some years ago, the destruction of a transgenic soy field in Rio Grande do Sul’, explained a movement coordinator (*O Globo* 6 April 2004). The response to the occupation and its results were swift. The government promised to appropriate 30,000 hectares of land for MST families in the region in which Veracel operates, and thus the landless left the plantation (*O Estado de São Paulo* 9 April 2004).

The Veracel occupation of 2004 managed to slow down plantation expansion, and several MST settlements established on the lands gained in the protest are now standing proof of this. Without the protest, these lands would have turned into eucalyptus plantations for Veracel, as the company was just about to plant trees in

these areas. Due to this successful outcome, other MST groups around Brazil continued these protests, and other civil society actors aligned themselves with the MST's framings and campaign by creating ties with the movement and replicating its strategies. I offer evidence suggesting that this has led to further cases of plantation expansion slowing, especially since 2007 and in the latter half of 2008. The expansion of plantations has not only been slowed or discontinued, but the lands saved from eucalyptus have also been earmarked for 'food sovereignty' and 'ethical' uses that the MST stipulates.

Besides the need to understand the politics of pulp investment, there is also a wide body of research that gives an impetus to scrutinize in detail the contentious strategies of the MST. The scholarship on the relation of civil society and the state in Brazil (Abers [2000](#), Dagnino [2002](#), Avritzer and Wampler [2004](#), Dagnino *et al.* [2006](#)), has argued that movements do best in the current political environment if they collaborate with the state but leave room to protest. Protests have a long history as effective political tools in Brazil, and they have gained currency particularly after the 1984 democratization (Avritzer [1994](#), Keck [1995](#), Dagnino [2002](#), Hochstetler and Keck [2007](#)), peaking in 1997 (Ondetti [2008](#)).³ The earlier research on environmental policy and conflicts in Brazil by Hochstetler and Keck ([2007](#)) emphasized how an amalgam of routine and contentious actions has led to the desired outcomes. Meszaros ([2007](#), 5) goes even further, arguing that the success of the MST has been borne exactly by the more contentious strategy its leaders created:

In fact, the alternatives had been tried and found wanting. The MST was born of a strong sense of past failures, including the assassinations of rural trade union leaders, the glacial pace of land reform, and the excessively debilitating legalistic culture of existing rural organisations.

The empirical evidence presented here on the dynamics and outcomes of the MST-paper industry conflict support these arguments. Joining the effort of Wolford ([2003](#)) and others to explain what happens after individuals join the MST, the article sheds light on a number of issues not considered before. Where for Wolford ([2003](#), 514) 'the MST's ability to maintain participation turns on its presentation of the movement as the primary mediator between a cruel State and its members', I argue that crucial participation-boosters are strategies that endow contentious agency and influence the 'structures'. The claim made by Wolford is a part of my explanation, but it alone cannot explain the success of the MST—or the variety between pulp conflict outcomes and the local MST groups compared here. An analysis of various key strategies can explain the differences. Thus, I analyze the ideal MST model as being formed by five concatenated strategies: (a) organizing and politicizing, (b) campaigning by heterodox framing,⁴ (c) protesting, (d) networking, and (e) embedding vis-à-vis the state whilst maintaining autonomy.

The analysis of the last strategy (e) builds on the significant debate about autonomy in peasantry and Latin American social movements, with some arguing movements have been co-opted by state engagement, and others that a more nuanced view is needed, also as the state context for embedding has changed (Alvarez *et al.* 1998). Hellman ([1992](#)) illustrates how Latin American social movements generated a 'fetishism of autonomy' in fear of losing their identities. It has been a long process since then for the movements to rework their relations with the state. Fox ([1993](#)), studying food policy in Mexico, argued for a theoretical framework focusing on reciprocal interaction between actors inside and outside the state. Evans ([1995](#)), studying industrial transformation in Brazil, showed how these actors are often embedded and play multiple roles. Borrás ([2001](#)) continued going beyond the dichotomous views, arguing that redistributive land reform can be implemented in

a politically hostile situation when initiatives by state reformists 'from above' positively interact with social mobilizations 'from below'. The findings in this article confirm these claims, and continue developing the interactive framework of Fox and Borrás, flipping and utilizing the concept of 'embedded autonomy' by Evans (1995).

The truth table (see [Table 1](#), page 440) on the movement strategies and correlating outcomes suggests that the movements' ability to maintain internal control and influence the public and state officials—the strategies by which they are able to self-propagate—are central in explaining the outcomes. By studying strategies, one can explain why the resistance to pulp investment has slowed plantation expansion. Next, I outline one by one the strategies that create the ideal 'MST model' and influence economic outcomes, providing empirical accounts from the pulp conflict cases.

Organizing and politicizing within the MST

The MST model is based on a strong organizing and politicizing of those who enter the movement. Contentious agency can be promoted by transforming the structural positions, that is, by creating an alternative social space, a new organization. Within the MST's organization, movement 'members' live in a social space quite different from the Brazilian society's dominant social space.⁵ Organizing and politicizing positions people in ways that allow them to participate daily in movement activities. The coordinators encourage and ask campers and settlers to act in sectors (like health, education) and at different levels (base unit, brigade, state, national, transnational), changing their positions frequently. The aim is to form an effective positioning grid to strengthen the organization, a pyramidal structure permitting both bureaucratic and ideological steering at the top and local initiatives at the base. As contradictory as it might sound, this strategy aims for promoting both a direct democracy and a hierarchical and bureaucratic movement.⁶ When positions are rotated, work within sectors fosters capacity for personal agency in many fields, which supports contentious agency.

From camps to settlements

After a typical period of camping for three or more years, the campers pass into agrarian reform settlements. This is a crucial moment. The spirit of solidarity, material scarcity and harsh conditions, suffering under the plastic bag shacks, cold water, severe weather, bugs, insecurity, mud and dirt, and the feelings of brotherhood and a shared struggle in the camp, turn into something new. People obtain land and state loans to build housing and increase production. At this point, some opt not to continue within the MST, as they have acquired land. The MST's goal is to assure that this does not happen. It does this principally through politicizing ideological and emotional practices (strategy a) and ethical, heterodox framing (b) that aims to tie people together, fostering a shared agency in protest acts (c), and allowing activity in society (d) and the state (e), whilst requiring activism, loyalty, and autonomy.

The MST cuts pieces of the territory and builds movement structures in these spaces: settlements, camps, land occupations, roadblocks, marches and squats, the visible territorial space of the MST. Indeed, space is a central element in the MST's trajectory: the movement focuses on territorializing a physical and social space with an alternative organization and ideology. Because settlements were formed in the process of land conflicts, the struggle lives on: for Medeiros and Leite (2004, 47–9) these are the reason for the formation and continuity of the MST. Guidry (2003, 190), who has studied space, citizenship and social movements in Brazil, argues that

space is essential: 'movement success means changing how people conceive of equality in the spaces of everyday life, work, and leisure, as well as making new conceptions of equality tangible and concrete in everyday spatial practice'. Daily rural practices, such as planting and harvesting, working on the land and within the movement-marked territory, allow for an interlinking of territorial, social, and symbolic practices to create a radical alternative.¹⁴ These acts are essential in the promoting and diffusing of a contentious habitus. The following case illustrates how this works in practice.

Example of a pulp conflict in Rio Grande do Sul

In May 2008, more than 1,200 MST families camped next to Southall farm in Rio Grande do Sul. Aracruz Celulose had announced its intention to buy this massive property, but INCRA, the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform, had already marked the area as suitable for agrarian reform. The MST aimed to pressure the state government to expropriate the land and to protest against the eucalyptus plantation expansion. I was in the area during this event doing field research. My intention was to arrive at this massive camp and see the scene at the spot of contention. Alas, my plans changed, as the episode quickly evolved into a potentially bloody clash.

The governor of the state, Yeda Crusius, ordered the *Brigada Militar* forces to surround the camp—an area of 16 hectares officially bought by INCRA—and block the entrances and exits to the camp. More than 1,800 police with full riot gear surrounded the camp. The police started to check everybody and arrested all who had a police record, for example, if one had not voted in elections (it is compulsory to vote in Brazil). Six militants were arrested. As a supporting protest and pressure, the MST groups in Rio Grande do Sul organized roadblocks in 15 municipalities. I was in the Nova Santa Rita settlement observing as the MST farmers blocked the federal highway next to their settlement.

In a very alarming and potentially violent subsequent decision, the governor declared a state of emergency in the 15 municipalities where the MST had roadblocks. If the MST had continued the blocks, the local courts could have ordered the *Brigada Militar* to intervene and clear them violently. However, because of the pressure exerted by the MST around the state, by simultaneous roadblocks and mobilization of an army of lawyers and high-level politicians, such as the Minister of Justice Tarso Genro (elected governor in 2010), Crusius ordered the *Brigada Militar* to withdraw. This kind of organized pressure would have been hard to create and maintain without active ideological congruity and diffusion promoting strategies.

The MST activists demonstrated their lack of fear of the authorities during the roadblock. They shouted to police cars running by, 'Go spend the state's gasoline, go'. I wondered why the ordinary citizens did not just come and clear the roadblock. The settlers replied that the public, not to speak of the *latifúndio*, are far too afraid of the movement to do anything.¹⁵ The MST members used the roadblock to take hold of the territorial, symbolic, and social space, demonstrating they have just as much of a right to occupy it as the state or any other actor. Some people affected by the roadblock questioned the MST's rights to do what they were doing, saying, 'There are no laws' or 'no justice in this country', to which the settlers responded, 'Yes we have justice in this country, justice for the rich'. According to one settler active in the roadblock, the protest showed society that, 'we are united and can occupy the road or whatever space'. In this way, the MST demonstrates and attempts to disseminate contentious habitus to the society, to other spaces, not only within its ranks. Next, I

will analyze the politicizing practices that accompany spatial acts, and after that, campaigning by heterodox framing.

Politicizing practices

Roadblocks and other almost daily politicizing practices are much more than struggles for the social and territorial space. They are personal experiences around which power relations revolve; they are 'empowerment medicine' for those dominated in the society up to the point of denying their own subjectivity, agency, and political potential. They are struggles in the symbolic space. 'This is a continuous fight', a young male settler explained, waving the MST flag on the roadblock. He wanted to emphasize that 'protest acts are not individual episodes, but a continuum'. Perhaps he was trying to say that protests are signs of underlying movement strategies being utilized and developed.

The movement seeks a change in people's behavior and symbolic systems through daily, politicizing practices, such as collective laundries, kindergartens, and other practical tasks and social gatherings, alongside discussions of new values. The politicizing practice of *Mística* is one of the most marked and essential rituals. According to the movement psychoanalyst Pertti Simula (various interviews, MST SP, 2007–2009), without mystical, strongly emotional rituals, the MST would not have the contentious force it has. *Mística* is extremely important as a clue uniting radically different people together, not only through the struggle for land within the MST, but also internationally in La Vía Campesina (Martínez-Torres and Rosset [2010](#), 164). The struggle of the movement gains depth through these practices. Practices also follow Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. For example, the schoolbooks of the MST portray how one stick breaks easily, whereas many sticks together do not break (see Cerioli and Broilo [2003](#)). Through this politicizing, Brazilian *indivíduos* become *peçoas*. Many proclaimed to me how happy they were since becoming 'conscious of concepts', 'aware', 'hungry for information'. These are transformations in the symbolic space.

Territorial dispossession, which many people in the camps and settlements have experienced, relates to symbolic violence inflicted in the social space and felt personally as very low self-esteem. This makes territorial dispossession of lands easier, because one does not conceive of one's own power or potential for agency. In such cases, land is not conceived as a right of all citizens, but rather, a consequence of possible citizenship that the person with low self-esteem feels he/she can never attain. For example, in the region of Extreme South of Bahia, eucalyptus expansion has pushed those people who do not fit into the model of paper pulp production into landless movements and other agrarian reform schemes, or into the periphery of cities. 'We feel like the rest, like we were the rest for Veracel', an ex-construction worker of the company in the *Rosa Luxemburgo* MST camp sadly said (interview, MST Bahia, 26 July 2006). This type of territorial, symbolic, and social exclusion and violence offers good breeding ground for Polanyian counter-movements to pop up—given that politicization and other strategies are used by activists.

However, in the creation of a utopia—and making people strive for this utopia—simple politicization is not enough. Leaders and militants need to direct the newly politicized participants into acting for a particular cause. By itself, organizing and politicizing creates rebels without a cause. Coupled with campaigning by heterodox framing, this strategy directs rebellion towards a certain goal. Together organizing, politicizing, and campaigning create rebels with a cause. In the campaign at hand, critiques of a large-scale pulp project start to

gain allies within the civil society and the state, who also frame eucalyptus expansion as the root of the landless plight.

Campaigning by heterodox framing

Campaigning by using heterodox framing is a prime strategy to gather, foster, and direct grievances. Campaigns are composed of frames. Heterodox framing is an act of spreading contentious ideological content within a movement. A mass social movement such as the MST can separate functions to ensure participants follow strategic shifts efficiently. Some focus on campaign and frame creation (leaders), others on spreading them to the camps and settlements (coordinators). Meaningful, directed campaigns can unite the many currents within a movement. They may also bring local populations closer to the heterodox framing, which helps to attain the campaign outcomes, even if people are not sympathetic to other aspects of a movement.

The MST has had a strategic shift from a narrow agrarian reform focus to a more general contestation of multinational capital. In 2007, reflecting this change in attitude in 2004, the movement vanguard Stédile argued, 'Our enemies are the agribusiness, the transnational companies, the banks and the financial market' (*Letraviva* 2 August 2007). Another MST leader, Ana Hanauer, explained why the movement started to campaign against large-scale eucalyptus plantations and pulp projects, without intentions to negotiate or end the conflicts: 'you do not sit at the table of the enemy ... we have no other option than to fight' (interview, MST RS, May 2008). Such campaign framings flow from the master-ideologies movements adopt. In large-scale resistance campaigns focusing on corporate resource exploitation in Brazil, the master ideology was first liberation theology. After democracy, this expanded into a political ecology master ideology, as Rothman and Oliver (2002, 128) found by a case study of a South Brazilian dam resistance movement. Anti-monoculture campaigns are part of the political ecology ideology and later food sovereignty paradigms.

Effective framing should be based on ethical and moral grounds, and not only aims to bring the challengers to the table, but offers a good alternative proposal. The MST's campaign against the large-scale pulp model has followed a typical strategy of La Vía Campesina 'to occupy and defend political space, and then rapidly move the debate out of the merely 'technical' realm onto a moral terrain of "right and wrong"', which has proven an effective strategy (Martínez-Torres and Rosset [2010](#), 163). In view of the MST national coordination, the anti-eucalyptus monoculture and anti-large-scale pulp production campaign, and the promotion of food sovereignty, small-scale pulp mills, and varied and distributed fibre sources as an alternative, has resulted in a

general debate on and attention to the green desert after April 2004: we have had actions against the large-scale pulp industry since 1994, but these have not managed to break the silence. These were acts without impact – which are the same thing as not to do them. It is important to do something to generate attention. (interview, MST São Paulo, September 2006)

In the Veracel occupation, the *sem-terra* activists cut down eucalyptus, a new symbol in an old struggle for land, and framed it as a threat to food sovereignty. This symbolization effectively led to some social reappraisal, in Brazil and transnationally, of eucalyptus and land as symbols of widespread clashing phenomena, such as the land question of the global South, landlessness, dubious monoculture plantation expansion, and contestable pulp investment. The territorial occupation linked to symbolic space in which the *sem-terra* activists set the real world moving by symbolic reframing.

When campaigns lead into active protesting, the heterodox frames become truly activated. Then they start a more meaningful, directly experienced travel across the movement and the impacted society. Organizing, campaigning, and protesting overlap and interlink. When protests are massive, disruptive, and re-symbolizing, they are more likely to generate attention, as the next section argues.

Protesting

Earlier social movement literature convincingly shows there is a strong correlation between the use of disruptive tactics and contention outcomes (Gamson [1990](#)). According to Piven and Cloward ([1978](#)), disruption is a more successful tactic than moderation for poor people's movements. This claim stands in contradiction to Robert Dahl's classic findings. Based on the Brazilian pulp conflicts, both Dahl and Piven and Cloward were right and wrong. The MST's protests aim to dramatize a public demand and bring state authorities to the bargaining table in a situation where embedding in the state (strategy e) does not reap results or is in need of political support via direct land conflict pressure. Pulp conflicts suggest that moderation and disruption together lead to better outcomes from the movement viewpoint. Protesting against pulp projects has been a way to bring state authorities to the negotiation table, and to gain leverage in the routine political games around pulp investment.

For the MST, disruptive protesting has also been a conscious attempt to experiment with new, unforeseen protest types. The first pioneering act was the April 2004 Veracel occupation. The second was the 2006 Aracruz tree laboratory destruction in Rio Grande do Sul. The third was the 2008 occupation of Stora Enso plantation in the same state. The tendency has been for the acts to become progressively more contentious. The more pioneering the act, the greater the efforts required. Furthermore, a rise in the level of contention leads to higher risk for the movement and its members. In developing new protest types, leaders are closely following how different types of disruption influence the effectiveness of more conventional strategies (interview, Kelly, MST SP, 14 December 2009), such as state embedding whilst maintaining autonomy (strategy e) and networking (d).

The first massive (3500 activists), pioneering, nonviolent, symbolic protest aiming to reframe a pulp project was the 2004 Veracel occupation. Also the Aracruz act of 2006 was a pioneering protest: the women of Via Campesina decided to mark 8 March as a particularly important day of struggle, and for this reason they 'needed to utilize innovative and highly disruptive methods' (Interview, Kelly, MST SP, 14 December 2009). The goal was to 'cause damages to the company, to open a debate, and mark a difference'. The act was a conscious experimentation with new methods (destruction that caused a direct loss of about 200 million reais to the company). It involved new elements in both its outer look and inner planning. The new protest methodology attempted to avoid the assimilation of protesting, the softening of the cutting edge of the disruptive strategy (interview, Kelly, December 2009). MST Women sector coordinator Kelly explained that the assimilation happens easily. In the 1980s, to occupy land was a radical act. In 1997, the National March was a novelty, whereas occupations had become a normalized, assimilated part of the political game—many saw them already as 'routine politics', even though the landholding antagonists see them still as 'illegal invasions'. Two years later in 1999, a similar National March, a replication of the protest form, no longer received the same attention. In this line of contention, the April 2004 Veracel occupation was the first pioneering act, and it

created enormous public interest. In fact, novelty, the pioneering quality of the protest act, appears to be very important, at least in the pulp cases observed here.[16](#)

The MST has many different types of protests, all of which have a particular meaning. The Red April protests have a different methodology than the 8 March Women's Day acts. The former focus on creating pressure and negotiation leverage (so these come coupled with the active use of embedding), whereas the latter are openly hostile and do not even seek negotiation. The 8 March protests 'seek direct confrontation and are very important for the formation of the women' (interview, Kelly, December 2009). The acts involve a small leadership, secrecy, and non-violence, but attempt to cause considerable economic losses and the loss of reputation (*desgaste, prejuizo*), business reliability and performance for agribusiness corporations. However, all the different protest types aim for the same broad goals: to foster a contentious habitus; land reform; food sovereignty; agroecological, right livelihood-based rural development; and a change in the targeted industry's investment pace and style.

Protests must be understood relationally. Adding a new protest type into the strategic toolkit changes the rules of the interactive, dynamic political games around investment policy. In fact, pioneering protesting is a mechanism of contention based on periodical innovations in the types of collective action. If mechanisms are 'delimited sorts of events that change relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations' (McAdam *et al.* 2001, 24), change in mechanism quality leads into changes in outcomes. In fact, protesting has indeed led into the slowing of plantation expansion over a variety of pulp projects. However, as the Qualitative Comparative Analysis truth table will indicate, a slowing outcome occurred only if all the strategies a through e had been active simultaneously in the case in question. In addition to land conflicts, the MST also participates in conventional political games through networking and many forms of state embedding, to which I turn next.

Networking with allies

The MST model expands by the transmission of strategies and mechanisms creating it, by a networked replication. Leaders meet constantly with a plethora of Latin American, European, Asian, and transnational social movements, putting great effort into building a transnational network of allies. MST militants and leaders have increasingly supported the indigenous people in their disputes, offering new heterodox frames and protest types correlating with the frames. This has resulted in a considerable transformation in the pulp project attitudes of the indigenous people. On 19 February 2005, following the MST networking, the indigenous people in Espírito Santo turned to radical acts as opposed to their earlier negotiating with Aracruz. According to Luciana Silvestre (interview, São Mateus, MST ES, 16 June 2008), the Regional Coordinator of MST in Espírito Santo, the movement and the indigenous have had extremely close relations for years, their relations intensifying through purposive assemblies organized by the MST, co-operation, and mutual help in various situations. The change in strategy happened after all routine political means had failed to address the problems.[17](#) In an assembly, the Tupinikim and Guarani leaders proclaimed, 'We came to the conclusion that the Agreement with Aracruz did not manage to resolve our problems; on the contrary, it has caused us even more difficulty, generating economic dependency, division between *aldeias* and the weakening of our culture' (cf. MMA 2005, 68). The transformation of frame and agency was drastic: 'The struggle for land, which is also the fight for the physical and cultural existence of Tupinikim and Guarani will, from now on, be our principal

objective and we will not cease until we manage to totally recover our lands' (cf. MMA 2005, 69). They would no longer negotiate with Aracruz. The MST was there, and the strategies it offered were the best choice available. According to Winnie Overbeek (from the Federation for Social and Educational Assistance, interview, September 2007), the MST's solidarity with the indigenous movement was crucial: 'In the decisive moments of struggle by the Indians, the campesino movements were there'. It was a small step from the already established ties and sharing of similar territorial and social spaces with the MST (vis-à-vis a common enemy, Aracruz) for the two to organize joint occupations of export ports and eucalyptus plantations. This was a strategic and pioneering shift into campaigning by heterodox framing and protesting disruptively and symbolically, and brought the indigenous a victory in their land struggle, uniting the MST and indigenous people's symbolic systems by shared contentious agency.

The networking of the MST is crucial, as all other constituencies that join the struggle against a commonly framed enemy strengthen the resistance network against eucalyptus expansion. In September 2006, the indigenous cut and burned several hundred acres of the eucalyptus plantation of Aracruz Celulose (AC), 'and for two days the following December, they and about 500 MST members occupied the port through which AC and three other corporations export cellulose, costing them an estimated \$21 million', as NACLA (2007) elucidates. Based on various key informant accounts, the reasons explaining the new contentious stance were multiple, including the greater pressure placed by growing corporate agency imposed on the indigenous people, the organizing help and heterodox framing offered by the MST, and the willingness of the larger indigenous movement to change their strategies, as well as their allegiances. In 2010, President Lula da Silva approved the demarcation of over 18,000 hectares of land into Indigenous Lands in the municipality of Aracruz (Diário Oficial da União, 11 November 2010). The unlikely outcome turned the case into one of the most important victories of the indigenous movement in Brazil.

A similar case in Bahia suggests that the replication of contentious agency across movements may increase the possibility that state actors take the side of the movement. By 2008, the homeless of the region had organized into a homeless *sem-teto* movement integrated with the MST. I observed how their relations became closer between 2004 and 2008. One night in July 2006, the military police came and torched a roofless people's camp in Porto Seguro. The next day was a day of rallying: the MST came to support these people, and I went along with the folks of the *Lulão* camp in Southern Bahia, next to Veracel, where I was doing field research. The eviction was illegal, said demonstrators, as according to the law the police must give prior notice and make the expulsion during the day. The police act signified for the camp members that people who embrace power might burn down dwellings in the middle of a city without any threat of punishment. What is sure—I witnessed this all—is that such actions bring the historically distanced city-dwellers closer to the MST, encouraging the MST model to expand and integrate passive people. City workers with almost no previous contact with the kind of ideological and cultural elements incorporated by the *sem-terras* very quickly became interested in conversations and joined actions with the MST.

The transformation shared the same characteristics as the Espírito Santo case. First, people become homeless due to plantation expansion and inadequate housing policies by municipalities. Second, routine political means are found inadequate to address problems, and people face repression. Third, purposeful help and networking attempts by the MST in crucial moments puts the people whose social and territorial positioning is already close to that of the landless, but who do not practice contentious agency, into contact with heterodox

strategies of protesting and framing that will end up changing their habitus into fully-fledged contention. From September to October, one part of the sem-teto movement in Eunápolis occupied an area of Veracel. 'We will not leave before rules are established for the use of soil for this company. We want homes and not eucalyptus plantations', said Wedson Souza Santos, the president of the movement's Eunápolis association. The public prosecutor in the area, João Alves da Silva Neto, followed the occupation closely. Instead of the usual condemnation of occupations as invasions, the Brazilian state actor entered in a legal action against Veracel, accusing the company of predatory expansion: 'I will denounce the expansion this company has carried out by irregular licensing and false documents', the public prosecutor affirmed (*A Tarde* 14 October 2008). Both the Espírito Santo and Bahia replication cases suggest that the wave of contention has spread from the MST to other social movements and state actors, to which I finally turn.

The embedded autonomy with the state

In this section, I assess the relation between the MST and the state, and the general importance of embedding in the state whilst maintaining movement autonomy in promoting contentious agency. Classic social movement studies, for example the civil rights movement research in the United States, have argued that movements normally have to choose between state support and autonomy (Meyer [2004](#)).

Pulp conflict observation allowed me to induct four dynamic games of corporate resource exploitation-based politics, where important decisions influencing rural movements are made. These are land conflicts; electoral politics; ideological and identity politics; and institutional games. Corporations and movements use distinct but interactively linked strategies to influence economic outcomes via these games. For example, movements protest corporate land access through land occupations (land conflicts). MST members use voting power to counter corporate electoral campaign financing (electoral politics). Movements and corporations seek ideological and identity congruity and certification from state actors, especially the government (ideological games). Last, both movements and corporations seek to embed the state institutions and structures whilst maintaining autonomy (institutional and structural politics). The characteristic relation that allows the analyst to decipher the role of a movement in the last three interactive dynamics I call embedded autonomy by a movement. Together with protesting and corporate land access, embedded autonomy by a movement is even more directly interactively linked to the politics of pulp investment than the other contentious agency-forming strategies (organizing, campaigning, networking), which operate more closely within a movement, but are also not bound to internal dynamics.

It is impressive that state embedding has not jeopardized the movement's critical ideology and relative autonomy. I see this character of the MST as a type of embedded autonomy, developing and flipping the classic conceptualization of embedded autonomy by Peter Evans ([1995](#)). This is an addition to the literature on social movements. I argue that successful movements, such as the MST, manage to utilize embedded autonomy as a technique to achieve both state support and autonomy.

The MST has secured a pool of state resources by demanding, as citizens with rights in Brazil, access to schools, healthcare, agrarian technicians, and other state and legally guaranteed institutions. However, MST groups implant the state support within and by their own ways and spaces: there are strong regional variations in implementation. In general, the MST is relatively autonomous, as it can determine or negotiate the type of external intervention in its communities (Vergara-Camus [2007](#), 114).

The fact that the movement has been an active contestator of the Lula da Silva government's economic policies, whilst simultaneously embedding with it (by support in electoral politics, ideologically as an ally in the broader leftist block in Latin America, and institutionally and structurally by many MST militants positioned as Workers Party members and/or state actors), illustrates how the MST has not fallen into the role of a clientelist underling, that it is integrated as a political movement into a coalition or alliance with the government or the state, in spite of embedding. The ideological work of politicizing and heterodox framing are central strategies ensuring spatial autonomy, as this creates a particular symbolic system. By this, the MST limits incoming cultural traffic but extends its impact on state policies and public opinion.

The embedded autonomy of a movement relies on a fine balance between autonomy and embedding. The general movement embedding within the state is currently quite deep. According to a member of the movement leadership, Neuri Rossetto, (interview, MST São Paulo, 15 December 2009), the situation is such that a further embedding would make it difficult to foster and maintain a good network of allies. A further state embedding would result in fewer struggles and protests and in a higher importance given to negotiation instead of confrontation. This would compromise the other strategies, such as protesting. Thus, the national leadership does not encourage participants to strive for political power at the cost of losing autonomy.

However, autonomy also does not mean isolation. Many movement members have become experts embedded in the state. Professionalization has generated movement power by tying members into professional habitus categories and fields within the state—the movement has its own teachers, agronomists, technicians, cooperative bankers, nurses, accountants, administrators, politicians, and state officials—while retaining them within the movement ideologically and in practice. The increase in roles taken by movement members and increased access to the most varied fields has allowed the MST to enhance its embedded autonomy, and thus gain power. Building on Bourdieu's (1991) concepts of field and capital, in both theory and practice a movement can trade and create capital in more areas as its members gain a habitus accepted and proficient in those fields. This ensures embedded autonomy in practice. The MST has managed to spread its model and exert influence while keeping an eye on and control over incoming impacts and attempts at co-option. Professionalization of the MST members does not mean that the movement will turn into a formal or official organization. In fact, professionalization allows them to embed better with the official spheres of the state and the society, whilst maintaining the flexibility of a non-registered movement. State embedding is a tool for the MST, not a goal *per se*, but a strategy in the broader conflict with large landowners, in which the state is just one albeit important dimension. MST–state interaction should be studied within the dynamics of movements, large landholder/corporate agency, and the state, as the next section illustrates by a case study of INCRA-MST-pulp company relations.

MST–INCRA–Agribusiness Dynamics

Wolford (2010) suggests that the way the MST interacts with the state land reform agency INCRA is participatory democracy by default. I will complement her findings by discussing the influence of third parties, such as the powerful large landholders or agribusiness, and approaching the state dynamics as formed by political games where members, challengers, and subjects interact (following the dynamics of contention approach of McAdam *et al.* 2001). I contest Wolford's assessment on two issues. First, as this article has argued, civil society has not risen to a prominent position only due to the weakness of the state; this process

has been much more interactive. Contentious agency promotion by the MST has been even more important than the weakness of INCRA: the MST-brigade level variations in the activeness of strategies, the implementation of the ideal MST model, helps to explain in detail how particular MST-INCRA relations have formed.¹⁸ Second, my comparison across six states (Rio Grande do Sul, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, Espírito Santo, Pará) suggests that INCRA is not so weak and its role regarding the MST is not as simple as the assessment of the Paraíba state and the MST-INCRA interaction by Wolford (2010) suggests. Both of these issues can be addressed by moving from a state–social movement analysis towards a study of the dynamics between movements and corporations/landowners remediated by the state. An example from the eucalyptus plantation disputes in Rio Grande do Sul can illustrate the point.

In Rio Grande do Sul, under the label of *Poupança florestal*, Votorantim VCP approached small farmers to gain access to their lands in a eucalyptus plantation outsourcing scheme for a possible future pulp mill. Some settlers within the MST started planting eucalyptus for pulp companies in 2003, but this process stopped in 2007. According to INCRA, in the contracts, the farmer plants eucalyptus and cultivates it, and then the company hypothetically buys the production. Since 2006, Votorantim VCP signed 160 contracts with farmers from the MST's agrarian reform settlements, totaling 1,000 hectares. As INCRA discovered the existence of these contracts, the institute notified the farmers that they would withdraw the agrarian reform lots from those settlers who planted trees in the VCP scheme. According to the law, agrarian reform lands belong to the state for at least 10 years, after which the state might theoretically privatize land for farmers as private property, for which the farmer would have to pay (interview, Dietrich, INCRA RS, 14 May 2008).¹⁹ Mozar Dietrich, the superintendent of INCRA in Rio Grande do Sul, said that the institute followed Brazilian law in this case. When Votorantim found out that INCRA was charging them and their contracts as being illegal, the company lawyers visited the institute. After talks, VCP discontinued the illegal outsourcing program, explained Dietrich. INCRA also contacted the MST, asking them to discontinue tree planting for VCP. About 120 farmers cut down their eucalyptus plantations, many of which covered the whole area designated for the settler family to produce food. Under the illegal scheme, the families were becoming dependant on the corporation, had discontinued the planting of food crops, and were buying basic food from the markets, which was in complete contradiction with the ideas and laws of agrarian reform—for which reason INCRA had to act.

I visited many farms where the MST farmers had cut eucalyptus and were now using the land for agricultural purposes. Eucalyptus was still growing in some parts. 'It is a real nuisance and hard to get rid of, like a pest. After you have planted it, it grows again and again even if you cut it down and even if you turn the soil many times', said one farmer—the same story was repeated various times by others. However, the story was not unanimous: 40 of the original 160 MST farmers under Votorantim's outsourcing scheme resisted INCRA's notification. As a movement, the MST did not interfere by demanding that these farmers cut down eucalyptus. This is a sign that the movement, at least in this area, gives a high degree of freedom to members and settlements to decide what to do. Indeed, the MST does not have any legal means to force its members to do this or that, or a hierarchical coercive system to impose such measures.

It is the state, in the form of INCRA, which has a legal role as a state institute to regulate and order settlements and take disciplinary measures under the rule of law. In this case, INCRA was defending the MST—in most other cases I have observed around Brazil it has been the other way around. For example, in the 2004 Veracel protest, the MST demanded and assured more resources for INCRA. Companies and land grabbers acting on

the verge of legality can penetrate movements and gain the allegiance of peasants; state embedding comes in handy to both prevent and solve such problems. Embedding with state institutions presents the contentious agency formation with both challenges as well as opportunities and situations in which state actors that enforce laws may defend movements vis-à-vis the society (for example, against corporate intrusion). Furthermore, state embedding is essential in the struggle over the setting of institutions, laws governing them, state actor positions, policies, and ideologies: all of which are essential to investment policy. The MST embeds in all of these political games.

However, the other strategies (organizing and politicizing, framing, protesting, and networking) besides the conventional embedded autonomy are also important: they concatenate and are all needed for contentious agency promotion. If the ideological congruity is not assured by organizing, politicizing, and campaigning, or if there are no significant protest acts, embedding is of less importance. Indeed, without protesting, the more likely outcome is unchecked and rapid ‘agribusiness expansion’ (in the territorial, symbolic, and social space) that can even penetrate a movement aiming for agrarian reform. At least this is what the empirical evidence across 13 pulp conflicts presented next suggests. The movement gains from its positioning between ‘law and disorder’, as Hammond (1999) has brilliantly remarked. The MST can put a lot of pressure on state actors, as state actors are afraid of the potential proliferation of disorder; at the same time, the movement can argue for the rule of law due to conventional state embedding and networking.

Findings: relation of strategies and economic outcomes

It has not been possible to offer detailed descriptions of all Brazilian pulp conflicts and the strategies MST and other movements used in their political dynamics. Instead, I outlined a few illustrative cases to highlight the argument about the promotion of contentious agency as a rewarding movement strategy. The truth table below summarizes the larger QCA on 13 pulp conflicts, on which this article's evidence is based. On top of the table are the slowed or discontinued cases, on the bottom those in which plantation expansion has continued unchecked. The dependent variable (Y) measures the reversal, discontinuation, slowing, or unchecked continuation of plantation land expansion by paper companies.

Table 1. Contentious agency promoting strategies and plantation expansion in 13 pulp holding cases, 2004–2008 (Active = 1; Inactive = 0; C = Number of Protests).

Holding (and Brazilian state)						Y Plantation Expansion (Indicator: empirical proofs)
	A	B	C	D	E	
Aracruz (ES)	1	1	3 ⁷	1	1	Reversed (government gave the indigenous groups 18,000 hectares that Aracruz had planted with eucalyptus)
Veracel (BA)	1	1	1 ⁸	1	1	Slowed (MST gained 30,000 hectares of settlement promises; Veracel was ordered to uproot 47,000 hectares)
VCP (SP)	1	1	1 ⁹	1	1	Slowed (the resistance obtained a court decision to stop eucalyptus expansion in São Luiz do Paraitinga municipality; a municipal law restricted

Table 1. Contentious agency promoting strategies and plantation expansion in 13 pulp holding cases, 2004–2008 (Active = 1; Inactive = 0; C = Number of Protests).

Holding (and Brazilian state)	A	B	C	D	E	Y Plantation Expansion (Indicator: empirical proofs)
						plantation at Capão Bonito municipality) ¹⁰
Stora Enso,	1	1	1 ¹¹	1	1	Discontinued (the MST protests made the company decide to leave the state; INCRA did not concede license for the expansion of plantations)
Aracruz (RS)	1	1	2 ¹²	1	1	Slowed (MST gained over 13,000 hectares—destined for pulp plantations—for landless families)
Suzano (BA)	1	1	0 ¹³	1	1	Continued
VCP (RS)	1	1	0	1	1	Continued
IP,	1	1	0	1	1	Continued
Suzano,	1	1	0	1	1	Continued
Ripasa (SP)	1	1	0	1	1	Continued
VCP/IP (MS)	0	1	0	1	0	Continued
Cenibra (MG)	1	1	0	1	1	Continued
Jarí (PA)	0	0	0	0	0	Continued

⁷The MST-supported indigenous peoples and *quilombola* occupations and uprooting of large eucalyptus land areas 24 July 2007; Aracruz export port (Portocel) occupation by the MST and the Indigenous peoples 12 December 2006; the MST-supported eucalyptus land occupation by the indigenous peoples in Aracruz, burning and uprooting of eucalyptus 07 September 2006. There was also a eucalyptus land occupation in Teixeira de Freitas on an Aracruz farm 07 April 2008, but this did not have a pioneering quality but followed the 2004 Veracel occupation type, and was thus not counted.

⁸Eucalyptus occupation and uprooting on 25 hectares in Porto Seguro 04 April 2004.

⁹Occupation of VCP eucalyptus farm Fazenda Una in Taubaté 17 May 2004.

¹⁰ *Defensoria Pública do Estado de São Paulo* (2009).

¹¹Women's day occupation of Tarumã farm and roadblocks 04 March 2008.

¹²Southall farm protest and roadblocks around the state 22 May 2008; Aracruz eucalyptus breeding site destruction in Barra do Ribeiro 08 March 2006. Both of these were pioneering, new type protests.

¹³The local MST did a large eucalyptus land occupation in Teixeira de Freitas on Suzano farm (16 April 2006). However, this protest act was not of a pioneering quality, but closely resembled the April 2004 Veracel occupation. Thus, it did not qualify as a pioneering protest.

The following empirical indicators were observed (by participant observation and interviews) to decree whether strategies a through e were active in a given conflict, movement, and period: (a) for the organizing and politicizing strategy to be deemed as having been active, the movement in question had to have a visible territorial space in the form of camps or settlements *and* a revolutionary attitude amongst the participants; (b)

for campaigning against pulp projects to be active, the participants had to voice heterodox eucalyptus discourses; (c) for a protesting strategy to be active, I observed the number of directed, pioneering, re-symbolizing, disruptive, and massive (over 300 people) land occupations and other protests—even one protest counted; (d) for networking activeness, one of the following instances had to have happened: existence of a strong local coalition network directed against eucalyptus monoculture *or* replication of the MST model by other social actors in the area, *or* case-specific transnational networking (for example advocating with NGOs from the home country about the corporations in question); and (e) for embedding to have occurred in the given period, I observed for voting, promising social peace against demands, and the congruity of state actor discourses and decisions with the MST; for autonomy, I observed movement-controlled decision-making and utilization of external resources.

Based on the truth table, the most important factor for movement success is to utilize strategies a through e simultaneously. The table indicates that when a through e are active simultaneously, the economic outcome has been at least plantation slowing. From this, it can be deduced that the main process of contentious agency promotion will not produce its results if for example protest actions are taken away. The two Bahian cases, Veracel and Suzano, are interesting: in both, protests were utilized, but only in one case did this challenge slow the expansion of plantations. This anomaly can be explained by the difference in the quality of the protests: in the Veracel case, the protesting was pioneering; the Suzano act merely replicated the earlier protest.

A comparison between outcomes and active strategies suggests that embedding with the state apparatus, filing lawsuits, and utilizing a variety of official channels to file class actions denouncing pulp companies' illegal activities were pursued in all the cases where plantation expansion was slowed. Indeed, in almost all of the cases where plantation expansion has been slowed, discontinued, or reversed, this change was derived in the last instance from a sustained legal process in which movement strategies support the official process, wherein corporate actions are being investigated by officials in the state apparatus. However, legal decisions alone have not been able to curb plantation expansion. For example, Stora Enso decided to withdraw from Rio Grande do Sul mostly due to the contentious episodes, considering the state impossible to operate in due to the resistance (based on several interviews with company executives, 2005–2010). Judges, courts, attorneys, police, ministers, politicians, and other authorities have made decisions or new laws, given judgments, or left the companies without proper authorization, for which reason the expansion of plantations has been slowed. In all such cases, however, the initial investigator and framer of the pulp question has been the local resistance front, in which the MST has been crucial.

Observing temporal changes (I covered the dynamics of pulp investment since the 1990s but there is no space here to present these findings), embedded autonomy by a movement requires the prior construction of strategies a through d. To be able to embed with the state can be a goal of a movement, but it may also be that the movement gains sympathetic state actors even without conscious effort, when judges, prosecutors, and other officials adopt the movement's alternative framing and start to promote the goals of the movement as their own. If a powerful state actor in a given episode of contention adheres to the movement's framing, this is sufficient for success. For example, in the cases of Aracruz (Espírito Santo and Rio Grande do Sul), the Minister of Justice was the right person to embed with. In the case of Veracel (Bahia), judicial power (judges and prosecutors) turned increasingly to the side of the MST, even though executive and legislative powers did not.

It is interesting to note how routine politics need to be supported by contentious strategies for movements to gain leverage and their desired outcomes in the political games of corporate resource exploitation.

Concluding remarks

A Qualitative Comparative Analysis comparing the land expansion of pulp holdings in different regional contexts shows that movement strategies can explain the variation in plantation expansion outcomes to a great degree. During the research period, there was a growing government interest in pulp investment and a simultaneous spur in available state financing, which increased corporate agency. Against this backdrop of a worsening configuration of political opportunities to slow plantation expansion, the fact that there was more widespread slowing of plantation expansion in 2004–2008 compared to the pre-2003 period is an interesting and vexing empirical finding. This anomaly can be explained by a simultaneous spread in contentious agency promotion, primarily following the 'MST model', across some pulp holding areas.

I have studied the organizing and politicizing, campaigning by heterodox framing, protesting, networking, and embedded autonomy strategies that promote contentious agency, particularly if used simultaneously. I assessed the 'MST model' as an example of a contentious agency-endowing set of strategies. The model has not been fully operational everywhere, since the model is an ideal, and only sometimes have activists been able to construct it. Needless to say, the set of strategies and the ideal model are constantly changing due to political system fluctuations, activists' steering efforts, and changes in corporate resource exploitation tied to world markets and corporate agency.

Strategies support each other and overlap. These strategies concatenate: when organizing and campaigning are simultaneously active, then a movement is forming rebels with a cause. Campaigning supports organizing and politicizing (base construction), they overlap, come hand in hand and form the core of contention; in the case of MST's struggle they are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the promotion of contentious agency. If these are active, a movement can further boost its potential by conventional strategies such as networking. It can also embed directly in political games, aiming to influence outcomes via dynamic interactions within the state.

If the MST has visibly protested against pulp projects, maintaining an active contentious agency, the expansion of eucalyptus plantations has been slowed or even reversed. In comparison, if the MST has not organized resistance, plantation expansion has not been slowed to even the slightest degree. Therefore, there is a causal relation between conflict outcomes and contentious agency. In conflict cases where strategies a through e have not operated simultaneously, plantation expansion has continued unchecked.

The article defined the MST as an emblematic social movement constructed by specific strategies promoting contentious agency. The comparison of MST-paper industry conflicts clearly demonstrated the complexity of the relationships between land owners, state representatives, MST leaders, settlers, and encampment members, particularly by conveying concrete empirical examples. Regarding INCRA and the MST, the analysis showed the contextual and dynamic relationship between both, as it happens in practice.

These findings challenge the classic claim of Piven and Cloward ([1978](#)) that poor peoples' organizations are most effective when most confrontational, and least effective when conciliatory. In fact, if movements retain

autonomy, which Brazilian family farmers have done in some areas by diversifying rural livelihoods (Schneider and Niederle [2010](#)), and keep on protesting, their embedding with the state comes in as a rewarding long-term strategy for influencing natural resource policy. Embedded autonomy by a movement gives it access to multiple political games in which important decisions are made, and by which state institutions can actually be used to aid in internal movement autonomy from corporate capture, as the conflict of INCRA in Rio Grande do Sul with the MST and Votorantim VCP illustrated. Disruptive protesting ensures embeddedness does not become corporatist or clientelist.

In the field of movement and conflict scholarship, this article also presented an original methodological contribution, providing an organization and analysis of data gathered by means of participant observation and in-depth interviews through Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). The principal methodological contribution was that the QCA technique can be used to systematically disaggregate the causal relations between particular sets of movement strategies and economic outcomes throughout a relatively small sample of cases (N was 13). By triangulation and causal process-tracing, the analyst can find out specific qualities in strategies most effective in political games. In this direction, there was innovation on the description of the importance of novelty and pioneer initiatives to the functioning of the MST's protest mechanisms. The methodology also provided detailed explanations on the qualities important in organizing and politicizing, campaigning, networking, and embedding strategies.

Above all, the article emphasized and showed that protests must be understood relationally, answering to the calls for dynamics of contention-type research frameworks (McAdam *et al.* 2001, Silva [2009](#), Luders [2010](#)); the QCA methodology coupled with ethnographic case studies and process-tracing was a very helpful methodology within this theoretical framework. Future research should apply the theoretical framework developed here to other political systems, industries, and conflicts to assess whether the movement strategies identified here are even roughly generalizable as effective tools of contention.

The major findings were very important and exciting: namely that disruptive protest acts, combined with embedding within sub-national and municipal legislatures and courts while maintaining autonomy (even if this is indirectly by the latter adapting the former's heterodox frame), have contributed to a movement achieving its goals, even in the face of worsening political opportunities. In particular, this notion of embedded autonomy challenges strands of the literature—namely Piven and Cloward's ([1978](#)) claim that movements that separate themselves from the state fare best, and political opportunity-based explanations of movements and the MST (Ondetti [2008](#))—as well as more anarchistic, horizontal, and anti-state tendencies of contemporary activism.

The article provides a framework for assessing the importance of contentious agency in political games, and argued this is the marking trait of the ideal 'MST model'. When people join the MST and embrace its strategies, they generate a new sense of individual and collective agency, a *sem-terra* habitus. This does not happen automatically, but is conditioned by an interaction of personal histories and the relational territorial, symbolic, and social spaces where habitus is located, formed, and changes (Bourdieu [1990](#), 1991, 1998). Transformation towards contentious agency is most likely to happen in the contextual setting of encampment time, the period when individuals can become MST members. When a *sem-terra* activist (encampment member, settler or MST leader) wins land by collective actions, for example by campaigning against large-scale pulp projects, this can create contentious agency instead of passivity or conventional agency.

The comparison of cases supported the hypothesis that contentious agency (promoted for example by the usage of strategies a through e) probably leads to a more abrupt slowing of plantation expansion (greater areas, reversal of expansion by difficult-to-change decisions and policies). It also shows that contentious agency and strategies promoting it can be replicated to influence conflict outcomes. Transformations to investment pace and style were initiated when contentious actors became socially and territorially very close to each other. Bourdieu (1991) theorized that changes in the positioning of actors in social and territorial spaces leads into similar transformations in the symbolic space. Pulp conflict cases illustrated how the theory works in practice: the replication of contentious strategies can be seen as a significant change in central elements in the symbolic space of the investment-impacted populations. Furthermore, the symbolic space transformation by the change in strategy led into a simultaneous formation of contentious habitus.

If contentious agency falters, the main process resisting agribusiness expansion is routine politics. However, I am not aware of any case where state actors have curbed the expansion of pulp plantations independently of social movement pressure. In the future, as the Brazilian agricultural frontier begins to close, as Fernandes (2009) suggests, there will be an even more heated territorial dispute between the peasantry and agribusiness. The MST–state–agribusiness relations, whatever they are, should be assessed within these dynamics.

Notes

¹Bourdieu (1998) described habitus as socialized subjectivity. Bourdieu's agents socialize into a habitus, which regulates their actions but also defines who and what they are. Habitus is strongly relationally and contextually imbued.

²The non-food agribusiness and conflicts have not been studied nearly as much as agriculture-based industrial plantation expansion, so the focus on paper pulp projects serves also to widen the applicability of earlier research on non-food capitalist ventures and their resistance. Even though less crucial globally than food production, in some regions of the global South pulp production is the most important agrarian change phenomenon.

³For a socio-genesis of protest mechanisms employed by the MST, as well as its replication in several states of Brazil, see, for example, Fernandes (1996) and Sigaud *et al.* (2008).

⁴The concept of heterodoxy comes from Bourdieu's (1991, 277) distinction of orthodox and heterodox discourses.

⁵Sigaud (2005) questions the presupposition that the people within the MST would be MST members, calling for self-criticism, so that scholars would not reproduce movement leaders' worldviews where movement participants are labeled automatically as members. Rangel (2010) argues that the majority of the participants of mobilizations organized by landless leadership don't perceive themselves as members of the movement, but as being (momentarily) with the movements and maintaining a series of reciprocal obligations. The relational approach utilized here supports these claims in not placing central explanatory force on agency or subjectivity, but on the strategies of changing social relations, such as organizing and politicizing. However, my participant observation between 2004–2009 does not support generalizing Rangel's empirical findings.

⁶See Polletta (2002) for an explanation of why these two are not actually contradictory, but mutually supportive. For Wolford (2003, 507), 'Leadership in the movement is carefully structured to be as horizontal as possible and all offices are, in principle, occupied temporarily'. See also critical studies on the MST's internal hierarchy and problems (Martins 2003, Caldeira 2008, Navarro 2002, Graziano 2004).

¹⁴See Fernandes (1996) for extensive geographic research on the spatial dimensions of the MST.

¹⁵The fear is a product of the often demonizing image the Brazilian media creates of the MST (see Hammond 2004), lack of contact and knowledge with settlers and campers, and dominant class-based judgments people make on the landless people and echoes of disruptive and sometimes destructive protest activities of the movement (Macedo 2005).

¹⁶A generalization, however, cannot be yet made based on these cases, because variety in issue salience, and targets' and third parties' cost calculation, also influences the effectiveness of movement strategies (Luders 2010).

¹⁷For example, state-level laws banning further plantations that were overruled by the Supreme Federal Court and Parliamentary Investigations were never concluded. See the Ministry of the Environment report (MMA 2005) for a detailed description on the failed conventional political attempts.

¹⁸In studies of the MST, it is highly problematic but common to talk about 'the MST' based on only limited field research and comparison across the hugely diverse Brazilian rural mosaic. After intense participant observation across many Brazilian states, I suggest that not even the state level is a sufficient level of observation. One has to go even deeper, to the brigade level (the MST divides its state operations across different territorially bounded 'brigades'), and see whether the strategies were active there. There is huge variation in the way the local groups implement the ideal MST model.

¹⁹The MST is against the privatization of land, seeking collectivity and a scheme in which lands will remain state property, under the guidance and control of those who cultivate and live on the land. This way the movement avoids selling the land and speculation, and maintains the goals of sustained agrarian reform.

⁷The MST-supported indigenous peoples and *quilombola* occupations and uprooting of large eucalyptus land areas 24 July 2007; Aracruz export port (Portocel) occupation by the MST and the Indigenous peoples 12 December 2006; the MST-supported eucalyptus land occupation by the indigenous peoples in Aracruz, burning and uprooting of eucalyptus 07 September 2006. There was also a eucalyptus land occupation in Teixeira de Freitas on an Aracruz farm 07 April 2008, but this did not have a pioneering quality but followed the 2004 Veracel occupation type, and was thus not counted.

⁸Eucalyptus occupation and uprooting on 25 hectares in Porto Seguro 04 April 2004.

¹⁹Occupation of VCP eucalyptus farm Fazenda Una in Taubaté 17 May 2004.

¹⁰ *Defensoria Pública do Estado de São Paulo* (2009).

¹¹Women's day occupation of Tarumã farm and roadblocks 04 March 2008.

¹²Southall farm protest and roadblocks around the state 22 May 2008; Aracruz eucalyptus breeding site destruction in Barra do Ribeiro 08 March 2006. Both of these were pioneering, new type protests.

¹³The local MST did a large eucalyptus land occupation in Teixeira de Freitas on Suzano farm (16 April 2006). However, this protest act was not of a pioneering quality, but closely resembled the April 2004 Veracel occupation. Thus, it did not qualify as a pioneering protest.

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