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The subversive practice of counting bodies

Ricardo Barbosa Jr
João Roriz
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Ricardo Barbosa Jr, Univeristy of Calgary

João Roriz, Federal University of Goiás

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Universidade de Brasília – UnB

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International Institute of Social Studies

The Hague, The Netherlands

E-mail: information@iss.nl *Website:* www.iss.nl

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

Porto Alegre, Brazil

Website: www.ufrgs.br/

Future Agricultures Consortium

Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex , England

E-mail: info@future-agricultures.org *Website:* <http://www.future-agricultures.org/>

Universidade Estadual Paulista – UNESP

São Paulo, Brazil

Website: www.unesp.br

The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and
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E-mail: information@ranepa.ru *Website:* www.ranepa.ru

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E-mail: yejz@cau.edu.cn

Website: <http://cohds.cau.edu.cn/>

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The Netherlands

E-mail: tni@tni.org *Website:* www.tni.org

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University of the Western Cape

Cape Town, South Africa

E-mail: info@plaas.org.za

Website: www.plaas.org.za

Terra de Direitos

Curitiba, Brazil

E-mail: terradedireitos@terradedireitos.org.br

Website: terradedireitos.org.br

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Abstract

This paper appraises Pastoral Land Commission's (CPT) practice of documenting the violence and conflict that takes place in the Brazilian countryside. It seeks to conceptually explore CPT's subversive practice of compiling and publishing this type of knowledge and its emancipatory nature.

Keywords

Pastoral Land Commission (CPT); documentation; violence and conflict; countryside; Brazil.

Acronyms

CEDOC	Bishop Tomás Balduino Documentation Centre
CNBB	National Conference of Brazilian Bishops
CPT	Pastoral Land Commission
MST	Landless Workers' Movement

I. Introduction

Despite active efforts of concealment and spatial remoteness, the violence and resulting conflicts that take place in the countryside are well known to activists and scholars who engage with agrarian issues and against extractivist 'growth' across the world. Nevertheless, detailed and wide-ranging accounts of such violence are hard to come by. The one major exception to this is Brazil, where a key organisation has been collecting and sharing such data for more than 30 years. State-driven territorial development based on agro-extractivism has led to widespread violence and conflict in the Brazilian countryside. Despite this, rural social movements (*movimentos do campo*) and environmental activists (*militantes*) who mobilise against such processes had been limited to voicing their grievances and framing critiques regarding their personal experiences, anecdotal evidence, and moral arguments. Little or no systematic data on violence related to or caused by land and environmental disputes is available. This reality had changed since 1985 when the Pastoral Land Commission (*Comissão Pastoral da Terra – CPT*) began to publish an annual document called *Cadernos de Conflito no Campo* (Report on Conflict in the Countryside) that publicises data compiled on the various forms of violence and conflict in the Brazilian countryside. Amongst other practices, CPT compiles data, names perpetrators, and frames 'conflict in the countryside', hence, constructing a narrative that the Brazilian state chooses to obscure. We understand CPT's practice of counting bodies as a practice of resistance.

Brazil's agrarian landscape has been marked by a great concentration of land, the effects of which are still determinant today (IBGE, 2018). Dating back to colonialism, land inequality is one of the most persistent features in the formation of the Brazilian imaginary, society, and institutions (Moreira, 2011). The political economy of slaves and indigenous exploitation was only possible due to the concentration of land in the hands of an aggressive rural elite (Prado Júnior, 1971). The very core of the formation of Brazilian patriarchy dates back to the rural families in colonial times (Freyre, 2006) preserved after independence. Historically, the economy was based on large single owner production units, the *latifúndios*, usually dedicated to a single or just a few types of products, destined to the foreign market resulting in social inequality, structural violence, and economic dependence (Furtado, 2007).

After five centuries, the absence of land distribution has been a growing source not only of economic inequality but also social violence. Even though the struggle for land distribution could be traced back to multiple social movements throughout Brazilian history, during the mid-20th century, the demands for the agrarian reform became prominent and organised – alongside its repression. The formation of 'peasants leagues' (*ligas camponesas*) during the 1950s and 1960s gathered and mobilised large groups in a time of pronounced urbanisation and industrialisation (Welch, 1995, 2009). The Catholic Church and the Communist Party disputed political influence in rural areas and drew more public attention to inequality, violence, and conflict in the countryside (Martins, 1981, 2002). Nonetheless, even when compared to other Latin American countries, in Brazil agricultural modernisation fostered by both democratic and dictatorship governments did not result in any serious effort to end the *latifúndios* (Long and Roberts, 2009). Rather the *latifúndios* have been supplanted by agribusiness, configuring the new version of capitalism in the countryside and instituting new models of exploitation and expropriation (Fernandes, 2016). Rural social movements that organised were received with systemic violence by the large landholders (*latifundiários*) and by the state. The landless peasants who carried out land seizures demanding agrarian reform met great repression (Robles and Veltmeyer, 2015), especially during the Sarney (1985-1990) and Cardoso (1995-

2002) administrations. According to a commentator, this highlights the hybrid character of the Brazilian state: it is modern and rational in the cities and at the federal level, while clientelistic and violent in rural areas, where it does not recognise lawful land expropriation (Hammond, 2009).

Despite the large and enduring number of violence and conflict in the Brazilian countryside, the state does not address it as a particular issue. In the statistics formation of the country's administration apparatus there has not been a concern to treat violence and conflict in the countryside as a problem of its own; hence, no official data relates the violence and conflict that take place in the Brazilian countryside to the political demands of activists, social movements, and other civil society organisations.¹ Although Brazil has been built precisely upon this very issue before CPT began its efforts of documentation, the violence and conflict in the countryside had not been framed as such. We understand that the lack of statistics on violence and conflict in the countryside in Brazil is part of the way in which the state 'manages' the issue. When there are no specific numbers and no official data, violence and conflict in the countryside becomes a mere criminal matter, its numbers are gathered and reported amongst widespread violence. Thus, the state's effort depoliticises the matter by intentionally failing to recognise it as such. No connection is made to the grievances and social movements that demand agrarian reform, labour rights, participation in natural resource governance, and other social demands. It is a way to officially 'un-frame' violence and conflict in the countryside as a political matter.

In opposition to the states intentional oversight, CPT's efforts have primarily focused on framing the violence and conflict in the countryside as a political issue and have since become the foremost authority for data relating to violence and conflict in the Brazilian countryside. Still, while CPT's data informs a significant part of the research on the agrarian question in Brazil, the organization itself is rarely the object of analysis and remains mostly unfamiliar to the scholarly community outside of Brazil. More so, even within Brazil where select scholars have studied CPT (Felício, 2005; Mitidiero Junior, 2010; Pinto, 2015), this practice of documenting violence and conflict in the countryside has not yet been conceptually explored. To address such gaps, this paper has two primary objectives. First, to build on our effort of investigating CPT and presenting the organisation, its practice, and significance to the Anglophone world, and, second, to conceptually explore the organisation's practice of collecting and sharing data on violence and conflict in the countryside, the effects of this and its meanings. We do this in hopes of contributing to the creation of 'movement relevant theory' (Bevington and Dixon, 2005) that can be of use for both academics and activists.

This research is guided by the question: to what extent and in what ways does CPT's practice of documenting and publishing data on violence and conflict in the Brazilian countryside configure a novel technology of resistance? The question is addressed by advancing three efforts. We focus on the way in which the practice of documenting and reporting on violence and conflict in the countryside came to be and how it has developed through time, and the meaning of such practice for CPT and its members as well as the relevance of resulting data for others (i.e., academics; investigative journalists, human rights NGOs and watchdog groups; peasants, indigenous and traditional peoples and communities). The first two efforts are based on primary data we collected, which is then further extrapolated to support existing secondary sources that inform the third effort.

¹ The one official state entity once responsible for violence in the countryside was the National Agrarian Ombudsman (*Ouvidoria Agrária Nacional*) linked to the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (*Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária – INCRA*) created in 1999, which was closed via Decree 8.889 in October 26, 2016 – immediately after the *coup d'état* that same year.

In addition to this introduction and final considerations, this paper is divided in the following manner. First, we present the research design and describe the methodological procedures employed. Then we situate the theoretical background. Next, we report on CPT's method of documenting the violence and conflict in the countryside as a form of resistance. Last, we discuss and reflect on the main findings.

2. Research design and methodology

To move beyond very broad agrarian political economy approaches, that tend to simplify the role of diverse actors and neglect relevance of others, we seek to promote a discussion about CPT and its practice of documentation that centres the individuals affected by extractivist violence in the countryside. Namely, we show how CPT's practice of collecting, processing, and publishing data on violence and conflict in the countryside perpetuates the struggle of such activists even after they have lost their lives. Our goal is not to present results or findings from this archive, but rather explore the political act of documenting and archiving violence and conflict itself.

We seek to make use of an approach that explores what CPT has produced as a counter-discourse on what takes place in the Brazilian countryside that competes with the state's official discourse. As such our work draws on traditional Marxist Agrarian Political Economy understandings and frameworks but is likewise directed by what could be described as 'post-structuralist preoccupations'. We do this to help draw attention to and (to an extent) contribute towards, addressing some disciplinary oversights and gaps in hopes of further informing the field of Critical Agrarian Studies by expanding its analytical scope. As such, we centre our analysis on a key, yet often overlooked organisation, CPT, and try to understand how religion and faith have played a central role in their struggle and engagement with the so-called 'rural poor' (*pobres do campo*). For one, it has granted CPT and its members a privileged type of access to the rural poor by being in the communities with them and bearing witness to the atrocities and injustices they were subjected. It has similarly become a moral imperative that leads CPT to act politically even while also simultaneously protected and constrained by the Catholic Church. It has likewise offered a particular position and structure for engagement that has allowed CPT to become a vital actor that supports the struggle of the popular groups of the countryside without becoming the protagonist of such struggles themselves. Such concerns are explored by recognising CPT's practice of documenting the violence and conflict in the countryside as a strategy of denouncing injustices. To do this, we inquire into the motivations and reasons behind this novel 'technology of resistance', as well as the method itself. We also venture initial explorations of what the practice of documenting violence, conflict, and deaths means for actors beyond CPT (e.g., scholars, NGOs, international organisations, and others) as well as the activists that the organisation reports on. We are particularly interested in what it means to have the stories of the activists' struggles and even of their deaths documented and told.

This paper is based on ten in-depth semi-structured interviews with members of CPT National, its six board members² and four others (see Table 01 for details), conducted between November and December 2016 in Goiânia, Goiás – Brazil. In addition to this, we also rely on the documents CPT has produced and upon the work of commentators. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and coded with NVivo for content.

² For details see <<https://www.cptnacional.org.br/sobre-nos/organizacao-e-coordenacao>>.

Table 01 – Interview participants

CPT National					
#	Name	Role	Brief description	Date	Length
Board					
1	Enemésio Ângelo Lazzaris	President	Bishop of the Balsas Diocese in the State of Maranhão	04.12.16	57:22
2	André Marie Gerard Camilla de Witte	Vice President	Bishop of the Ruy Barbosa Diocese in the state of Bahia, has been with CPT for 40 years	05.12.16	1:46:36
3	Jean Ann Bellini	Coordinator	Has been with CPT for 40 years	17.11.16	2:00:27
4	Paulo César Moreira dos Santos	Coordinator	Was trained as a priest and has been part of CPT Mato Grosso for 20 years	30.11.16	1:47:02
5	Ruben Alfredo de Siqueira	Coordinator	Has been with CPT for 35 years, currently part of CPT Bahia	04.12.16	1:00:08
6	Thiago Valentim Pinto Andrade	Coordinator	Was trained as a priest and is part of CPT Ceara	06.12.16	1:29:49
Communication					
7	Antônio Canuto	Head	Founding member of CPT	07.11.16	1:22:02
Bishop Tomás Balduino Documentation Centre (CEDOC)					
8	Cássia Regina da Silva Luz	Head	Has been with CPT for more than a decade	29.11.16	1:30:02
9	Flávio Marcos Gonçalves de Araujo	Intern	Has a degree in History and was a Geography student, served as both the 'gatekeeper' and 'test interview'	10.11.16	1:00:57
Former members					
10	José Paulo Pietrafesa	Former member	Federal Univeristy of Goiás Professor, was a member in the 80s and 90s	14.11.16	1:47:56

Compiled by the authors (2016)

3. Creating meanings, framing discourses

3.1 *Placing the scale on the ‘small’: from ‘violence that happens in rural areas’ to ‘conflict in the countryside’*

While there is some divergence and multiple Development Studies approaches that influence Critical Agrarian Studies, the discipline has been largely formed by a focus on broad processes that tend to highlight the historical development of the structural concentration of land in countries like Brazil. Smaller scales of analysis are usually subsumed and therefore specific and novel actions of ‘small’ actors – when compared to the state – are not properly analysed. This means that key actors, like CPT, can be overlooked – which occurs because the focus is not on grounded processes, quotidian relations and events, nor subjective or moral dimensions. Broad framings have played a significant historical role and has allowed us to understand the ‘big picture’, by describing the principal processes and identifying the main actors who promote (e.g., the state and large agri-food corporations) and suffer (e.g., the peasantry, indigenous and traditional peoples and communities, and others) injustices in the countryside. While this informs our efforts as scholar-activists, it paints a picture in broad strokes.

As Marx (1978, p. 14) famously put it, ‘new knowledge arises out of taking radically different conceptual blocks, rubbing them together and making revolutionary fire’. Marx (1887) himself drew on the work of English political economists, German critical philosophers, and French utopian socialists jointly to write *Capital*. On this note, we look at Marxist Political Economy-based Critical Agrarian Studies and ask: what has been omitted, or plainly, what are we missing? To help us identify and address such gaps and oversights this research proposes employing preoccupations directed by the novelty and specificity of CPTs’ actions.

As a result, we draw on Marx and Foucault together.³ For those seeking to do novel research that supports change it can be valuable to have ‘post-structuralist preoccupations’ inform Critical Agrarian Studies. There are some key works in Critical Agrarian Studies that pointed towards this direction (see Li, 2009) as well as select examples from the recent scholarship (see Rocha and Barbosa Jr, 2018; Welch, 2018). While post-structuralism comes as a response to the often-deterministic structural ways of understanding the world, it is not necessarily antagonistic to the Marxist tradition and the two can be used complementary. It is important to recognise that post-structuralist ‘tradition’ is not as unified or consolidated as the Marxist one, yet it can be useful in and for Critical Agrarian Studies because of the ways in which it offers a different reading of the social world. Specifically, the extent to which it shows that reality consists of multiple diffused narratives and discourses that create meanings for a (narrated) world, and that this is determined through power relations.

CPT creates an alternative (or competing) discourse. We understand discourse in the Foucauldian perspective of “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment [...] Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But [...] since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect (Hall, 1997, p. 44). Hence, CPT creates meaning and tools to understand a specific aspect of reality by focusing on the power of telling, or, simply, on being able to tell stories. By placing CPT’s practice and voice at the forefront,

³ While it does not fall under the realm of Critical Agrarian Studies, Blom Hansen and Stepputat’s (2001) edited volume *States of Imagination* promotes a dialog between Gramsci and Foucault in the study of the state, mostly in the so-called Global South, and is an important example of the form this may take.

we begin to address their contribution to the production of a counter-discourse regarding the violence that takes place in the Brazilian countryside. They offer a different reading – and a different constitution – of the social world. We understand that CPT offers an alternative discourse when it questions the extent to which the state emphasises a preferred single story. By transforming ‘violence that happens in rural areas’ (state discourse) to ‘conflict in the countryside’ (CPT discourse), CPT unveils the power relations that had become naturalised to the point that we often fail to see them because we don’t perceive (meta)narratives as stories that we tell and are (re)told, but rather as (objectively) real.

3.2 *How choosing what counts allows one to govern*

Who chooses what gets counted, in what ways, and how does this allow one to govern? This matter relates to other points. For one, the power of telling stories and how this creates narratives, as well as how being able to tell counter stories allows counter-narratives to be created. And, correspondingly, the power-knowledge nexus (Foucault, 1972).

The craft of producing numbers and data about society is closely related to statecraft itself. According to Foucault (2007), it is a constitutive element of the modern state and its way of governing. From the 17th century onwards “the sovereign’s necessary knowledge (*savoir*) will be a knowledge (*connaissance*) of things rather than knowledge of the law, and this knowledge of the things that comprise the very reality of the state is precisely what at the time was called ‘statistics’” (2007, p. 354). The way to govern the population was no longer a subject exclusive to the privy of academics and lawyers nor of theoretical debates around prudence and virtue. Since knowing legal matters was not enough, states induced an administrative apparatus capable of compiling data and producing analysis and knowledge that would subsidise the practice of governing (i.e., governmentality). It became necessary to know the elements of the state, what were its contents and capabilities. The production of statistics – which is, etymologically, the ‘knowledge of the state’ according to Foucault – became the craft of the state itself, the knowledge of its strengths and material resources, such as population, army, natural resources, trade, and money.

The development of such tools of government changed through time. Methods of measuring, producing and controlling resources developed alongside a growing bureaucracy, initially in small states but later becoming a necessity to all rulers. The administrative apparatus became crucial to the formation of knowledge and the exercise of power: it was not only charged with executing orders or collecting wealth, but it produced knowledge which by its turn was essential to the exercise of power (Foucault, 2007). Throughout the centuries state bureaucracy tested many methodologies, formulas and approaches, all in the name of bureaucratic efficiency and rationalisation of the state. At the same time, the state became empowered by the same activity, as it became the sole entity capable of engaging vast resources to collect, process, and use wide-ranging, accurate, representative, and trustworthy data (Porter, 1986). As a ‘technology of power’ in the Foucauldian sense,⁴ statistics helped to determine the character of social facts and shaped ideas and classifications in social sciences (Hacking, 1991).

Not only is the production of knowledge crucial, but so is its management and concealment from others. There are historical examples of how social groups have used the data collected by the state to subvert the state itself. Because of this, those

⁴ For more on this see Behrent (2013).

who govern through the state have become more and more selective of what type of data they produce and make available.⁵ As important as the production of knowledge is its management, which includes its suppression. Statistics about the state and its subjects is crucial to governing and also to impede others from challenging such governance or governing instead. Foucault (2007) names one kind, what he calls the 'problem of the secret', which involves retaining data that could be used by the enemies and rivals of the state, such as the size of the army and the amount of the wealth a state has. In its management of populations and territories, sensitive knowledge should not be made public if it may jeopardise the rule of the state.

We understand that the Brazilian state's decision not to count bodies resulting from conflicts in the countryside – but rather to insist on just adding such numbers to the general crimes rate – is precisely another type of non-produced or non-disclosed knowledge. To put this another way, the state bureaucracy purposefully chooses not to quantify the body count resulting from conflicts in the countryside as such or at least no to publish it. The choice of what gets counted, and not, is an important, calculated, and eminently political one. It is in the Brazilian state's interests to not have data on violence and conflict in the countryside. The fact that an organisation such as CPT can undertake the monumental task of carrying out this process in a country of continental proportions such as Brazil is no small feat. As such, it is done purposefully and through great efforts. And, as we argue, it is done with the intent of shining a light and making political an issue that would otherwise be obscured by the state.

4. Documentation as a technology of resistance

4.1 CPT was born in a context of conflict to contribute

CPT was officially founded in 1975 during the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) in the city of Goiânia, Goiás, where its national headquarters is still located, and the fieldwork was carried out. Its roots can be traced back further to a group of priests, bishops, and laypeople lead by Bishop Tomás Balduino that came together to reflect on the kind of pastoral action the Catholic Church should take in the early 1970s during the Military Dictatorship (Zachariadhes, 2010; Balduino, 2011). As a faith-based organisation, the religious beliefs of CPT and its members impact their political actions. At that time, progressive clergy within the Catholic Church heavily influenced by Liberation Theology⁶ mobilised in defence

⁵ The changes made after Brazil's 2006 Agricultural Census is an example of this. The impact of having government data that showed how it was peasant and family farmers who produced the majority of the food eaten by Brazilians has lead the parameters by which different types of farmers are identified to change for the 2017 Census (IBGE 2018). For more on this see Mitidiero Junior, Barbosa and Hérick de Sá (2017).

⁶ CPT, and the other initiatives, arose in response to the Second Vatican Council at Rome in 1961-1962 that was reaffirmed in Medellin, Colombia, as Liberation Theology in 1968. Liberation Theology is a radical religious movement that arose in the late 20th century in Latin America as Christianity became influenced by Marxism (Gutierrez, 1988; Smith, 1991; French, 2007). It is a movement in which progressive expressions of the Church renewed their commitment with the poor by emphasising liberation from the various forms of oppression that needed to occur before the final salvation – through death. It is important to note that Liberation Theology is not a theology formed by the Church *for* the poor, but rather *with* the poor and through their struggles. In this sense, Liberation Theology is the outcome of a co-constitutive relation. Recognising how popular participation helped shape Liberation Theology reflects how CPT was formed and operates. The creation of CPT was not something that the Church did 'for the people', but rather the result of what progressive expressions within the Catholic and other Christian churches did together *with* the people.

of the rural poor who were suffering extreme violence at the hands of *latifundiários* (large landowners) and military dictators. CPT is thus born as a result of the commitment to the rural poor.

Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga was the first to speak openly against the *latifúndio* in his 1971 Pastoral Letter entitled 'An Amazonian Church in conflict with the *latifúndio* and social marginalisation'. Together with an analysis of the socio-geographical conditions, he reported on, identified by name, and denounced those who perpetuated extreme violence, he also called upon the Catholic Church to abandon its Eurocentric precepts and intervene in defence of the rural poor and against those who harmed them. Casaldáliga's call to action had great repercussions as it led the 'agrarian question', previously understood as something marginal, to become part of the Church's institutional discourse for the following decades. In this sense, CPT was born as "a response to what the Church thought of the occupation of the Amazon," that is, it "arises from the belief that the state is linked to the problem and not the solution" as Antônio Canuto (2016), a founding member of CPT and its current Head of Communication, explains in an interview. One of CPT's National Coordinator, Jean Bellini, (2016) comments on CPT's origins by stating that the organisation "emerged to denounce the dictatorship and the *latifúndio*." In the words of Bishop Tomás Balduino himself (2011, p. 1341, our translation), CPT was formed to "resist the military dictatorship." Or as Paulo César Santos (2016), another of CPT's National Coordinators, plainly states, "CPT was born in a context of conflict to contribute."

CPT's formation and past are described in detail in several self-organised and, at times, self-published books (CPT, 1997a, CPT, 2016; Poletto and Canuto, 2002; Pietrafesa and Sauer, 2005) and in the works of commentators (Mitidiero Junior, 2010; Corso, 2012; Pinto, 2015). In an upshot, since its foundation the organisation has played an essential role in the formation of many important social movements, such as the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) (Fernandes, 2000; Pinto, 2015). For having helped the rural poor organise CPT is at times referred to as the 'mother of movements' (*mãe dos movimentos*). During the interviews, it was clear that CPT members do not formally recognise themselves as a social movement, instead, they positioned the organisation as a 'secondary actor'. This has been done by supporting struggles without hijacking or obscuring the protagonism of popular movements or the activists involved. Many interviewees understand CPT's work as an exercise a 'prophetic voice' (*voz profética*) in that it is the organisation's role to offer direction to rural social movements. One commentator understands such responsibility as an effort to realise a religious action inspired by the model of the biblical prophets (Valério, 2013). While our focus is not on CPT's history itself, it is essential to understand how the practice of documenting and reporting on violence and conflict in the countryside was created and how it has developed through time.

4.2 *How the need and desire to denounce the violence and conflict lead to its documentation*

CPT is best known for the reports on violence and conflict in the countryside that it compiles and publishes annually in *Caderno de Conflitos no Campo Brasil* (Report on Conflicts in the Brazilian Countryside).⁷ Documentation as a practice of resistance has been at the forefront of CPT's objectives since its inception in 1975. Documenting violence and conflict in the countryside has had, from the very beginning, the goal of denouncing. Jean Bellini (2016) indicates that at CPT's origin, "the first thing was to communicate," emphasising the objective of denouncing. In its first national assembly in 1977, CPT

⁷ The reports can be accessed here <<https://www.cptnacional.org.br/index.php/publicacoes-2/conflitos-no-campo-brasil>>.

members approved a document with a plan of action in which the organisation intended to “use communication channels to inform public opinion about the conditions of injustice” in the Brazilian countryside, and also to “systematise and evaluate experiences” (CPT, 1977, p. 2, our translation). Although CPT members were already internally circulating data on violence and conflict in the countryside, in 1985,⁸ it initiated a more structured approach regarding knowledge gathering, analysis, and publication. It created in that year an archival centre to systematise the collected data and began publishing the yearly report, in which it provides statistical data and analysis regarding many issues related to violence and conflict in the countryside in Brazil. When he took us on a tour of CPT National, Antônio Canuto (2016) described the archival centre where the annual reports are prepared as “the heart of CPT”. In 2013, the Documentation Centre was named Bishop Tomás Balduino (*Centro de Documentação Dom Tomás Balduino – CEDOC*) in honour of one of its founders and most influential member. José Pietrafesa (2016), former CPT member and current university professor, synthesises the significance of documentation by explaining that CPT was created as “a pastoral service with the objective of denouncing the violence [and conflict] in the countryside.”

The archive gathers an impressive amount of primary and secondary documents⁹ and is fully available online.¹⁰ Since the beginning, *Caderno de Conflitos no Campo Brasil* already brought compiled data on what it named violence and conflict in the countryside in Brazil. In its first 1985 report, CPT counted the total of 768 conflicts in the Brazilian countryside – these include conflicts related to land ownership, labour, unions, droughts, and mining – with the involvement of 86,854 families, or 567,354 people, in an area of more than 9 million hectares (CPT, 1985). It also calculated that 216 persons were murdered, 1,363 were injured, and 557 were arrested due to land conflicts that year. This methodology showed a significant level of sophistication from the very beginning, the first report advanced an extensive analysis that localised the most dangerous areas in the country, the primary sources of causalities, how local authorities were involved, what were the repertoires of action, and macro-conjuncture issues, such as the political re-democratisation and the prospect of an agrarian reform. Perhaps most importantly, alongside a list of victims and activities that CPT was taking, the report *directly named* large landholders (*latifundiários*), banks, companies, contract killers (*pistoleiros*), politicians and others who were involved in the violence and conflict in the countryside. Such practice has continued throughout the years and remains one of the main features of *Caderno de Conflitos no Campo Brasil*.

Over time CPT has developed a comprehensive and systematic methodology of recording violence and conflict in the countryside. Since 1997, *Caderno de Conflitos no Campo Brasil* established so-called ‘scientific procedures’ for data collection, analysis, and filing.¹¹ First, secondary data is collected from local, regional, and national newspapers in addition to publications from unions, churches, police reports, and others. Then members of CPT National analyse this. Only material

⁸ It is important to note that the publishing of these results coincide with the end of the end of the military dictatorship in Brazil.

⁹ They are subdivided in three. The first is entitled ‘land conflict’ has more than 310,000 pages of documents related to 25,000 registered land conflicts in Brazil. The database contains documents drafted by CPT itself or by associated institutions (primary sources) and also contains sources from the news. The second is the ‘thematic’ one and gathers 110,000 pages of primary and secondary data to “contribute to the understanding the complexity of land” in Brazil. The third section regards the institution itself and holds 5,000 documents drafter by CPT.

¹⁰ The archive can be accessed here <<https://www.cptnacional.org.br/cedoc/centro-de-documentacao-dom-tomas-balduino>>.

¹¹ The 1997 report based on the 1996 data also provided two definitions of conflict: (i) ‘land conflicts’, understood as those which involve the struggle over the “means of labour or production” which involve the ownership and use of land and water, and the access to natural harvest (such as rubber), and (ii) ‘labour conflicts’, related to the relation between employer and employee, involving issues such as labour infringement, exploitation and slavery condition (CPT, 1997b). Another significant change is the number of academic writers that began to publish analytical articles using CPT’s database. These changes reflect the main focus of the struggles in the countryside of previous years, for more on this see Welch and Sauer (2015).

that indicates sources are considered, and only new occurrences are computed in the yearly report. If there are concerns over the accuracy or authenticity of the data in-person investigations are carried out by the nearest regional CPT. In the cases where the numbers from the newspapers do not coincide with the ones collected by a regional CPT, preference is given to the data collected by the latter. As such the newspapers and other sources serve as an initial indication that are then verified, that is, supported and substantiated by self-reported data from rural social movements and other CPT partners as well as in-person investigations. In other words, the secondary data collected from news sources are 'fact-checked' by local agents and partners. Despite this far-reaching and rigorous process CPT only claims to capture and depict a portion of all the violence and conflict that actually takes place in the Brazilian countryside. Collected data is processed, categorised, interpreted, published, and disseminated through events across the country and institutional partnerships. Since CPT members are deeply rooted in rural communities across Brazil, they are not just outsiders who are coming to 'take' these stories but are often telling the stories of their neighbours. In many cases, accounts of events they have witnessed themselves. As such, the *Caderno de Conflitos no Campo Brasil* has become one of the primary sources for year-by-year conjuncture analysis of the agrarian question in Brazil.

Per long-time Head of Documentation Cássia Luz's (2016) interview, the method of documenting violence and conflict can be traced back to Friar Mario, an Italian clergyman who was working in Brazil. Friar Mario is accredited with developing the categories which have remained constant over the last 42 years with additional categories and parameters being added as needed. Cássia Luz (2016), insists that it is essential to recognize the Bishop Tomás Balduino Documentation Centre as a "series of things": i) the physical archive that consists of a collection of books, reports, handwritten notes, the digital archives, and other sources; ii) the operation centres across Brazil where data on violence and conflict in the countryside is collected daily, then processed and interpreted to inform the preparation of the reports published yearly; but, also, iii) the various CPT members and associates. She goes on to indicate how "Balduino himself always carried a small notebook and a pencil around with him to keep records of what he witnessed", and that now that we had learned about this work it was also our "responsibility to collect such information and report it".

4.3 Documentation as an adaptive technology of resistance

During the more than four decades that it has existed, CPT's commitment to the rural poor has remained and been reaffirmed formally during its National meetings. Over time this commitment has expanded and led to different tactics and strategies as well as the adoption of novel parameters in their documentation process. The core and basic principles of CPT's methodology has remained the same over time. Nevertheless, given its self-determined unique position, complex practice, and broad field its technologies, tools, and scales are not static and have been continuously (re)shaped to account for the changing agrarian question. CPT recognises, develops, and follows new frames and topics through time. At first, it was organising and mobilising with newly created social movements in the 1980s, such as the MST, that relied on CPT as a source in the design of their repertoire (Flynn, 2013). At that time, the focus expanded beyond physical violence and conflicts to other issues that eventually took shape along the mobilising themes of 'rights' and 'waters', which was added to the struggle for land.

CPT also offered support to new social actors such as labour unions that became central in Brazilian politics from the 1980s. In this, CPT eased the link between cities and the countryside. Ruben Siqueira (2016), another of CPT's National Coordinator, explains that "trade unions in the countryside took a long time to form, different from cities where they came

with urbanisation” and that for a time helping workers to organise themselves into unions was central to CPT’s work. As the rural unions lost their combative potential, this was eventually left out of the primary strategy as it expanded to incorporate other rights-based issues such as slave labour (CPT, 1999). Still, it is important to highlight the historical contributions of the rural labour movement to the struggle for land in Brazil (Welch and Sauer, 2015). The concern over water began with the issue of drought (Castro, 1962) in the same context as, and together with, the Movement of People Affected by Dams (Thorkildsen, 2016). During this period, the megaprojects of hydroelectric plants expelled a significant number of peasants, indigenous and traditional peoples and communities, riverside dwellers (*ribeirinhos*), and others from their lands without any protection (e.g., Germani, 2003). While these themes remain, the focus on water takes on other aspects within agribusiness – some scholars for instance use the term *agrihidrobusiness* to emphasise the prominence of water (e.g., Thomaz Júnior, 2010). Issues such as damaging springs, contaminating water with poisons used in large plantations (e.g., pesticides and herbicides), excessive use through mechanised irrigation, and others issues are incorporated into the water agenda (Malvezzi and Poletto, 2003).

With time, CPT’s efforts have similarly shifted its focal points from particular issues to those affected by them. Thus, terms like the ‘rural poor’, start to be substituted for the recognition and reaffirmation of other spatialised identity indicators such as peoples of the countryside (*povos do campo*), peoples of the forest (*povos das florestas*), and peoples of the waters (*povos das águas*). In turn, it is imperative to recognise that CPT’s concerns have widened and adapted to address these different injustices, and the practice of documentation has been adapted accordingly.

4.4 The meaning of documentation for CPT members and the value of data on violence and conflict in the countryside to ‘others’

For our purposes, a constant variable in all interviews was CPT’s role as the source of data regarding violence and conflict in the Brazilian countryside. We focussed on the member’s self-perception regarding the meaning of such practice and their evaluation of who the end users of this data were. The interviews show that while the practice of documentation comes out of the desire and need to denounce it is also a form of meaningful ‘indirect’ engagement. Documentation allows CPT members to contribute to the struggles of the rural poor by making use of the Church’s structure while also adhering to its constraints on the forms of more ‘direct’ political engagement. As was elegantly put by Jean Bellini (2016), finding the best form of action is a continuous challenge for CPT members because although the organization “is not a social movement it’s members are activists at heart”. Considerable debate about this can be found in the literature and some commentators argue that CPT not only supports the struggle for land, but that it struggles for land (Mitidiero Junior, 2010), and is hence a social movement. Still, even though Regional CPT’s have been found to participate in land occupations (see Mitidiero Junior, 2010), this is the exception. Paulo César Santos (2016) clarifies that CPT is “a presence in the struggle for land that does not claim land for itself.” That is not to say that CPT abstains from the struggle for land. CPT is largely involved in multiple social manifestations often of religious nature, such as the pilgrimages and festivals for land (*Romarias da Terra*)¹² along with *mística* (rituals) and prayers to draw attention to problems such as land concentration and to honour the memory of historic heroes of the struggle for land.

¹² Examples can be found here <<https://www.cptnacional.org.br/romarias>>.

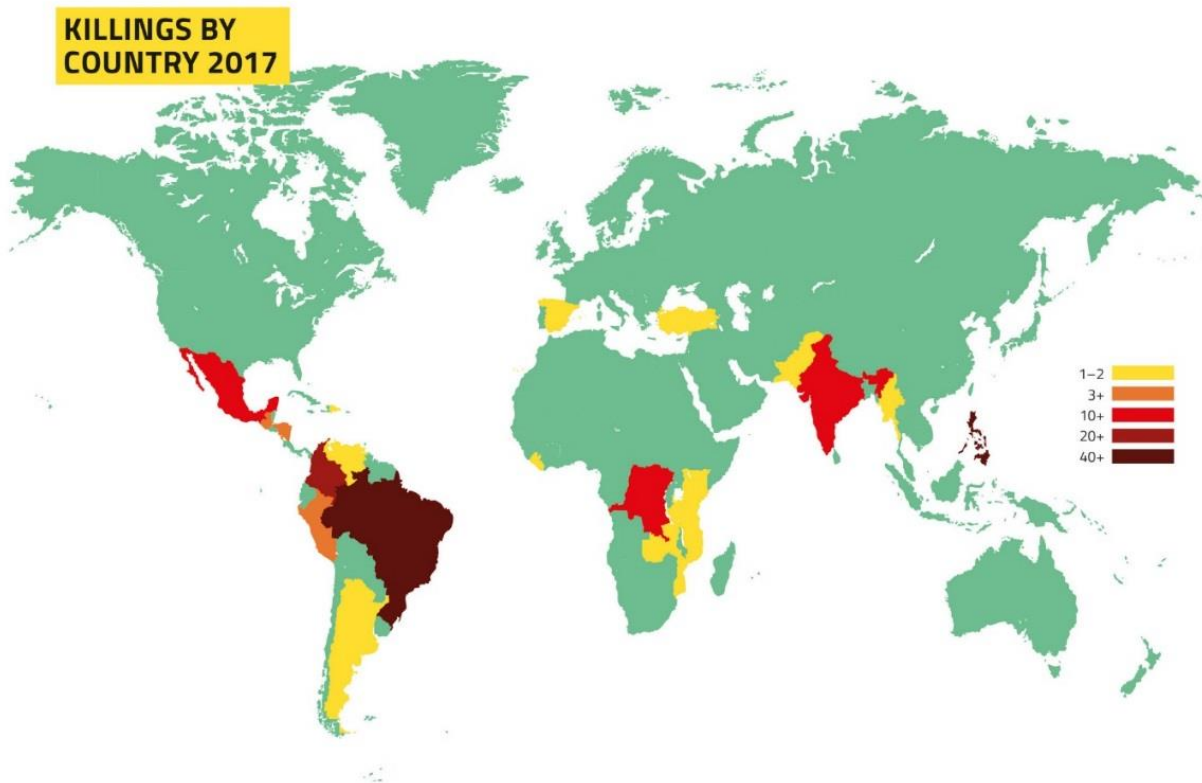
CPT does not only collect data to inform its own practice but also to inform and influence 'outside' actors that in turn perpetuate the data and its framings towards the construction of counter-narratives. In this sense, it is important to ask: who makes use CPT's data and in what ways is it useful to them? CPT has become the foremost authority on violence in the countryside in Brazil and is often consulted and cited both nationally and internationally. Paulo César Santos (2016), for instance, stated that the foreign press regularly consults with CPT when it comes to land conflict in Brazil. As do international organisations such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the International Labour Organisation and other agencies from the United Nations consult CPT database, as was indicated by Thiago Valentim Andrade (2016), José Pietrafesa (2016), and Cássia Luz (2016). As such, CPT's practices of "denunciation, solidarity, and publication" is part of the organisation's production of meanings as relates to an issue that the state chooses not to, indicates Jean Bellini (2016). She goes on to highlight the contradiction in this by stating that at times even state officials, such as a Federal Prosecutor on one occasion, make use of and cite CPT's data.

In addition to these uses, three other groups stand out. Academics, for one, makes regular use of CPT's data in their teaching and research (e.g., Porto-Gonçalves, 2006; Rocha and Barbosa Jr, 2018, and many others). Multi-university academic networks have also developed that draw on CPT's archives and methods, in addition, expanding it to incorporate other issues of interest. Most notable is the DATALUTA Network (*Rede DATALUTA*), a group of Critical Geographers, that spatialise CPT's data and add further data on social movements.¹³ Over time the relationship between CPT and academics have become even closer and often select academics are invited to analyse and comment on CPT data. Such analysis becomes part of the yearly *Caderno de Conflitos no Campo Brasil*. The second group is composed of investigative journalists, human rights NGOs and watchdog groups. CPT's data is reported on by both national and international news sources that seek to draw attention to land and environmental violence that takes place in Brazil. The data likewise informs the analysis of other groups such as Global Witness (2018a, 2018b) that have published a recent report in both English and Portuguese on the killings of environmental and human rights activists globally. The data from CPT about violence and conflict in the countryside informed Global Witness' analysis in Brazil and can be seen spatially situated with data from other countries in Map 01. Similarly, the CPT data is a key source for other national groups such as *Observatório de Conflitos Rurais São Paulo* (São Paulo Rural Conflicts Observatory).¹⁴ The third group, and the most important, are those who have the data produced about themselves and their struggles. Peasants, indigenous and traditional peoples and communities are in this sense not only the source but likewise the end users who on one hand help to collect and on the other use this data to make sense of their struggles, to keep their history alive, in addition being a tool of resistance itself.

¹³ *Rede DATALUTA* has been active since 1998 and their reports, also published yearly, can be accessed here <<http://www.lagea.ig.ufu.br/rededataluta.html>>.

¹⁴ Their reports can be accessed here <<http://conflitoruralsp.com.br/>>.

Map 01 – Killings by country 2017



Global Witness (2018a, 2018b)

5. The subversive art of making the invisible visible

*"It is dark, but I sing" – CPT (2015)*¹⁵

So, what is the significance of CPT's practice of documenting and archiving violence and conflict in the countryside? CPT's efforts of documentation not only collect and bring together the violence committed against activists and social movements, it also connects the resistance. Given that the practice of state formation passes through the framing of knowledge, the absence of knowledge is likewise a tactic of the state. Thus, the state obscures the struggles, violence, and conflicts in the countryside by failing to recognise it as such. CPT's effort of documentation works in the opposite direction. That is, its effort largely focusses on giving visibility to the struggles, violence, and conflicts in the countryside. In short, while the state's politics of governance includes the invisibilisation of violence and conflict in the countryside, the documenting of such processes makes them visible and is a powerful form of resistance. In short, we argue that amongst

¹⁵ Sung loudly at CPT's IV National Congress, held in Porto Velho, in the state of Roraima, July 12-17, 2015, to celebrate the Memory, Rebellion (*Rebeldia*), and Hope of the rural poor along with CPT's 40-year history. The chant also became the title of the event's final letter. For more on this see <<https://www.cptnacional.org.br/noticias/acervo/40anos/campanha-cpt-40-anos>>.

its many contributions, CPT plays a central role in making visible the violence and conflict in the countryside, which the state chose to hide by not recognising and counting it as such. In doing so, CPT has become the most significant player in framing the issue of violence and conflict in Brazil's countryside.

While a Marxist Political Economy approach is useful to understand why there is violence and conflict in the Brazilian countryside in the first place, the introduction of 'post-structuralist preoccupations' is likewise valuable for understanding CPT's practice of documenting violence and conflict in the countryside because of its focus on violence and power – and how one begets the other. While the state's dominant narrative is based on denying that (agro)extractivist violence in the countryside 'makes die' CPT's practice of counting bodies 'lets live' even in death (Foucault, 2008). In such terms, CPT mirrors the form of what it opposes.

Body counts are a crucial aspect of so-called 'traditional' conflicts (e.g., war), yet remain largely overlooked by critical scholars (Krause, 2017) despite such information being key in how different groups create and frame narratives, exercise power, and govern (Stepputat, 2018). The CPT case is unique in that by counting bodies they were able to frame a series of supposedly occasional violence in terms of an actual existing conflict not traditionally recognized as such. The yearly reports have allowed the so-called 'externalities' of the agricultural modernisation project to be empirically contextualised since 1985. As a result, activists, social movements, academics, and other engaged citizens can denounce the human and environmental cost of what we now understand as the expansion of (agro)extractivist processes. This active effort of documenting the violence in the countryside has proven to be one of the most powerful resources available to those who seek to critique and condemn the intentionally unregulated, and therefore unrestricted, often state-supported (Hopewell, 2016), advancement of capital in the Brazilian countryside. We find that CPT's political action of collecting and publishing data on violence and conflict in the countryside is what allows the myth of (peaceful) 'progress' and 'development' to be challenged and unmasked. More so, this active effort of documenting the violence and conflict offers support and subsidy for allies to resist such processes more effectively.

If on one hand authoritarian and corporate interests promote violence tacitly to govern, to institute fear and deter resistance, CPT 'manages' the violence and conflict through documentation, to denounce injustices and resist. CPT counters such efforts by framing the violence and conflict in the countryside in other terms. To put this another way, CPT creates meanings regarding such process. CPT has been able to establish a wide-reaching institutional presence and, rigorous methodology that spans all of Brazil, reaching the furthest most remote locations, and is still able to powerfully tell these stories. The knowledge is treated in a way that values the lives and the struggles of the deceased, and in resistance to injustice. This allows the deaths do be understood as more than just mere 'occurrences'. It 'maps out' the violence as a strategy for doing politics and of governance. Yet, CPT's effort is not just about quantifying deaths in a way that dehumanises the particularity of the victims, by turning them into 'mere statistics'. Instead, it is a way of shining a light on the injustices imposed upon the most vulnerable peoples of the countryside. They achieve this by telling their stories. Telling the stories of their struggles and even the stories of their deaths. The stories of those who would otherwise be forgotten.

It is not only that these stories are not being forgotten, and are being told, but that they are being collected – from remote, 'forgotten' regions – and then told *together* within a discourse. They are being told by an organisation linked to the Catholic Church that still holds a compelling position of moral authority in Brazilian society (Lehmann, 1996; Hagopian, 2008; Seidl and Neris, 2017). The data on violence and conflict produced by CPT has become a powerful 'technology of resistance' that clarifies the often-observed violent expansion of capital in the countryside. Still, subversive politics needs to be built, supported, and sustained. The practice of documentation fits into CPT's effort of working towards the shared construction

of emancipatory horizons, together with the peoples of the countryside (*povos do campo*). This allows CPT to offer direction to the many activists and rural social movements that look to them for guidance. As such it fits into CPT's desire to remaining the 'secondary actor' and allows them to exercise their 'prophetic voice' through the dissemination of shared language and goals.

6. Final considerations

Although CPT is a truly unique organisation that has developed an impactful practice to address significant issues in an awe-inspiring scale, the practice of collecting and publishing data for subversive ends is not unique to the organisation. The practice can be, and has been, used by other social groups. For example, the Black Lives matter movement was greatly supported by the work of Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Wesley Lowery (2016) and his team that compiled local data on the disproportionate ratio of police violence against African-Americans to show how it was a widespread, national issue. In this case, such data was only collected and made available at local – county or municipal – state structures. As such, counting bodies is not only valuable in the countryside, nor in Brazil, but can also be valuable in other geographical contexts.

To conclude, while there is a need and opportunity for the broader use of numerically expressive data in resistance, the landscape of engagement and the resulting political opportunity structures are changing. That is, the digital age and big data are representative of the promise that all the knowledge is 'out there' and thus supposedly 'made available'. But if, on the one hand, data was obscured by not being counted, now in the digital age of big data, it becomes obscured by being hidden within excessive, continuously produced, ever-expanding amounts of data (Kitchin, 2014). Instead of scarcity there is now excess. And as a result social realities are likewise obstructed. Therefore, while this represents a strategy with great potential for activists and social movements, it also represents a novel frontier for research that can offer greater insight into the complexities of the social world. This offers an opportunity for academics who want to do research that supports social movement struggle. In short, research that points to the need and value of collecting and distributing *numbers* that show *what* actually *counts*.

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ricardo.barbosajr@ucalgary.ca

Ricardo Barbosa Jr

MA student at the Department of Geography, University of Calgary – Canada. He holds a BA in International Relations from the Federal University of Goiás – Brazil.

joao.roriz@gmail.com

João Roriz

João Roriz is an Assistant Professor of International Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, Federal University of Goiás. He holds a PhD from São Paulo University and was an Academic Visitor (2015-2016) at University of Oxford.

