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Landless with land

The Landless Rural Workers Movement MST and
Agrarian Reform Settlers in Ceará state, Brazil

Master Thesis

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Abstract

This study is about the relations between the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers Movement MST and a sample of its members. In the mid 1980s MST originated from land occupations in the South of Brazil. Today it is present all over the nation and Agrarian Reform beneficiaries make for an increasing share of MST's members. The empirical study in the Northeastern state Ceara focused on MST's interaction with Agrarian Reform settlers. Literature review, semi-structured interviews and participant observation provided the base for the qualitative analysis. It revealed that the collective identity of members and MST's ideology are key concepts to understand MST and its relations with the Agrarian Reform settlers. Providing access to land by land occupations, fetching back dignity and shared values create a strong collective identity and explain MST's ability to mobilize masses and external support. Through teaching activities of movement activists, mainly literacy education and political awareness creation, MST has a bearing on the settlement communities. This results in institutions for collective production and social organization. The anti-capitalist ideology can be explained by historical experiences and is characteristic for a social movement. Yet with regard to problem solving in the settlements and in relation to MST's goal to have a "liberating character", the role of ideology is problematic.