

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Land sovereignty in depressed and contested agro-territories: The cases of Portugal and Brazil

Lanka Horstink^{1,*†} , Kaya Schwemmlin^{1,†}, and Gabriela Abrahão Masson^{2,3}

This article offers an exploratory operationalisation of the concept of land sovereignty applied to land politics in 2 agro-territories from different countries and continents sharing a common language and deeply linked histories: Portugal and Brazil. These display a similar model of agricultural development, representing a contradiction between the promise of profit based on aggressive exploitation of the territory and the marginalised condition of its population. How this agricultural model took hold in each country and manifested the agrarian question differs according to key socio-historical factors, such as the role of each in the colonial history that links them. Today, however, these agro-territories face similar challenges: human rights abuses, environmental destruction, lack of sound territorial management and fair policies, coupled with the dilapidation of socio-economic infrastructures. This makes them especially vulnerable to climate change, unemployment and poverty, while also caught in a clash between development models: a hegemonic hyper-intensive production model and the peasant-based model that has been resisting the advances of the former. This double jeopardy has prompted us to speak of 'depressed and contested agro-territories'. Our study shows how, in the case of Brazil, despite physical violence and threats to life, social movements are propelling land reform, linking it to the concept of the social function of land. In Portugal, in contrast, the country's alignment with neoliberal development has civil society divided about how to contest land use. Our analysis indicates that in both cases: (i) today's land politics are heavily biased towards a neoliberal, export-based, hyper-intensive agriculture controlled by large corporations, with weak legislation in place to defend both social and environmental rights; (ii) land reform based on land sovereignty and the social function of land is deemed crucial to assist agro-territories in regaining socio-ecological balance and to attain democratisation of land politics by regaining control over land, natural resources and local markets.

Keywords: Land sovereignty, Agrifood system, Land politics, Agroecological transition, Social function, Agrarian question

1. Introduction

New trends in sustainable development linked to changes in global finance and demands in areas such as energy, food and climate mitigation (Borras and Franco, 2012) have fostered resource concentration, monopolisation and intensified contestation over essential resources, such as water, energy sources and land, as well as agriculture itself (Behring, 2003; GRAIN, 2016; Behring and Boschetti, 2017; Gomes, 2018). Within this context, land, in its multiple meanings (concept, resource, territory and property), is a significantly contested element of agrifood systems, subject to 'colonisation, enclosure, commodification and

financialisation' (Wittman and James, 2022). Land grabs have evolved from the early forms evidenced in the enclosure of the commons in England and the colonial expansion across the Global South (Roudart and Mazoyer, 2015) to planet-wide land grabs that promise high financial returns (Li, 2014).

The 2 countries that are the object of this study are prime examples of the evolution of land acquisitions and use. Brazil's socio-environmental disaster trend began with the exploitation of 'brazilwood', a dye used in European luxury textile production (Marchant, 1943). The colonial exploitative model for the Brazilian countryside combined monoculture and slave labour (Prado, 2000), putting in place the plantation agriculture, such as sugarcane production, that continues to this day. The 'sugar rush' that was once linked to European food security needs as a cornerstone of the modern industrial proletariat's diet (Mintz, 1986) is now associated with the production of 'green energy' in both Brazil and Portugal (Santos, 2020; Silva, 2023). Our current globalised, intensified, product-

¹ Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon (ICS-UL), Lisboa, Portugal

² Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro, Minas Gerais, Brazil

³ Porto Institute of Higher Education, Porto, Portugal

† These authors share first authorship

* Corresponding author:

Email: lanka.horstink@ics.ulisboa.pt

oriented and industrialised production systems have been disproportionately affecting rural communities. They are bearing the brunt of these global land acquisitions, coupled with climate change, environmental degradation, loss of arable land and biodiversity, pollution, as well as the gradual erasure of their livelihoods and social infrastructures. A staggering 75% of the world's poor live in rural regions, with almost half of these smallholder farmers (World Resources Institute et al., 2005; Mitiku, 2014; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2017). Although most economically vulnerable people live in the Global South, pockets of poverty and deteriorating infrastructure can also be found in the Global North (e.g., Gupta, 2015; Sonnino and Hammer, 2016; Walker et al., 2019; Middlemiss, 2022).

We argue that land grabs and their social and environmental consequences are associated with territorial contestation derived from conditions of conflict generated by social classes and power relations that cement 'spaces of domination and spaces of resistance' (Rosset and Altieri, 2017, p. 119). This territorial contestation is carried out in both material and immaterial spaces—not only disputes over land and resources but also ideas and ideologies (Rosset and Altieri, 2017). The double jeopardy of extreme social, economic and ecological vulnerability and vigorous contestation over land, resources and developmental models prompted us to coin the term 'depressed and contested agro-territories' (Horstink et al., 2023). The vulnerability of these territories stems from the historically aggressive exploitation of people, resources and ecosystems coupled with the simultaneous dilapidation of socio-economic, material and financial infrastructures and support systems. At the same time, these disputes oppose an expansionist capitalist, industrialist and productivist model of agriculture with the ways and livelihoods of old and new peasant agriculture and its supporters (Horstink et al., 2023). This article presents 2 examples of 'depressed and contested agro-territories' while further developing this concept in connection with land sovereignty and follows a modern interpretation of peasants and peasant agriculture: farmers who cultivate by relying predominantly on internal resources while '[developing] these resources as patrimony' (Bernstein et al., 2018, p. 696).

To assess the socio-economic and environmental challenges resulting from the increasing concentration of wealth, resources and power in the hands of a few (e.g., López, 2010; Ricardo and Nicholas, 2014) and to create advocacy approaches for communities, Borras and Franco (2012) have proposed land sovereignty as an analytical framework fit for challenging modern land dynamics and land politics—the latter understood as 'the politics of who gets what rights and access to which land, for how long and what purposes, and of who gets to decide' (Borras et al., 2015, p. 603). They define land sovereignty as the 'right of the working peoples, rural and urban, to have effective access to, control over and use of land, and live on it as a resource, space, and territory' (Borras et al., 2015, pp. 610–611). The concept can be considered an 'advocacy framework' and a 'call to action' against hegemonic global

actors and the ongoing privatisation of the commons (Borras and Franco, 2012). It is also part of the demand for food sovereignty claimed by the farmers movement *La Via Campesina*, which embraces food democracy as well as agroecology to achieve a sustainable and just transformation of food systems (*La Via Campesina*, 2018).

Our study proposes to expand on land sovereignty as a powerful tool to address the new land dynamics and reframe the political and academic debate around land grabbing, consequent land concentration and land use. This requires connecting with new understandings of property by challenging the dominant Westernised notion of property as either private or vaguely defined public, while proposing a focus on pluralised and nuanced understandings of the concept (Borras and Franco, 2012). The approach also calls for a land reform that is here understood as a deliberate change in (1) land holding, (2) land (re) distribution, (3) the scale of operations on the land, (4) the patterns of cultivation or (5) the relation of agriculture with other sectors of the economy (Tuma, 2022). We further propose using the 'social function of land' as a guiding concept for land sovereignty discourses. This concept has been used in Latin American countries as a tool for land redistribution and can be understood as 'the notion that the right of private ownership includes an obligation to use property in ways that contribute to the collective or common good' (Ondetti, 2016, p. 30). Our operationalisation of land sovereignty additionally builds on conceptions of agrarian reform and other redistributive land policies (e.g., land restitution), bolstered by multiple meanings of land (as a territory, essential resource and landscape) and the provision of an inclusive framework that can channel divergent struggles from below to create synergies and mutual reinforcement with other political struggles, such as food sovereignty (Borras and Franco, 2012). Land sovereignty challenges the dominant neoliberal capitalist vision in 2 important ways: (1) it urges to protect land as a common and crucial resource and an important element for self-identification rather than property and scarce commodity (Akram-Lodhi, 2021), and (2) it contradicts the tendency of current land politics and dynamics to neglect the idea of sustainably repurposing and redistributing land to rural workers and smallholder farmers (e.g., Borras et al., 2015; Borras and Franco, 2018; Brent, 2018; Franco and Borras, 2021; Wittman and James, 2022).

Land sovereignty is also a response by current agrarian and social movements to the unsolved agrarian question, here seen as a '[...] set of interpretations and analyses of agrarian reality, which seek to explain how the possession, ownership, use and utilisation of land is organised' (Stédile, 2005, pp. 15–16, our translation). Inquiries into the agrarian question focus on how, within specific historical conditions and among clamant contradictions, the law of capitalist accumulation engages with and modifies agrarian social relations (e.g., McMichael, 1997; Bernstein, 2004; McMichael, 2013; Moyo et al., 2015). Scholars are divided on the continued existence and nature of the agrarian question today (e.g., McMichael vs. Bernstein, as analysed by Friedmann, 2016). We follow McMichael (2013, p. 83) in conceptualising the contemporary agrarian question



Figure 1. Location of the agro-territories of Odemira and Triângulo Mineiro.

as not only food or peasant-driven but also inspired by a 'sustainable socio-ecological future', articulated with the 'contemporary crisis of capitalism', of which it is its most poignant contradiction.

Our study uses an exploratory analytical matrix, based on 6 attributes, for the assessment of land sovereignty as a critical socio-ecological lens to compare land politics in the European agro-territory of Odemira, Alentejo (Portugal) and the South-American agro-territory of Triângulo Mineiro, Minas Gerais (Brazil).

The article is structured as follows: after introducing the context of our study, we describe our objectives and methodology in the second section. The third section presents the results of our comparative critical social analysis, the implications of which are discussed in the fourth section. The final section concludes our study, answers the research question and offers ways forward for research into land and food politics in depressed and contested agro-territories.

2. Methodology

This article aims to conduct a comparative critical social analysis of land politics, using the lens of land sovereignty in 2 'depressed and contested' agro-territories: Odemira and Triângulo Mineiro (**Figure 1**).

Odemira is a Nuts¹ III municipality that is part of the coastal area of the Alentejo region in the south of Portugal, while Triângulo Mineiro is the westernmost region in

the State of Minas Gerais in the southeast of Brazil. Odemira is the largest municipality in Portugal, spanning an area of 1,720.6 km² or 1.8% of the country's land (Câmara Municipal de Odemira, 2023). Considering that Brazil is 100 times larger than Portugal, the Triângulo Mineiro region (considered a Mesoregion Triângulo Mineiro-Alto Paranaíba) is proportionately a similar size, spanning 90,832.3 km² representing 1% of the total land (IBGE, 2022).

Despite having experienced a significant rural exodus, Odemira is the only territory in the rural region of Alentejo to have increased its population, currently at 32,529 inhabitants (PORDATA, 2023). The Triângulo Mineiro region accounts for approximately 2 million individuals, as per the latest figures available (IBGE, 2022). Despite their differences in scale, both regions are low population density areas: 18.1 inhabitants/km² for Odemira (PORDATA, 2022) and an average of 22 inhabitants/km² for Triângulo Mineiro (IBGE, 2022).

In both regions, agriculture is the key economic activity (including arable crops—in particular cash crops—livestock and forestry). Odemira's economy further relies on tourism, trade, services, some industry and fisheries (Câmara Municipal de Odemira, 2023), while in Triângulo Mineiro industry (e.g., food and wood processing, production of agrochemicals) and services are additional important activities (Silva and Santos, 2018).

Regardless of the disparity in scale, the authors identify both regions as examples of the plight of 'depressed and contested' agro-territories. They simultaneously represent

1. NUTS is a nomenclature for territorial units used for statistical purposes in the EU.

spaces of increasing socio-ecological resistance instigated by the negative socio-ecological consequences of neoliberal capitalist extractivist development patterns (Matzembacher and Meira, 2020; Horstink et al., 2023) as well as territories providing high financial returns for large agribusinesses: Triângulo Mineiro is a significant contributor to the Minas Gerais state, which is the fourth largest agricultural producer in Brazil (Ministério da Agricultura e Pecuária, 2020) while Odemira is seeing rapid growth and is now the second highest contributor in the country in terms of Gross Value Added (PORDATA, 2024).

While Portugal and Brazil share a common history, our analysis acknowledges that it is based on unequal power relations. Portugal, a significant maritime force in the early 15th and 16th centuries, consolidated the art of oceanic navigation to conquer littoral territories for the crown's enrichment (Vilardaga, 2002). The colonialist *modus operandi* resulted in disputes over shared resources, culture, religion and trade. Starting from the 16th century, Brazilian indigenous people faced growing dispossession, expropriation and commodification of land and natural resources due to the creation of plantations that followed the principles of mercantile capitalist accumulation (Stédile and Estevam, 2012). The Portuguese invasion of Brazil led to the forced migration of 12.5 million Africans (the largest forced migration in history), thereby reshaping American, European and African cultures and economies (Hawthorne, 2010).

Using this socio-historical lens and a focus on the struggle for sustainable agrifood systems, our analysis will examine how land politics evolved and impacted the potential for land sovereignty in the 2 agro-territories.

The methodology guiding the comparative case study is that of critical social analysis, which is both a normative and an explanatory critique of socio-economic and socio-ecological circumstances, going beyond the simple description of existing realities, by adding an evaluative assessment as well as seeking to explain how such realities came to be (Fairclough, 2013, p. 9). Our analysis draws on the historical-materialist perspective on human constraints, that is, focusing on the economic infrastructure of these farming regions, the means of production and the resultant economic relations among people, which, according to Marx (2005), condition the social life of humans. Critical social analysis within a historical-materialist framework is the best approach for interpreting the socio-economic and socio-ecological dynamics of agro-territories, considering the tensions between classes, social identity groups and development models.

In this article, we ask the following research question:

How can the struggle for land sovereignty contribute to healthy and fair agrifood systems in depressed and contested agro-territories?

To answer our question, we combined bibliographical and historical documentary research with empirical data from qualitative action research studies carried out in the two agro-territories (Masson, 2016, 2020; Horstink et al., 2022; Horstink et al., 2023). The documentary data stem

from reports, statistics and news stories for each of the regions/countries and were complemented by a literature review focusing on the wider areas that the agro-territories under study are a part of (respectively, Alentejo and Minas Gerais).

The action research conducted in Odemira, Portugal, relied on the methodology of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). This is a qualitative methodology that employs a flexible toolkit of methods for assessing food and farming systems based on the knowledge of rural people, while at the same time empowering them to take local action (Chambers, 1994). During the appraisal, 103 local food actors were contacted, having been selected according to 11 typologies, including 4 typologies of producers. Interviews using FAO's agroecological assessment tool TAPE² were conducted with 16 farmers and complemented with 4 semi-structured interviews with political and NGO food system actors. Additionally, 3 one-day-long workshops, each with between 25 and 30 participants, were held to complete the Rural Appraisal in 3 stages: (1) Diagnosing the agro-territory and identifying key challenges, (2) Jointly drawing a possible path to a healthy and fair agrifood future, (3) Discussing the agro-territory's land politics and its socio-ecological implications. The empirical data from the Triângulo Mineiro region (Triângulo Mineiro-Alto Paranaíba Mesoregion), Minas Gerais, draws on participant observation research in 2 so-called rural settlements (land reclaimed by force by peasants supported by social movements). This long-term observation was supported by additional qualitative data obtained from 10 focus groups, attended by peasants from the settlements (approximately 10 people per focus group) and 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews with local food and land reform actors (11 peasants, 3 state representatives and a representative from the Landless Rural Workers Movement—MST). These interviews touched on (i) life stories and struggle for land, (ii) type and outcomes of local agricultural production systems, (iii) territorial challenges and (iv) access to agrarian, agricultural and social policies. Participatory observation and focus groups were carried out before the interviews, with the focus groups covering 3 themes: (1) agrarian reform, (2) rural social security, (3) rural organisation through associations and cooperatives.

The final phase of the Brazilian study focused on the 'action component' of action research, experimenting with reclaiming food sovereignty by peasant families (former landless rural workers) with the help of institutional actors and social movements. The flagship of this effort is a Peasant Farming Fair, which was established using the region's university's premises.

In order to qualitatively assess and compare land politics in multiply stressed agro-territories such as Odemira and Triângulo Mineiro, we designed an analytical matrix (**Table 1**) capable of evaluating how these land politics have contributed (or not) to land sovereignty in the regions.

2. Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation (TAPE). Available at <https://www.fao.org/agroecology/database/detail/en/c/1430122/>.

Table 1. Matrix for the assessment of land sovereignty

Attribute of Land Sovereignty	Indicators
1. Confrontation of the agrarian question	How the agrarian question developed in the agro-territory; how it affected the agro-territory; power relations; class and group tensions; property relations; colonialist movements; balance of capitalist elite exploitation of resources and people vs. autonomy, social control and equitable distribution of common resources; whether the agrarian question is or is not currently being resolved.
2. Respect for the social function of land	'the notion that the right of private ownership includes an obligation to use property in ways that contribute to the collective or common good' (Ondetti, 2016, p. 30); to what extent state, local government, capitalist elite, local elite, farmers, rural workers, agrarian migrants and rural groups respect the social function of land; how the social function of land is interpreted (e.g., is it used to achieve greater social equity?); existence of commons; active recuperation of abandoned arable farmland.
3. Existence of democratic land reform	Redistribution of land; level of access to land; changes in tenure; tenure security; redesignation of land use; place of agriculture in the economy; methods of cultivation (Tuma, 1965); inclusive decision-making for sustainable and fair land use; those that bear the brunt of environmental costs have a determining say in land reform (Horstink, 2017).
4. Existence of an agroecological food system	Existence of peasant family farming, whether traditional or modern; diverse, synergetic and resilient land stewardship; agroecological farming practices; local production, processing and distribution systems; relative independence from global food systems; co-creation and sharing of knowledge; existence of local decision-making on food systems; initiatives for circular and solidarity economy; respect for human and social values; existence of individual as well as community food security; existence of peer-to-peer learning networks.
5. State support for sustainable land and food system reform	Regional, national and international policies that support sustainable land reform as well as sustainable food system reform; active state involvement in support of peasant and agroecological farming; state initiatives for sustainable inclusive rural development; policies that aim at regenerating the rural landscape; state support for defending the agroecological integrity of agro-ecosystems and food systems.
6. Existence of an active civil society	Initiatives by local associations and development agencies; existence of social contestation to projects that harm food and land sovereignty; pressure from civic groups to change food system policies; civic actions for change; attempts at placing local food systems and common resources under popular control; democratic tools available for asserting popular control.

The matrix's attributes are based on the 10 elements of agroecology from FAO (Wezel et al., 2020), the ecological-democratic quality of food systems matrix developed by Horstink (2017), the exploratory concept of 'depressed and contested agro-territories' (Horstink et al., 2023), the principles of food sovereignty (International Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007; Beauregard and Gottlieb, 2009) and, lastly, the attributes of food system sustainability as explored by Eakin et al. (2017). The attributes concentrate on the role of land in food politics and the securement of fair and healthy agrifood systems.

3. Results

Applying the matrix presented in **Table 1** to our combined documentary and empirical data, we present our comparative assessment of land sovereignty for Portugal and Brazil. The key findings shed light on the degree of achievement (or underachievement) of land sovereignty in our selected case studies, according to the 6 attributes of land sovereignty.

3.1. Confrontation of the agrarian question

The agricultural question in Portugal was largely the product of a rural development model strengthened during the dictatorship that consolidated land concentration, established fundamental socio-economic inequalities (Cunhal, 1968; Baptista, 1994, 2005, 2010; Almeida, 2016; Bernardo do Amaral Frazão dos Santos, 2016) and aggravated repression, coercion and silencing (Moreira and Gerry, 2003). Even though the progress of agriculture, industry and transport was considered vital in development plans during the regimes, poverty alleviation and economic growth policies were either non-existent or inexpressive, undermining the poorest and the rural population. Consequently, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Portuguese economy was less developed than other European Countries, with many people still working in the primary sector: up until the 1950s, agriculture in Portugal was the most relevant economic activity in the country, employing 47% of the active population and contributing 32% to the gross domestic product (Baptista, 1994).

However, *latifundia* elites historically owned most of the land and have had facilitated access to productive means in Portugal. The prevalence of *latifundia* is particularly associated with the South of Portugal, namely the Alentejo region—a region where large landowners employed wage labourers who worked within an extensive agricultural model relying primarily on monoculture production, such as wheat (Moreira, 1991). The *latifundia* cultivated the more productive lands with recourse to wage labour, while the remaining (more unproductive) lands were often rented to sharecroppers (Baptista, 2010). In today's scenario, *latifundia* are connected to Portugal's ongoing efforts to integrate global markets, liberalise the economy and modernise agriculture (Moreira, 1991). This modernisation process is characterised by mechanisation, the use of chemical inputs, European subsidies associated with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and export-oriented production (Horstink et al., 2022). As a result, the concentration of land is now so high that a mere 0.1% of holdings (261 holdings) of 1,000 or more hectares operate on 12.3% of the country's Utilised Agricultural Area (Instituto Nacional de Estatística [INE], 2017).

Since the Alentejo region continues to lack equitable distribution of common resources within weak legislative protective frameworks (e.g., *Lei dos Baldios*, NATURA 2000 network law), the region is subject to enduring land monopolisation—the global capitalist elite tends to dictate developmental pathways and privatise productive inputs (e.g., land and resources) for industrial agriculture, green energy generation and mining (e.g., Horstink et al., 2022; Horstink et al., 2023).

This hegemony is contested by diverse social movements and local residents who have become active and are developing more democratic organisational forms for territorial management. They are revitalising parts of the region's social fabric through the formation of new cooperatives and businesses (such as the cooperative *Regenerativa Cooperativa Integral*), as well as new cultural and gastronomic events. This rejuvenation of the social fabric has run parallel with the survival of traditional subsistence vegetable gardens and local seed-saving practices, as well as the widespread participation in cultural events, such as the 'Feira da Alegria' (translated into 'Fair of Joy'), in São Luís, Odemira.

Much as in the Portuguese case, the Brazilian context provides proof that the agrarian question has not found a structural resolution. In Brazil, the agrarian question stems from the concentration of land that colonisation produced (e.g., Stédile and Estevam, 2012; Sampaio, 2013) and is based on colonial slave relations and the unbridled exploitation of land and natural resources. In the colonial system, the enslaved people used to work 14 to 16 h without breaks or food, had no rights and were sold, traded, punished, mutilated and killed without their aggressors and murderers being held responsible (Moura, 1992). This has resulted in the external domination and annihilation of indigenous peoples' lives and culture and long-standing depressed and contested territories: at first due to the political requirements of the so-called 'old colonial system', later through the enrichment of

a globalised transnational economic *latifundia* elite with control over land and natural resources. Hence, racism has been structural in the formation of Brazil.

As many natives were expelled from their lands, social struggles have often intertwined with environmental concerns (e.g., the resistance of indigenous people and the persistent opposition to the slave system—the 'Quilombagem' movement). Currently, rural unions and social groups are at the forefront of resistance efforts against ongoing processes of commodification, degradation and expropriation (as is the case of Minas Gerais).

In modern days, the colonial slavery model was replaced by the forces of a capitalist society (Moura, 1983) that conveyed the roots of the agrarian question in structural racism. Looking at Brazil today, it is still possible to see the multidimensionality of the historically inherited poverty: hunger reaches 33.1 million people, of which 70% are Afro-Brazilians (PENSSAN, 2022). Afro-Brazilians represent 72.9% of the unemployed in the country, out of a total of 13.9 million people in this situation (IBGE, 2022). Brazil ranks eighth among the most unequal countries in the world, despite the fact that in 2011 it was the sixth largest economy, with the sixth largest Gross Domestic Product (Assumpção, 2015). Aside from the social aspects of structural inequalities based on racism, the legacy of colonialism can also be observed when looking at the concentration of land and the criminalisation of indigenous claims to the latter. In Brazil, there are 5,498,505 rural properties, of which 85% are less than 100 ha and occupy just 16% of the arable land, while properties over 1,000 ha represent only 2% of the total, but control 52% of all land (Fernandes, 2015).

The legacy of capitalist, conservative, employer-led agriculture (Masson, 2016, 2020) and the production of socio-economically vulnerable territories was further advanced under Jair Messias Bolsonaro's extreme right-wing administration. This government resulted in severe repercussions for the food sovereignty of indigenous communities, threatening their very survival and existence and access to drinking water, as the recent Yanomami genocide demonstrates—between 2019 and 2022, deaths increased by 331% in the 4 years of Bolsonaro's government (Fellet and Prazeres, 2023). Alongside malnutrition, the Yanomami deal with the contamination of their rivers by mercury and iron ore, which has made the water unsuitable for consumption. Furthermore, institutional and legal challenges such as the 2019 abolition of the government body that develops and implements policies for indigenous peoples and the conservation of their land (the historic National Indigenous Foundation) or the lack of demarcation of indigenous lands in Brazil (a right that indigenous peoples have since 1988 over the lands that they have traditionally occupied) can be portrayed as consequences of this type of political development agendas.

The colonial extractivist capitalistic *modus operandi* morphed into a neo-extractivist model in Brazil's Legal Amazonia and in the Cerrado of Minas Gerais—from mining practices to the advance of the Matobipa agricultural frontier in the Cerrado biomes that accounted for the deforestation of 50,000 km² just in the last 10 years

(Instituto Tricontinental de Pesquisa Social, 2020). Today, this region accounts for a large share of Brazil's production of grains and fibres (Masson, 2016, 2020). The fact that the Brazilian territory received the most significant number of investments in land and agriculture by institutional investors among developing countries was an important facilitating factor (Frederico, 2018). Consequently, the former right-wing government has exacerbated global climate change patterns through increasing deforestation and decreasing legal environmental standards: Amazonia is now emitting more carbon dioxide than it is sinking (Gatti et al., 2021).

3.2. Respect for the social function of land

The concept and practice of the social function of land does not exist in Portugal. Before the 1970s revolution, debates over land and its use and distribution were silenced by the dictatorship and were mostly linked to physiocracy—land as a fundamental means for human activity, a debate that at the time only existed in Portugal (Quaresma, 2023). The early expressions of the agrarian reform, considered one of the triumphs of the 1970s revolutionary process, brought alive some of the notions associated with the idea of a social function for land. Notwithstanding, it is important to highlight that the agrarian reform mostly benefited men and excluded women and other small-scale marginal producers from the bulk of its positive effects (de Vale Estrela, 1978).

Following the failure of the Portuguese agrarian reform, agriculture not only radically changed shape, but the producer typology was also affected, as many small-holder or peasant farmers received state subsidies to leave the fields and stop producing. This policy of 'being paid not to produce' drove people away from the countryside, and peasant agriculture became increasingly viewed as a hobby activity or a consequence of poverty, with no economic value (Almeida, 2020). Today, the area for peasant agriculture is smaller, there are far fewer people working in it, and the contribution to GDP is minimal—1.3% in 2022 (PORDATA, 2022). With greater reliance on Brussels, the possibilities envisaged during the democratisation period, namely the democratic control of citizens over food systems, were largely lost. In the case of the municipality of Odemira, we find that over the course of 50 years (1974–2024), this region went from nationalising 20,000 ha in the municipality (Quaresma, 2023) to having over 3,000 ha in private hands for export-based agriculture (AHSA, 2023), with more expansions planned.

In Portugal, export-oriented monoculture production based on chemical inputs and high energy and water demand is the preferred production model for the hegemonic economic elite. Moreover, as steadily more large-scale landowners see energy investments as an economic opportunity, land is increasingly monopolised for 'energy transition' needs. Hegemonic actors with private ownership or usage rights wield the pretext of 'sustainability' as advertised in the European Union's (EU's) Green Deal to instead industrialise further. This goes against the idea of a 'collective good', as this production typology tends to ignore collective environmental and social criteria, such

as respect for a social or common function of land or the attainment of food security.

The findings reveal that, in relation to Portugal, the shift in power relations associated with the consequences of the hegemonic neoliberal development model on a 'young' democracy negatively affected civil society's capacity to demand respect for the social function of land and fundamental human rights protection.

With regard to Brazil, land relations have been contested throughout its history. The struggle for land is written in the history of Brazil: it was the object of revolts associated with the dissatisfaction of the colonised against the Portuguese Crown, as was the case of the *Inconfidência Mineira* (1798); it was a fundamental part of popular uprisings, like the *Conspiração dos Alfaiates* (1798); it was at the centre of the confrontations between residents and military such as in the *Guerra de Canudos* (1896) in Bahia; or the *Guerra do Contestado* (1914), which was a 'peasant war' based on contested land in the southern regions of Paraná and Santa Catarina (de Souza Martins, 1980); or even in the form of social resistance organisations (e.g., the '*Quilombagem*' movement).

The conflict over land tenure was also at the centre of the formation of the Peasant Leagues around 1945 in most Brazilian states. These describe politically organised tenured peasants, squatters and sharecroppers who resisted expropriation and expulsion from the land (Fernandes, 2000). During the 1960s, the Brazilian military dictatorship asphyxiated the struggle for agrarian reform, as agriculture was undergoing heavy industrialisation subsidised by foreign capital. Hence, the rural poor were left to migrate to urban centres in search of work and subsistence to sell their labour force to industries belonging to regions of the North (Lustosa, 2012; Stédile and Estevam, 2012).

After long periods of contestation and social uprisings, the concept and practice of the social function of land was included in the Federal Constitution of 1988, although it never achieved the status of state policy nor was ever applied in a structural manner. The Constitution declares that the state is responsible for expropriating rural properties that are not fulfilling their social function for the purpose of agrarian reform. The social function of land includes the following criteria for how land is used: (i) adequate soil usage, (ii) preservation of the environment and natural resources, (iii) observance of the provisions that regulate labour relations, (iv) considerations of the well-being of owners and workers (Federal Senate of Brazil, 1988).

In practice, expropriation of property when not fulfilling the social function is mainly forced by collective entities such as MST, which take matters into their own hands and then pressure the state. The key to this resistance is employing more sustainable modes of farming and guaranteeing community food sovereignty, as well as reimagining and reappropriating the notion of the social function of land to empower rural workers, peasant farmers and ecological farmers for agroecological food system transformation.

Federations, unions and social movements strategically occupy rural territories that do not fulfil the social

function to seek a fair redistribution of land from the state through agrarian reform. The latter's slow progress has resulted in many enduring (years, even decades) encampments and rural settlement projects. These typically practise extensive family agriculture, where diversity and agroecology prevail (MST, 2013). Collective entities in agro-territories have, in this way, conquered the right to use the land to fulfil its social function despite various structural challenges to their long-term viability due to the absence of public policies for these territories. MST is a prime example of collective resistance, battling for the creation of short food chains in conjunction with land democratisation through agrarian reform and other public initiatives. Today, MST supports approximately one million settled families in 9,000 settlements spread over 88 million ha of land in Brazil (MST, 2022). In Minas Gerais, from 1986 to 2016, 416 rural settlements were identified, consisting of more than 25,091 settled families in an area of 1,054,763 ha, making it the state with the largest number of settled families and of hectares expropriated for agrarian reform purposes (Masson, 2016, 2020, 2021). Most are in the Northwest, North and Triângulo Mineiro/Alto Paranaíba regions (Girardi et al., 2016).

Despite physical violence and threats to life, social movements are propelling agrarian reform and linking it to the concept of the social function of land. Social and solidary economy entities such as cooperatives and activist movements are key in strengthening the families, who often produce collectively to satisfy their needs. Food production in settlements on regained converted land focuses on vegetables and fruit or dairy. It is transforming abandoned intensively farmed agricultural land into biodiverse, pesticide-free cultures, even under difficult conditions of production and trade, and contributing to the food sovereignty of the families involved.

3.3. Existence of democratic land reform

In the context of Portugal, the early democratic advancements (1960–1970) are associated either with the implementation of agrarian reform as a means to foster the establishment of a socialist society or with the establishment of the Portuguese social welfare system and the nationalisation of strategic sectors of the economy.

Modernisation of the farm system was politically presented as an instrument of democratisation. However, it quickly consolidated the concentration of land and led to the loss of citizens' democratic control over food systems due to shifts in geopolitical power dynamics. Shortly after the revolution, the developmental process decreased even more, cementing the country's economic gap with higher income countries (Amaral, 2023). Despite the significant social and economic changes that Portugal underwent since the beginning of democracy in 1974 (Burneau, 1986), the overall socio-economic results have been ambivalent (Amaral, 2023): while an unprecedented set of social and human rights were established, the Portuguese social welfare system was developed, and other dimensions, such as health standards, improved significantly, low educational standards and low average income, as well as high levels of inequality persist to this day.

Therefore, Portugal is still ranked one of the most unequal industrialised countries in the world. The country also went from having one of the highest birth rates in Europe in 1974 to one of the lowest, making it one of the world's fastest ageing countries (Amaral, 2023).

According to Baptista (2005, 2010) and Stédile (2020), agrarian reform in Portugal was of a popular type, as it was marked by measures of nationalisation, expropriation and occupation of properties over 50 ha (irrigated) or 500 ha (rainfed). The agrarian reform was based on the signatory Constitution of 1976. Article 96 of the 1976 Constitution displayed the objectives of the agrarian reform: the improvement of the living conditions of workers, the guarantee of food supply for the country and equality of agricultural relations of production (Constitution of the Portuguese Republic of 1976). As Bernardo do Amaral Frazão dos Santos (2016) noted, the economic system that was in place was disrupted by the new Constitution, as private property was legally disputed under the slogan 'land for those who work it'. In this context, a new rural leasing regime was approved that sought to end precarious leases and the privileges of landowners since, initially, the lands were nationalised and managed by farm workers (Quaresma, 2023). The forms of financing and support from the Portuguese State also changed, and Collective Production Units (UCPs) and Agricultural Cooperatives were instated. From 1974 to 1976, almost 600 UCPs were created in the country (Bernardo do Amaral Frazão dos Santos, 2016).

The hegemonic counter-movement against democratic land reform in Portugal fostered a culture of criminalisation and degradation of the public image of the 'revolutionary' peasant. This hegemonic power of neoliberal capitalist development in rural Alentejo appears to have considerably overshadowed prior social and solidarity economic efforts and more equitable land ownership.

Instead, since the early 1980s, the Portuguese modernisation of the agricultural system has been exclusively grounded in the expansion of hyper-intensive, export-based agriculture (e.g., olives, almonds, avocado, oranges and berries). Today, agro-territories like Odemira are heavily dependent on external products and inputs, suffering from a historically inherited vulnerability and accelerating exhaustion of resources (e.g., water and land) in parallel with conflicting visions for the future development of the region. Additionally, as foreign investment in local agriculture expanded, the region has witnessed important social and demographic changes, such as a new wave of legal and illegal immigration. Odemira's farm sector has been employing Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Moldovans, Romanians, Moroccans and, more recently, Nepalese, Indians, Pakistanis and Bengalis. These migrant agrarian workers are vulnerable to exploitation. The fact that farm workers working in large-scale export-oriented agriculture are predominantly immigrants has seen the emergence of a new racialised food production system, producing new forms of racism and xenophobia. Odemira, the most productive county in economic terms in Portugal and a top agricultural exporter, has, in just 15 years (2008–2023), increased its population by 24% (PORDATA, 2023). At the same time, its foreign population increased

by 528%, now representing 38% of the total population. The overwhelming majority of foreign residents are from Asian origin (70%) (PORDATA, 2022).

Public discussions over democratic land reforms in the region are at their barest beginnings. The data provided in the context of our PRA pointed to the democratisation of agri-food systems as the top contributing factor to the roadmap for change. Fundamental requirements to enhance democratic control over land and resources indicated by local food actors were: (1) Protection and commitment to the human rights framework (including collective rights, such as food sovereignty); (2) Protection and guarantee of equitable access to common resources, particularly land and water; (3) Sustainable transition of production systems alongside inclusive and efficient water and land governance; (4) The need to place a moratorium on the expansion of intensive agriculture and instead promote agroforestry and agro-silvo-pastoral systems with transparently monitored water usage.

However, these discussions only constitute a starting point and need more inclusion of migrants, rural women, marginalised producers and the rural poor, who lack representation and the capacity or opportunity to be heard.

In the case of Brazil, conservative modernisation, in parallel with the dynamics of the Green Revolution, crystallised the agrarian question, cemented land concentration and resulted in citizens losing democratic control over food systems. To regain social control over land, landless workers and their families endured a minimum of 6 years of waiting for the regulation and structuring of their settlements by the National Institute for Agrarian Recolonisation (INCRA).³ Several important challenges were reported, such as successive eviction attempts by landlords and local police, and lack of support from the INCRA and the local municipality, resulting in miserable housing conditions (e.g., living under plastic roofs and on dirt floors, having no access to water and basic sanitation).

However, continued efforts by social movements and civil society in the fight for democracy, agrarian reform and social rights have made some advancements in attaining democratic land proposals, such as the ones advanced by social movements such as the MST, MLST,⁴ Peasant Leagues and Peasant Women's Movement. These movements spearhead a popular agrarian reform based on agroecology (Masson, 2020).

Because the hegemonic economic elite considers the agrarian reform and all its related processes an action of communism, people who resist are criminalised (e.g., Jair Bolsonaro's proposed 'Anti-Terror Law' which frames social movements as terrorist movements). Social stigmas and prejudice deepen the already existing rural–urban poverty

divide. At the same time, illegalities by Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and the State have created a web of unaccountability with harmful racialised consequences (e.g., the Yanomami genocide).

The performance of the Brazilian State, always at the 'fringes of the bourgeoisie' (Netto and Braz, 2021), follows the logic of deregulation of land governance and as such further deepens the agrarian issue. Little political effort is invested in pushing forth structural land policies, such as the second National Plan for Agrarian Reform from 2003, and it tends to fade away between governments (in this case, between the Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff administrations). Efforts today to effect a social Agrarian Reform and re-democratisation of land are led by several organisations, collectives, social movements, rural and urban workers, such as '*Diretas Já*' (Direct Elections Now), and social movements like MST.

3.4. Existence of an agroecological food system

Portuguese agroecological food systems have been politically de-incentivised for over half a century. Despite some existing policies, agroecological, peasant and small and medium-scale family producers tend to be politically marginalised and suffer isolation (whether geographical, cultural or digital).

Nevertheless, Odemira is an example of how small-scale agroecological, biodiverse, sustainable, local and resilient farming systems persist in diverse agricultural typologies: from young, often foreign, 'neo agrarians' who experiment with food system regeneration through agroecological practices as well as fomenting alternative food networks (e.g., the Association for the Maintenance of Agriculture of Proximity—AMAP); to small and medium-scale peasant producers who have used the same farming methods and techniques for generations; and, lastly, professional organic farmers. These diverse examples of best practices coexist and have started influencing each other and creating synergies in the region, exploring spaces for their co-development.

Together with the legacy of the *minifundio*—or small landowners—subsistence and family agriculture in Odemira, as well as in the Alentejo as a whole, have coexisted with the increasingly hegemonic large hyper-intensive foreign export-focused farms. The latter tend to have more power to foster good relations with the municipalities (using either direct influence or a producer organisation) by contributing to improving public facilities, such as public schools. Consequently, local decision-makers find it impossible to act independently from these larger economic actors.

In Brazil, even while human rights violations, extermination of indigenous peoples, structural inequalities based on racialised, gendered, class-based land access and political abandonment and criminalisation of social struggles persist, peasant farming continues to be the backbone of the country's food system. Resistance to neoliberal land demands has materialised in the form of encampments and rural settlement projects that practise extensive diverse and agroecological family agriculture (Masson, 2016, 2020, 2021).

3. In Portuguese 'Instituto Nacional da Colonização e Reforma Agrária' (INCRA). It is a federal body that exists in each of the states in Brazil, including Minas Gerais. The Minas Gerais institute is the reference centre for the families mentioned in this paragraph.

4. The MLST, also known as the Landless Liberation Movement, was established in 1997. It is regarded as the second largest contingent of landless labourers, following the MST, and operates in approximately 9 states.

To foster more knowledge co-construction and a 'safe space' for critical discussions on the agrarian question and agrarian reform, the Peasant Agriculture Fair (FAC) was created in the agro-territory under study. This fair has been considered a relevant instrument for constructing food sovereignty and bottom-up knowledge production. It was created in 2017 at the Federal University of the Triângulo Mineiro (UFMT) in collaboration with various social movements and rural settlements in the region through university extension efforts based on popular education. The 6 editions of the fair have already realised the commercialisation of more than 6 tonnes of diversified, agroecologically produced food products, not just vegetables and fruits but also dozens of varieties of countryside delicacies, handicrafts, seedlings, spices and preserves.

Unfortunately, these examples continue to form a minority, as many of the rural poor carry on facing structural inequalities and a lack of basic human rights. Therefore, significant redistributive governmental efforts will be needed to complement the efforts from civil society and academia.

3.5. State support for sustainable land and food system reform

While Portugal's agrarian landscape is being marked by several neoliberal shifts, new strategies for future policies for sustainable development in the EU are under discussion within the framework of the Green Deal and its Farm to Fork mechanism (May 2020). Some of the European Commission policy initiatives are the Organic Action Plan (2021), the Food Security Plan (2021), Global Standards on Food Safety (2022), Carbon Farming (2022) and Sustainable Aquaculture (2022). The key agriculture-related legislation currently proposed by the European Commission is, however, far from consensual and is, in some cases, turning back the clock on sustainability. The regulation on the sustainable use of pesticides in plants, which promised to halve the use of pesticides by 2030, has been dealt a final blow by the European Commission itself in 2024, with its president offering to withdraw the proposal. Equally controversial are the proposals for the liberalisation of 'new' genetically modified organisms in agriculture and the restriction of farm-saved and traditional seeds, as well as the shocking decision to relax the CAP's Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions. These measures, or lack thereof, have the potential to adversely affect organic and agroecological farming, as well as significantly limit farmers' autonomy. At the same time, the European Commission decided to renew the authorisation for the continued use of the toxic herbicide glyphosate, despite not having obtained a qualified majority. This agrochemical is a key tool in the expansion of hyper-industrialised agriculture, and Portugal's government and large agricultural companies strongly support its use.

In Portugal, the National Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change with regional plans such as Odemira's Municipal Climate Change Adaptation Strategy serves as a platform for state and scientific regional involvement in the form of climate change adaptation and sustainable development.

Portugal's current interpretation of the CAP policies appears to have anticipated the EC's 2024 proposal to further weaken its environmental requirements. Portugal's policies have continued to strongly favour larger agricultural holdings and hyper-intensive export-oriented cash crop production. Even though Portugal was one of the few European countries from the Global North that voted in favour of the United Nations Declaration on the Right of Peasants (UNDROP), the national subsidy system still allows for extremely toxic agrochemicals to be used under the 'eco-schemes' reform. This leaves small-scale, peasant, smallholder organic and sustainable farmers out of the money pot.

Another form of state support for peasant and agroecological farming is the recognition of the national relevance of family small-scale farming, since peasant family farming still represents 68% of agricultural labour in Portugal (INE, 2019). This type of farming can be seen as a legacy of the *minifundio* and subsistence agriculture once practised primarily in the north of Portugal (Dinis, 2019). Family small-scale farming has, theoretically, been recognised by the government as important. This governmental endorsement of the value of family agriculture materialised in the form of an increase in the annual flat-rate payment, the creation of the Redistributive Payment and changes to support for Small Investments in Agricultural Holdings in the Mainland Rural Development Programme (PDR 2020). Furthermore, these measures were supported by the creation of the status of Small Family Farmer as an instrument for sustainability and the strengthening of social and territorial cohesion (2017). In practice, however, these standards fall short, lack transparency, inclusivity (especially of small farmers) and are still poorly defined (Dinis, 2019; Do Mar, 2023). The National Confederation of Agriculture (CNA), a member of La Via Campesina, has struggled for decades to institutionalise and operationalise the status of the Family Farmer with a guaranteed state budget (Masson, 2022).

Some studies, such as Delgado (2023), note that while significant progress has been made in national food policies, land is still not a primary concern despite being a vital priority for the creation of a sustainable agricultural system. Portuguese policymaking reveals a disregard for the importance of land access and preservation, both of which are crucial to the establishment of sustainable national food systems that encompass the entire food chain.

Furthermore, contemporary grassroots movements' concerns tend not to be aligned with the topics that are part of international and national food policymaking agendas, indicating a lack of connection between policymakers and rural environments and local food system actors.

A clear food territorial perspective is still lacking, as well as a shift away from sectorial policies and towards a more integrated food systems approach, which would involve land as a fundamental component. Calvário and Castro (2023) observe that the existing agricultural policy and support for family farming focuses more on issues of inclusion, which resides more in the social policy domain, than on issues of redistribution and justice. Portugal's policy scenario showcases an urgent need for incorporating

bottom-up public participation, transparency and inclusion into a wide range of political decision-making processes to ensure greater social acceptability.

When it comes to Brazil, policies have favoured large-scale investments and massive livestock development creating a pattern of concentration, expropriation, exploitation, exclusion and subalternity inherent to the general law of capitalist accumulation (Masson, 2016, 2020). From 2000 onwards, economic globalisation deepened neoliberal policies with less autonomy, less public expenditure and more private land ownership.

However, policies to support agrarian reform and food do exist in Brazil. They are largely the achievements of social movements fighting for land, peasant agriculture and agroecology against the development model of the Green Revolution, agribusiness and the production of export commodities such as sugarcane, soya and maize.

Since the coming into effect of the Federal and Democratic Constitution of 1988, agrarian policies have regulated land structure in Brazil. State support for rural development is expressed through the institutional recognition of family farming, as evident in the National Family Farming Programme (PRONAF, constituted in 1995) and some of its subprogrammes: (1) PRONAF ABC+Agroecology: for agroecological or organic production; (2) PRONAFWoman: financing for women farmers who are members of family farms; (3) PRONAFYouth: financing for family farmers and rural producers between 16 and 29 years old. These funding lines are mainly destined to small- and medium-sized farmers in agrarian reform territories and indigenous and *quilombola* communities and to the development of organic/agroecological agriculture. However, this financing programme is marginal when compared with the state budget allocated to PRONAF for large properties and extractive agriculture with intensive use of agrochemicals. Brazil is a champion of pollution by pesticides, while there is evidence of predatory agribusiness practices, in particular in Minas Gerais and Amazonia (Masson, 2016). The productivist mindset resulting from the agricultural modernisation paradigm has strongly influenced policies (Petersen and Silveira, 2017), which are still far removed from the reality of many family farmers (Rode et al., 2021).

In addition to the introduction of the right to adequate food into the Brazilian constitution in 2010 through the Constitutional Amendment No. 6, other food and sustainable rural development policies worth mentioning are the Food Acquisition Programme (2003); the Programme for the Sustainable Development of Rural Territories (2003); the Organic Agriculture Law (2003); the National Policy for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (2004), which adopts the principles of agroecology as the guiding principle for its actions; and the National Policy for Agroecology and Organic Production (2012). Other domains and sectors that relate to food policies through specific programmes include:

- Food and education: the National School Feeding Programme, 1979, which recommends that 25% of school meals should come from family farming, preferably organic.

- Food and nutrition: for example, the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy, 2004; the Food and Nutrition Security Law and the National Food and Nutrition Security System, 2006.
- Food and social policies: the Zero Hunger programme was one of the first achievements of President Lula of the Brazilian Workers' Party.

Among the environmental policies of note we find the National Plan for the Control of Deforestation in Brazilian Biomes (2023). Here, the focus is on job creation, valuing national production and fostering a green economy in line with the Paris Agreement.

Brandão et al. (2020) find that policies that focus on addressing the demands of Brazilian family farmers have contributed towards the dissemination of more diverse, sustainable and fair production methods and techniques (e.g., organic fertilisers and seed banks). They have created specific markets for steady income that are contributing towards attaining food security (Brandão et al., 2020). Nonetheless, funding needs to be amplified to reach more producers, producers need access to reliable and timely information on bureaucratic requirements and most of the existing programmes need to allow for production for self-sufficiency. These policies still lack a connection with the reality of the small-scale family farmers and are not improving their protection from land grabbing (Brandão et al., 2020; Rode et al., 2021).

3.6. Existence of an active civil society

In Portugal, early expressions of an active rural society can be found in the context of the popular uprising and the agrarian reform in the 1970s. Today's agrarian environmental challenges derive mostly from the combination of political support for highly intensive farming practices for export and the latter's aggressive need for farming inputs (land, water, energy, labour and agrochemicals), coupled with political abandonment and policies that are unsuitable for small-scale peasant farmers. This has generated what we have called depressed and contested agro-territories in rural Portugal. On the one hand, local residents and small- to medium-scale producers have a very different perception of the future of the agro-territory compared to hegemonic food system actors. The former tend to think of territory in the long term as patrimony to be sustainably preserved for future generations. In contrast, the latter consider land from a short-term usage perspective, where economic sustainability is central and ecological sustainability relies on technological fixes.

The role of civil society in Odemira is still marginal, even if several movements and protests have challenged the dominant extractive model (e.g., the civic movement '*Juntos pelo Sudoeste*', CLARA—Centre for a Rural Future; SOS Rio Mira, *Guardiões do Mira*, Seed bank from the foundation '*O Cerro*', the association *Rewilding Sudoeste*). Data from the PRA workshops (Horstink et al., 2022; Horstink et al., 2023) show that the municipality needs to politicise food consumption and production and develop intra-community and inter-actor discussion to democratise local food systems. Local food actors have manifested

the need to activate plans, strategies and mechanisms for a proposed roadmap for local sustainable and fair agrifood systems, among these the shortening of food chains and provision of market opportunities for small-holder farmers. This will require the creation of support systems (knowledge-exchange groups, cooperatives and communities of practice, but also improved institutional support), as well as awareness-raising on agri-food issues as a precondition to the development of sustainable agri-food systems (i.e., collective reflections on what is consumed, where it comes from, who produces it and how, as well as its impact on the environment).

Additionally, social movements in Odemira tend to be dominated by middle-class residents, who are members of the local ecologist and developmental associations, as well as the more economically privileged foreign residents, such as digital nomads. They thus sometimes lack legitimisation by the people they are purportedly defending, for example, peasant farmers, rural workers and migrant workers.

In Triângulo Mineiro, it was also mostly social movements that have advocated for the recognition of struggles around land control and that have helped shape agricultural and rural development policies from 'below' in both colonial and neoliberal struggles. Centuries of resistance have created a pathway for a transition towards healthy, sustainable, peasant-based food systems that fulfil the social function of land. The struggle for indigenous, peasant, sovereign and diversified territory is currently manifested in the need to demarcate indigenous territories, develop land reform and implement measures to combat hunger and deforestation.

Even while racism and preconceived sociocultural perceptions have continuously perpetuated patterns of injustice and unequal access to resources, social movements have persisted in offering resistance: for example, the Peasant Leagues (founded 1945), the Landless Farmers' Movement of Rio Grande do Sul (1960); the Alternative Agriculture Movement (1970); the Movement of People Affected by Dams (1970); the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (1985); the Peasant Women's Movement (1986); the Small Farmers' Movement (2001); the National Agroecology Coalition—ANA (2002); and the Brazilian Association of Agroecology—ABA (2004). These collective entities, alongside MST and La Via Campesina, demand a diverse, sovereign, peasant and agroecological model of agricultural production, which would not only be fairer but also more sustainable.

Despite their differences in scope, bottom-up resistance movements have promoted progress in most of the dimensions of land sovereignty in both agro-territories. Brazil stands out as an example of long-term continued struggle in all 6 dimensions of land sovereignty identified by us, while Portugal is missing a focus on 2 of the attributes (although they have been momentarily important in the past): addressing the agrarian question and the social function of land. Nevertheless, the importance of an active civil society is undeniable if we wish to enable long-term changes and support the most vulnerable food system actors by enhancing their food sovereignty, livelihood, rights, environment and resources.

4. Discussion

The case studies of Triângulo Mineiro and Odemira have been identified as examples of 'depressed and contested agro-territories' due to the ongoing aggressive exploitation of people, resources and ecosystems (the 'contested' dimension), coupled with the simultaneous dilapidation of socio-economic, material and financial infrastructures and social support systems (the 'depressed' dimension).

Today, albeit in varying degrees, both agro-territories face competition over their remaining resources between an expansionist neoliberal capitalist, industrialist and productivist model of agriculture and the ways and livelihoods of old and new peasant agriculture based on traditional and agroecological production methods.

We find that TNCs have settled in both agro-territories and are increasingly monopolising land. This onslaught, supported or tolerated by governments in both countries and condoned globally by supranational organisations such as the World Bank Group and the World Trade Organisation (e.g., Roudart and Mazoyer, 2015; Borras and Franco, 2018), is stalling or even halting counter-hegemonic efforts to democratise land reform and place local food systems and common resources under popular control. In both countries, the dynamics of industrialist agricultural development are causing widespread environmental destruction and land-use change owing to increasing (native forest) deforestation and resource pollution and exhaustion, such as the loss of productive land and biodiversity or the depletion and contamination of water. In consequence, these agro-territories are disproportionately more vulnerable to climate change and its impacts and suffer drought and loss of fertile soil. Furthermore, the incursion of intensive extractive activities is escalating the exploitation of people and breaches of human rights.

These dynamics have had different expressions in Portugal and Brazil. Whereas Portugal was part of the expansionist force that colonised large parts of the world, extracting their natural wealth and cultivating their lands for the benefit of elites in the 'old world', Brazil was on the side of the invaded and suffered the onslaught of colonialist forces.

Both countries have an unresolved agrarian question resulting from applying the law of capitalist accumulation to agriculture, which dictates concentration, specialisation, industrialisation, commodification and the imperatives of growth and profit. These commandments of capitalism produce blatant contradictions in agrifood systems. In the case of Brazil, the processes of colonialism and capitalism turned peasant farmers into (exploited) agrarian workers and rural people were removed from their source of subsistence and cultural identification. In the Portuguese context, the prevailing land-use patterns and power dynamics that were observed before the agrarian reform have largely remained intact. While powerful players continue to exert control over the productive resources in the region, rural areas are increasingly suffering from the process of deagrarianisation and depeasantisation as a result of

changing socio-demographic structures (e.g., migration or enlistment in the colonial wars [Moreira, 1991]).

Contestation against the commodification and financialisation of agriculture and the monopolisation of land has had different manifestations in Portugal and Brazil. Portugal's attempt at agrarian reform in the 1970s can be deemed unsuccessful and was reversed within a decade. Currently, private property is the main form of land ownership in the country (as opposed to collective land management such as the *Baldios*—community forest and farmlands) and inhibits dissent over land use, while land redistribution is rarely, if ever, part of the debate. We find that in the agro-territory under study in Portugal, a clear food territorial perspective as well as unity among civil society actors is lacking, and that contestation is largely concentrated on stopping mega-projects of extractivism meant to feed the needs of large transnational economic actors.

Brazil's social fight for justice, on the other hand, is deeply intertwined with struggles for land and the environment. At the risk of life and limb, indigenous peoples and landless rural workers are either re-occupying their historic lands or occupying land using a legally protected mechanism, namely the social function of land, that is, the responsibility to use and care for land for a larger common good (Ondetti, 2016). Despite the lack of support from the State and the active opposition of agribusiness and TNCs, people have collectively occupied rural territories that do not fulfil their social function to seek a fair redistribution of land from the State through agrarian reform. Federations, unions and social movements, such as MST, have supported and empowered this strategy. However, the pushback from the hegemonic capitalist elite is often violent. Land occupation, even under the aegis of the social function of land, has been heavily criminalised, and seizing land, in the absence of socio-economic land reform and social policies, often means living in the most abject circumstances.

Our study confirms the idea advanced by Borrás and Franco (2012) and Wittman and James (2022), among others, that land is one of the most contested elements of agrifood systems. Whether in Portugal, where civil society organisations and movements protest the encroachment of hyper-intensive agriculture and extractivist mining and energy projects, or in Brazil, where landless rural peoples (re)occupy land from agribusiness under extremely challenging circumstances and indigenous peoples fight for the demarcation of their lands, land is the common denominator.

In the case of Portugal and Odemira, peasants, and, in fact, most rural peoples, including migrant workers, are absent from the contestation, disempowered and/or exploited to the point of resignation. In contrast, in Triângulo Mineiro, Brazil, the perspective of 'land for food' is strongly ingrained and fought for by those who need the land, with support from organised civil society.

In both agro-territories, state and regional authorities are failing in their responsibility to rural peoples, with politicians and policies mainly serving transnational and other hegemonic private interests. Policies and laws for

land and food system governance are either biased towards the hegemonic players (Portugal) and/or are not being applied consistently (Brazil).

This demonstrates the critical significance of incorporating the notion of the 'social function of land' in the struggle for the realisation of land sovereignty. This concept can simultaneously convey the multiple sociocultural meanings of land (e.g., identity territory, landscape, commons and essential resource) and confront the hegemonic monolithic conceptualisation of land as a commodity, private property and financial asset. Our study has also shown that the application of the 'social function of land' to land use can play a crucial role in addressing the predicament of territories that are both 'depressed and contested'. The concept has the potential to challenge the growing concentration and control of land by dominant global economic forces and mitigate some of the negative effects of capitalist expansion and human rights abuses on social relationships, cultures, landscapes, rural livelihoods and the overall social and ecological structure of agricultural territories.

Although systematically marginalised and disconsidered by neoliberal capitalist dynamics, peasants and small-scale farmers are proving to be recalcitrant in both agro-territories under study. Peasant agriculture, whether old or new, continues to be the backbone of Portuguese and Brazilian subsistence agriculture. It is informed by values of circular economy, short food chains, diversity and autonomy. New peasants, such as the neo agrarians in Odemira, practise agroecology and regenerate the land where they settle. In Brazil, the settler families in Triângulo Mineiro, inspired by the values of agroecology of the movement MST, tend to practise extensive, chemical-free and external input-independent family agriculture. Here, the notion of the social function of land is providing a platform for concrete opposition against exploitative land relationships and environmental degradation, as it addresses vital questions such as (i) how is the land used? (ii) to whom is it allocated? (iii) who may access and profit from it? and (iv) who decides over it?

In **Table 2** we present a brief overview of the key similarities and differences between Odemira and Triângulo Mineiro in terms of their degree of realisation of land sovereignty, operationalised in 6 attributes.

In summary, we find evidence that all 6 attributes needed to realise land sovereignty are present in the Brazilian agro-territory, while the Portuguese agro-territory only displays 4, because it does not broach the confrontation of the agrarian question nor the recognition of the social function of land. Socio-historical factors, as we have shown, have resulted in a significant legal and cultural divergence in addressing issues of land reform and use. But in both regions, the degree of fulfilment of either of the 6 attributes is still insufficient for land sovereignty to be realised. In our conclusion we will look at what is challenging the realisation of land sovereignty and what can be done.

Table 2. Comparative land sovereignty assessment of Odemira and Triângulo Mineiro

Attribute of Land Sovereignty	Comparative Results
Agrarian question	<p>Neither Odemira nor Triângulo Mineiro address the agrarian question in a structural fashion.</p> <p>The capitalist neoliberal paradigm in their agrifood systems is powerful and attempts to eradicate alternative forms of agriculture and agrifood system governance, while it monopolises farmland.</p> <p>Nevertheless, Triângulo Mineiro is better equipped (defended by the constitution and the action of social movements) to keep the agrarian question alive in their territory, whereas in Odemira, and Portugal in general, the agrarian question is ignored or even dismissed.</p>
Social function of land	<p>The territories differ in the existence of a mechanism for agrarian or land reform.</p> <p>Brazil successfully employs the legally enshrined notion of the social function of land to change land-use and ownership, although intensely contested by the capitalist and political elite.</p> <p>The concept is unknown and unused in Portugal. Collective management of common land is slowly being eroded by the dominant class. Land is legally and culturally considered property, commodity and a financial asset, not a common resource or an identity territory, let alone a right.</p>
Democratic land reform	<p>Efforts in favour of democratic land reform are dissimilar in the territories.</p> <p>Civil society in Odemira protests abusive land use without, however, reclaiming the land for collective use or redistribution. Agrarian reform in Portugal is a sensitive subject, which has been eradicated from legislation.</p> <p>Landless rural workers in Triângulo Mineiro strategically occupy land collectively to demand an agrarian reform and the fair distribution of land. The Brazilian Constitution gives them a legal basis for their action.</p> <p>In both countries, however, contestation tends to be criminalised: in Portugal, under the pretext of the supremacy of the right to private property; in Brazil, by reframing land occupation as invasion and by linking it to 'communist' actions.</p>
Agroecological food system	<p>Both agro-territories possess an incipient agroecological food system, which in Odemira is still very atomised while in Triângulo Mineiro it is being collectively built, one occupied land at a time.</p>
State support	<p>In both agro-territories, State support is severely lacking or even actively opposing peasant and social movements' efforts to construct food sovereignty and bring land under popular control. In Brazil, however, legislation favours the land redistribution efforts and has the potential to bolster land redistribution, while in Portugal any occupation of land, for whatever reason, would automatically lead to police action.</p>
Active civil society	<p>Both agro-territories showcase an active civil society protesting the monopolisation and repurposing of land.</p> <p>In Odemira, contestation is nevertheless still dispersed, dominated by middle-class actors with environmental motivations or notions of climate justice, and lacking a common food territorial perspective.</p> <p>In Triângulo Mineiro, rural workers and farmers themselves are part of the struggle, supported by social movements and academia. Their struggle is strategically framed within the concepts and methodologies of food sovereignty and agroecology.</p>

5. Conclusion

This study provided an exploratory operationalisation of the concept and framework of land sovereignty to examine and compare land politics, tested in 2 multiply stressed agro-territories that share a colonial past and language: Portugal and Brazil.

In this article, we asked: how can the struggle for land sovereignty contribute to healthy and fair agrifood systems in depressed and contested agro-territories?

Our analysis shows how socio-historical disparities in land ownership and use, resulting from repression, colonisation, exploitation, land grabs or other forms of unequal power dynamics (such as class, gender and race), framed within the centuries-old project of commodification and financialisation of agriculture, are major

contributing factors to the existence of 'depressed and contested' territories.

We assert that the latter condition is consolidated by multiple and multi-level stressors stemming from the hegemonic conflict between an elite growth- and profit-oriented production model and one that is more collective, inclusive, solidary and strongly sustainable, combined with the historical and current socio-economic and ecological consequences of the first model. We find that in Odemira and Triângulo Mineiro, these stressors are effectively blocking the pathways to fair and healthy food systems.

In both regions under study, we observe that today's land politics are heavily biased towards a neoliberal, export-based, hyper-intensive agriculture controlled by

large corporations, with inadequate legislation in place to defend social and environmental rights, while most of the policies and investments continue to favour large-scale extractive projects. Despite the enormous challenges, we simultaneously find evidence in both agro-territories of resistance against the dominant developmental model. Confronted with land grabs by 'global players', environmentalist movements in Odemira and vulnerable peoples supported by social movements in Triângulo Mineiro are questioning the legitimacy of the capitalist elite, while calling for respect for their right to access, use and control the lands they live on. In Portugal, motivations for contestation are mainly environmental, although increasingly inspired by notions of just and sustainable food and energy systems. Protests are mostly driven by middle-class residents and NGOs. In Brazil, on the other hand, the dispute is fuelled by the small-scale farmers and rural workers themselves, with the support of country-wide social movements, and strongly supported by the vision of food and land sovereignty and the methodologies of agroecology.

We maintain that reframing the political and academic debate around land and land politics is crucial for building healthy and fair agrifood systems, and especially for regenerating multiply stressed and conflicted agro-territories. In this context, land sovereignty emerges as an emancipatory framework for achieving this goal, for the following reasons:

1. It acts as an 'umbrella concept' that provides a framework for diverse bottom-up socio-ecological justice demands.
2. It is a binding agent for a diversity of rural actors that together demand an agrarian and land reform based on the social function of land, united by the promise of regenerated agroecosystems as well as socio-economic infrastructures.
3. It serves as a catalyser for demands for control over land and resources for social movements and marginalised communities.
4. In its demand for redistribution and repurposing of land and resources, it provides a 'transition opportunity' in terms of land use changes—from large-scale monoculture to fostering re-agrarianisation and re-peasantisation based on the principles of agroecology.
5. It advocates community control over land and resource governance, ensuring that the agro-territory benefits the communities, contributing to better livelihoods, stable incomes, healthy ecosystems and food security and sovereignty.
6. As a contributing factor to the revitalisation and democratisation of rural areas, it can help reduce the risks of climate change and intensive agriculture, such as fires, drought or soil degradation.

The test of our exploratory assessment of land sovereignty in our 2 case studies indicates that, for land sovereignty to be realised, all 6 attributes must be fulfilled. Of these, the agrarian question is the hardest and less likely to be resolved due to strong historically forged path-

dependence lock-ins, in both the Global North and Global South, within the paradigm of capitalist accumulation applied to agriculture and other resource-dependent activities. Despite this almost impossible challenge, the agrarian question is far from 'dead' (e.g., Moyo et al., 2015). In the absence of state and policy support, and facing severe backlash from the capitalist elite, numerous counter-movements and spaces of resistance continue to call for food and land sovereignty, democratic governance of land and agroecological transition, as well as the inclusion of marginalised peoples and respect for human rights. Thus, even the partial attainment of the other 5 attributes of land sovereignty can help place agro-territories in the best position to slow down or halt the incursion of destructive extractivist projects, and demand that those who suffer the cost from any human activity also be the first to benefit from it. In both Portugal and Brazil, an active civil society is demanding democratic land reform, promoting agroecological food systems, and challenging the State and local government to provide the necessary support for a transition to fair and healthy food system and land management.

It is only in Brazil, however, that these efforts are supported by the notion of the social function of land. And it is also only in Brazil, that all 6 attributes are addressed. This has led us to single out the social function of land as a leveraging variable for the other attributes. The recognition of the social function of land is the key that can unlock land sovereignty, even in the absence or weak fulfilment of the other attributes in the matrix. The social function of land asks if land is used in ways that benefit the common good and challenges the idea of absolute property rights on essential resources. This measure of social, ecological and economic sustainability of the use and tenure of land has the potential to lead the way to revitalising and democratising depressed and contested agro-territories, if appropriately legitimised and supported in the political debate.

One of the main lessons that we can draw from our analysis is the urgency of incorporating the concept of the social function of land into Portuguese agricultural policies, political debate and social imaginary. In Portugal, the challenges that peasants and other people working in rural areas face demonstrate an urgent need to gain insights from Brazil and politicise land governance. This means creating synergies with other transformational approaches and concepts such as food sovereignty, agrarian/land reform and demanding that the fulfilment of the social function of land be, at minimum, part of the debate over criteria for land use, and at best elevated to the level of law. To achieve this, as the case of Brazil illustrates, it is vital to create a broad recognition of agroecological, small-scale and family farming and support this with social, economic and environmental policies that can facilitate sustainable and fair farming systems co-created from below. Only when the socio-economic functions of land are combined with its socio-ecological and identity roles will it be possible to resolve the double jeopardy characteristic of depressed and contested agro-territories. To achieve this vital first step in leveraging land sovereignty, the concept of the social function of land should be taken

up in both activist and academic debates in the Global North. Just as food sovereignty demands that access to and control over food systems should reside with those who most depend on them, something that has already been recognised in discussions in the Global North, land sovereignty demands that land be reframed from a commodity and property to a common resource, a source of identity and a right, exactly like the right to food.

This study focused on 2 agro-territories, which, while clearly indicative of a larger problem and representative of many other agro-territories, constitute only 2 case studies. Future studies could expand on the analytical framework of land sovereignty to consolidate its attributes and test its usefulness in identifying strengths and weaknesses of agri-food systems. Research should also continue to identify depressed and contested agro-territories in both the Global North and South and analyse their food and land politics to deepen our understanding of the impact of the negation of the agrarian question and simultaneous appropriation of land and its meaning by the neoliberal capitalist paradigm.

Data accessibility statement

To protect the identity of Portuguese and Brazilian food actors participating in the studies, due to the sensitive nature of the topics studied, raw data (interview and workshop recordings) have not been made public.

Acknowledgements

The authors recognise Miguel Encarnação as one of the creators of the research project that this article resulted from and are grateful for his technical and logistical support. The authors also wish to deeply thank the reviewers, editors and proofreaders for their support in maximising the article's quality.

Funding

Lanka Horstink received support for her post-doc research from the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) under the contract n° CEECIND/01132/2017/CP1426/CT0001 and Kaya Schwemlein received support for her PhD work from the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) under the contract n° PD/BD/150557/2019.

Competing interests

The authors declare that the research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Author contributions

Contributed to conceptualisation: LH, KS, GAM.
 Contributed to research and tool design: LH, KS, GAM.
 Contributed to writing, original draft sections 1–5: LH, KS.
 Contributed to writing, original draft on Brazilian data: GAM.
 Contributed to writing, review, and editing: LH, KS, GAM.
 Contributed to data collection: LH, KS, GAM.
 Contributed to data analysis: LH, KS, GAM.
 Contributed to data visualisation: LH, KS.
 Contributed to the article and approved the submitted version: All authors.

References

- AHSA.** 2023. AHSA statistics. Available at <https://ahsa.pt/>. Accessed May 5, 2023.
- Akram-Lodhi, AH.** 2021. Land, in Akram-Lodhi, AH, Dietz, K, Engels, B, McKay, B eds., *Handbook of critical agrarian studies*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing: 72–79.
- Almeida, MA.** 2016. A questão agrária na história de Portugal. *Mátria XXI* 5: 265–296.
- Almeida, MA.** 2020. The use of rural areas in Portugal: Historical perspective and the new trends. *Revista Galega de Economía* 29(2): 1–17. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15304/rge.29.2.6750>.
- Amaral, LAN.** 2023. Social, economic, and demographic change during the Portuguese democracy (1974–2020), in Fernandes, JM, Magalhães, PC, Pinto, AC eds., *The Oxford handbook of Portuguese politics. 1st ed.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press: 53–69.
- Assumpção, A.** 2015 Feb 13. O mundo como ele é e como o Brasil pode se dar bem. *CartaCapital*. São Paulo. Available at <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/economia/o-mundo-como-ele-e-e-como-o-brasil-pode-se-dar-bem-6015/>. Accessed May 20, 2023.
- Baptista, FO.** 1994. A Agricultura e a Questão Da Terra—Do Estado Novo à Comunidade Europeia. *Análise Social* 29(128): 907–921.
- Baptista, FO.** 2005. A questão da terra, in *Terra e tecnologia: Século e meio de debates e políticas de emparcelamento*. Lisboa, Portugal: Celta Editora: 193–220.
- Baptista, FO.** 2010. *Alentejo: A questão da terra*. Castro Verde, Portugal: 100 Luz editora.
- Beauregard, S, Gottlieb, R.** 2009 Apr. Food policy for people: Incorporating food sovereignty principles into state governance. Senior Comprehensive Report. Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, Occidental College, Los Angeles, CA. Available at <https://www.oxy.edu/sites/default/files/assets/UEP/Comps/2009/Beauregard%2520Food%2520Policy%2520for%2520People.pdf>. Accessed August 13, 2024.
- Behring, ER.** 2003. *Brasil em contra-reforma: Desestruturação do Estado e perda de direitos*. São Paulo, Brazil: Cortez Editora.
- Behring, ER, Boschetti, I.** 2017. *Política social: Fundamentos e história*. São Paulo, Brazil: Cortez Editora.
- Bernardo do Amaral Frazão dos Santos, E.** 2016. Reforma Agrária e sua influência nas políticas agrícolas em Portugal (1975–2015) [Master's thesis]. Lisbon, Portugal: ISCTE, University of Lisbon.
- Bernstein, H.** 2004. Changing before our very eyes: Agrarian questions and the politics of land in capitalism today. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 4(1–2): 190–225.
- Bernstein, H, Friedmann, H, Van der Ploeg, JD, Shanin, T, White, B.** 2018. Fifty years of debate on peasantries, 1966–2016. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 45(4): 689–714.
- Borras, J, Franco, J.** 2018. *Agrarian climate justice: Imperative and opportunity*. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Transnational Institute.

- Borras, SM, Franco, JC, Suárez, SM.** 2015. Land and food sovereignty. *Third World Quarterly* **36**(3): 600–617.
- Borras, SM Jr, Franco, JC.** 2012. *A land sovereignty alternative: Toward a people's counter-enclosure*. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Transnational Institute.
- Brandão, EAF, da Rocha Santos, T, Rist, S.** 2020. Family farmers' perceptions of the impact of public policies on the food system: Findings from Brazil's semi-arid region. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* **4**: 556732. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2020.556732>.
- Brent, ZW.** 2018. *Building social muscle to transform food systems: Insights from the European local public policy landscape*. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Hands on the Land for Food Sovereignty and Bizkaia EHNE. (Think piece series food for thought no. 2).
- Burneau, TC.** 1986. Constituição: O caso de Portugal. *Lua Nova: Revista de Cultura e Política* **3**: 68–73.
- Calvário, R, Castro, I.** 2023. A questão alimentar em Portugal: (Des)encontros entre políticas públicas, alternativas alimentares cidadãs e a agricultura familiar. *Análise Social* **LVII**(3): 570–593. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31447/AS00032573.2022244.06>.
- Câmara Municipal de Odemira.** 2023. CM Odemira / Economia. Official Site of the Municipality of Odemira. Available at <https://www.cm-odemira.pt/pages/220>. Accessed July 10, 2023.
- Chambers, R.** 1994. The origins and practice of participatory rural appraisal. *World Development* **22**(7): 953–969. DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(94\)90141-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(94)90141-4).
- Cunhal, Á.** 1968. *Questão agrária em Portugal*. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Civilização Brasileira.
- de Souza Martins, J.** 1980. *Expropriação e violência: A questão política no campo*. São Paulo, Brazil: Editora Hucitec.
- de Vale Estrela, A.** 1978. A reforma agrária portuguesa e os movimentos camponeses. Uma revisão crítica. *Análise Social* **14**(54): 219–263.
- Delgado, C.** 2023. The role of land as the central piece to sustainable food systems: Lessons learned from Portugal national food-related policies. *Geography and Sustainability* **4**(1): 84–90. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geosus.2023.01.001>.
- Dinis, I.** 2019. The concept of family farming in the Portuguese political discourse. *Social Sciences* **8**(7): 213. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/socsci8070213>.
- Do Mar, D.** 2023. Estatuto da Agricultura Familiar: Cinco anos depois, das restrições a medidas pontuais. Available at <https://www.jornaldenegocios.pt/empresas/agricultura-e-pescas/detalhe/estatuto-da-agricultura-familiar-cinco-anos-depois-das-restricoes-a-medidas-pontuais>. Accessed December 21, 2023.
- Eakin, H, Connors, JP, Wharton, C, Bertmann, F, Xiong, A, Stoltzfus, J.** 2017. Identifying attributes of food system sustainability: Emerging themes and consensus. *Agriculture and Human Values* **34**(3): 757–773.
- Fairclough, N.** 2013. Critical discourse analysis, in Handford, M, Gee, JP eds., *The Routledge handbook of discourse analysis*. New York, NY: Routledge: 9–20.
- Federal Senate of Brazil.** 1988. *Constituição da república federativa do Brasil*. Brasília, Brazil: Senado Federal, Centro Gráfico.
- Fellet, J, Prazeres, L.** 2023 Feb 17. Sob Bolsonaro, mortes de yanomami por desnutrição cresceram 331%. *BBC News Brazil*. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/cw011x9rpldo>. Accessed May 5, 2023.
- Fernandes, BM.** 2000. *A formação do MST no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Editora Vozes.
- Fernandes, BM.** 2015. Políticas públicas, questão agrária e desenvolvimento territorial rural no Brasil, in Grisa, C, Schneider, S eds., *Políticas públicas de desenvolvimento rural no Brasil*. Porto Alegre, Brazil: Editora da UFRGS: 381–400.
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.** 2017. *The future of food and agriculture: Trends and challenges*. Rome, Italy: FAO.
- Franco, JC, Borras, SM Jr.** 2021. The global climate of land politics. *Globalizations* **18**(7): 1277–1297.
- Frederico, S.** 2018. Território, capital financeiro e agrícola. Investimentos financeiros estrangeiros no agronegócio brasileiro. Relatório de Pós Doutorado. Laboratoire Dynamiques Sociales et Recomposition des Espaces (Ladyss), Universidade Paris 8.
- Friedmann, H.** 2016. Commentary: Food regime analysis and agrarian questions: Widening the conversation. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* **43**(3): 671–692.
- Gatti, LV, Basso, LS, Miller, JB, Gloor, M, Domingues, LG, Cassol, HLG, Tejada, G, Aragão, LEOC, Nobre, C, Peters, W, Marani, L, Arai, E, Sanches, AH, Corrêa, SM, Anderson, L, Von Randow, C, Correia, CSC, Crispim, SP, Neves, RAL.** 2021. Amazonia as a carbon source linked to deforestation and climate change. *Nature* **595**(7867): 388–393. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03629-6>.
- Girardi, EP, Fernandes, BM, Feliciano, CA, Pauli, L, Filho, JS, Coca, E, Origuéla, CF, Pereira, LI, Filho, ER, Ferreira de Limam, DMD, Medeiros, RV, Moreira, EDRF, Fabrini, JE, Roos, D, Nardoque, S, Cleps, JC Jr, de Souza Campos Vinha, JF, da Silva, FA.** 2016. Relatório DATALUTA Brasil 2016. Presidente Prudente, Brazil: NERA.
- Gomes, CM.** 2018. A justice approach to the African 'land rush': Investigating the social dynamics around agricultural investments in Mozambique [PhD thesis]. Lisboa, Portugal: Universidade de Lisboa.
- GRAIN.** 2016. The global farmland grab in 2016: How big, how bad? GRAIN Report. Available at <https://grain.org/en/article/5492-the-global-farmland-grab-in-2016-how-big-how-bad>. Accessed August 13, 2024.
- Gupta, A.** 2015. Is poverty a global security threat? in Roy, A, Crane, ES eds., *Territories of poverty: Rethinking north and south*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press: 84–102.
- Hawthorne, W.** 2010. *From Africa to Brazil: Culture, identity, and an Atlantic slave trade, 1600–1830*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Horstink, L, Encarnação, MF, Schwemlein, K.** 2022. *Análise da realidade agroalimentar em Odemira*

- 2022: *Relatório do projecto Diagnóstico Rural Participativo de Odemira*. Lisboa, Portugal: ICS-Ulissboa e GALA-Grupo de Acção e Intervenção Ambiental.
- Horstink, L, Schwemmlin, K, Encarnação, MF.** 2023. Food systems in depressed and contested Agro-territories: Participatory rural appraisal in Odemira, Portugal. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* **6**. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2022.1046549>.
- Horstink, LE.** 2017. A global food polity: Ecological-democratic quality of the twenty-first century political economy of food [Doctoral dissertation]. Lisbon, Portugal: Universidade de Lisboa.
- IBGE.** 2022. Censo Demográfico 2022. Available at <https://censo2022.ibge.gov.br/panorama/>. Accessed May 10, 2023.
- Instituto Nacional de Estatística.** 2017. Inquérito à Estrutura das Explorações Agrícolas—2016. Available at https://www.gpp.pt/images/Agricultura/Estatisticas_e_Analises/Estatisticas/AnaliseEstruturaExplAgricolas2016.pdf. Accessed August 13, 2024.
- Instituto Nacional de Estatística.** 2019. Recenseamento agrícola 2019—Primeiros resultados. Available at <https://www.acos.pt/files/20210401145737753recenseamento-agricola-2019-2021.pdf>. Accessed August 13, 2024.
- Instituto Tricontinental De Pesquisa Social.** 2020. Reforma agrária popular e a luta pela terra no Brasil. Dossiê n° 27. Available at https://thetricontinental.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20200328_Dossier-27_PT_Web.pdf. Accessed August 13, 2024.
- International Forum for Food Sovereignty.** 2007 Feb. Declaration of Nyéléni: Declaration of the International Forum for Food Sovereignty. Nyéléni, Mali.
- La Via Campesina.** 2018. Food sovereignty now! A guide to food sovereignty. LVC. Available at <https://viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/02/Food-Sovereignty-A-guide-Low-Resolution.pdf>. Accessed June 28, 2022.
- Li, TM.** 2014. What is land? Assembling a resource for global investment. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **39**(4): 589–602. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/tran.12065>.
- López, R.** 2010. Global economic crises, environmental-resource scarcity and wealth concentration. *CEPAL Review*. Available at <https://hdl.handle.net/11362/11437>. Accessed November 11, 2023.
- Lustosa, MDGOP.** 2012. *Reforma agrária à brasileira: Política social e pobreza*. São Paulo, Brazil: Cortez Editora.
- Marchant, A.** 1943. *Do Escambo à Escravidão—As relações económicas de Portugueses e Índios na colonização do Brasil 1500–1580* [Lacerda, C trans.]. São Paulo, Brazil: Companhia Editora Nacional.
- Marx, K.** 2005. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the critique of political economy*. London, UK: Penguin Books.
- Masson, GA.** 2016. A reforma agrária como uma política pública de desenvolvimento ou política social? Uma análise a partir dos assentamentos rurais Tereza do Cedro e Dandara no município de Uberaba/MG [Doctoral thesis]. São Paulo, Brazil: Universidade Estadual “Júlio de Mesquita Filho”—Editora Unesp.
- Masson, GA.** 2020. *A Questão Agrária e a Luta pela Reforma Agrária no Triângulo Mineiro*. Curitiba, Brazil: Editora Appris.
- Masson, GA.** 2021. Determinantes do desenvolvimento capitalista no campo em Minas Gerais, as lutas pela terra, suas diferentes manifestações e a reforma agrária como política social, in Bruziguessi, B, Bezerra, CS, Capuchinho, MN, de Jesus, NM, Alagoano, VM eds., *Questão agrária e políticas públicas em Minas Gerais: Conflitos sociais e alternativas populares*. Juiz de Fora, Brazil: Editora UFJF: 49–57.
- Masson, GA.** 2022. Estado e políticas públicas em Portugal: Uma análise a partir da entrada na comunidade econômica europeia, in *Congresso Internacional de Direitos Humanos de Coimbra* (vol. 7), No. 1.
- Matzembacher, DE, Meira, FB.** 2020. Mercantilização & contramovimento: Agricultura sustentada pela comunidade (CSA): Estudo de caso em Minas Gerais, Brasil. *Organizações & Sociedade* **27**(94): 396–430. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1984-9270942>.
- McMichael, P.** 1997. Rethinking globalization: The agrarian question revisited. *Review of International Political Economy* **4**(4): 630–662.
- McMichael, P.** 2013. *Food regimes and agrarian questions*. Halifax, Canada: Fernwood Publishing.
- Middlemiss, L.** 2022. Who is vulnerable to energy poverty in the Global North, and what is their experience? *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Energy and Environment* **11**(6): e455.
- Ministério da Agricultura e Pecuária do Brasil.** 2020. Agropecuária brasileira em números. Secretaria de Política Agrícola—SPA Departamento de Crédito e Informação—DCI Coordenação-Geral de Avaliação de Política da Informação—CGAPI. Available at <https://www.gov.br/agricultura/pt-br/assuntos/politica-agricola/todas-publicacoes-de-politica-agricola/agropecuaria-brasileira-em-numeros/agropecuaria-brasileira-em-numeros-abril-de-2020>. Accessed May 5, 2023.
- Mintz, SW.** 1986. *Sweetness and power: The place of sugar in modern history*. Reprint Edition. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Mitiku, A.** 2014. Impact of smallholder farmers agricultural commercialization on rural households' poverty. *International Journal of Applied Economics and Finance* **8**(2): 51–61.
- Moreira, M.** 1991. Portuguese agriculture and the state: An outline of the past 25 years, in Friedland, WH, Busch, L, Buttel, FH, Rudy, AP eds., *Towards a new political economy of agriculture*. New York, NY: Routledge: 1–16.
- Moreira, MB, Gerry, C.** 2003. The impact of global economic integration on the countryside: Reflections on the Portuguese experience, in Entrena, F ed., *Local reactions to globalization processes: Competitive adaptation or socio-economic erosion?* New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers: 69–94. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.4810.0004>.

- Moura, C.** 1983. Escravidão, colonialismo, imperialismo e racismo. *Revista Afro-Ásia*. n. 14. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.9771/aa.v0i14.20824>.
- Moura, C.** 1992. *História do Negro Brasileiro-Série Principais*. São Paulo, Brazil: Editora Ática SA.
- Moyo, S, Jha, P, Yeros, P.** 2015. The agrarian question in the 21st century. *Economic and Political Weekly* **50**(37): 35–41.
- MST.** 2013. Movimento Programa agrário do MST: Natureza, fundamentos, proposta e lema de luta (2013). *Revista InSURgência, Brasília, DF, ano 2013* **1**: 247–279.
- MST.** 2022 Sep 30. O Governo Lula foi o que mais assentou famílias na história do Brasil. *MST Website*. Available at <https://mst.org.br/2022/09/30/o-governo-lula-foi-o-que-mais-assentou-familias-na-historia-do-brasil/>. Accessed May 5, 2023.
- Netto, JP, Braz, M.** 2021. *Economia política: Uma introdução crítica* (vol. 1). São Paulo, Brazil: Cortez Editora.
- Ondetti, G.** 2016. The social function of property, land rights and social welfare in Brazil. *Land Use Policy* **50**: 29–37.
- PENSSAN.** 2022. *2º Inquérito Nacional sobre insegurança alimentar no contexto da pandemia da Covid-19 no Brasil*. São Paulo, Brazil: Fundação Friedrich Ebert: Rede PENSSAN.
- Petersen, PF, Silveira, LM.** 2017. Agroecology, public policies and labor-driven intensification: Alternative development trajectories in the Brazilian semi-arid region. *Sustainability* **9**(4): 535. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/su9040535>.
- PORDATA.** 2022. Estatísticas sobre Portugal e Europa. Available at <https://www.pordata.pt/portugal>. Accessed May 25, 2023.
- PORDATA.** 2023. Estatísticas sobre Portugal e Europa. Available at <https://www.pordata.pt/portugal>. Accessed June 16, 2024.
- PORDATA.** 2024. Estatísticas sobre Portugal e Europa. Available at <https://www.pordata.pt/portugal>. Accessed June 16, 2024.
- Prado, C Jr.** 2000. *A questão agrária no Brasil*. São Paulo, Brazil: Brasiliense.
- Quaresma, A.** 2023 Apr 1. Perspectiva sociohistórica das lutas camponesa em Odemira. Personal communication at the workshop Nossa terra, Minha terra: A Questão Agrária em Odemira.
- Ricardo, F-N, Nicholas, G.** 2014. Working for the few: Political capture and economic inequality. Oxford, UK: Oxfam International.
- Rode, GDF, Stoffel, J, Rambo, AG.** 2021. PRONAF—Agroecologia: Reflexões sobre o (não) acesso ao subprograma no território da cidadania Cantuquiriguaçu/PR. *Informe GEPEC* **25**(1): 10–26. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.48075/igepec.v25i1.23900>.
- Rosset, PM, Altieri, MA.** 2017. *Agroecology: Science and politics*. Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing.
- Roudart, L, Mazoyer, M.** 2015. Large-scale land acquisitions: A historical perspective. *International Development Policy | Revue internationale de politique de développement* [Preprint] **6**. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4000/poldev.2088>.
- Sampaio, JR.** 2013. Notas críticas sobre a atualidade e os desafios da questão agrária, in Stédile, JP ed., *Debates sobre a situação e perspectivas da reforma agrária na década de 2000*. São Paulo, Brazil: Expressão Popular: 189–240.
- Santos, P.** 2020. Agronegócio e controle de terras por agentes estrangeiros no Triângulo Mineiro/Alto Paranaíba: O grupo Bunge Açúcar e Bioenergia. Dissertação [Mestrado em Geografia]. Uberlândia, Brazil: Universidade Federal de Uberlândia: 131.
- Silva, L.** 2023. As discórdias em torno das centrais fotovoltaicas em Portugal. *Análise Social* **58**(247): 270–293. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31447/AS00032573.2023247.04>.
- Silva, LNF, Santos, MBS.** 2018. Formação e desenvolvimento do Triângulo Mineiro: Aspectos econômicos, educacionais e tecnológicos. *Economia & Região* **6**(1): 81–105.
- Sonnino, R, Hanmer, O.** 2016. Beyond food provision: Understanding community growing in the context of food poverty. *Geoforum* **74**: 213–221.
- Stédile, JP.** 2005. *A questão agrária no Brasil, vol. 1: O debate tradicional—1500–1960*. São Paulo, Brazil: Expressão Popular.
- Stédile, JP.** 2020. *Experiencias de Reforma Agraria en el mundo*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Batalla de Ideas Ediciones.
- Stédile, JP, Estevam, D.** 2012. *A questão agrária no Brasil, vol. 3: Programas de reforma agrária, 1946–2003. 2nd ed.* São Paulo, Brazil: Editora Expressão Popular.
- Tuma, EH.** 1965. *Twenty-six centuries of agrarian reform: A comparative analysis*. No. 2. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Tuma, EH.** 2022. Land reform. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at <https://www.britannica.com/money/topic/land-reform>. Accessed December 15, 2023.
- Vilardaga, JC.** 2002. *Lastros de viagem: Expectativas, descobertas e projeções portuguesas no Índico—análise de três narrativas quinhentistas*. São Paulo, Brazil: FFLCH.
- Walker, HM, Culham, A, Fletcher, AJ, Reed, MG.** 2019. Social dimensions of climate hazards in rural communities of the global North: An intersectionality framework. *Journal of Rural Studies* **72**: 1–10.
- Wezel, A, Gemmill-Herren, B, Kerr, RB, Barrios, E, Luiz, A, Gonçalves, R, Sinclair, F.** 2020. Agroecological principles and elements and their implications for transitioning to sustainable food systems. A review. *Agronomy for Sustainable Development* **40**(6): 1–13.
- Wittman, H, James, D.** 2022. Land governance for agroecology. *Elementa Science of the Anthropocene* **10**(1): 00100.
- World Resources Institute (WRI) in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, and World Bank.** 2005. World resources 2005: The wealth of the poor—Managing ecosystems to fight poverty. Washington, DC: WRI.

How to cite this article: Horstink, L, Schwemmlin, K, Masson, GA. 2024. Land sovereignty in depressed and contested agro-territories: The cases of Portugal and Brazil. *Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene* 12(1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/elementa.2023.00075>

Domain Editor-in-Chief: Alastair Iles, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, USA

Guest Editor: Sylvia Kay, The Transnational Institute, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Knowledge Domain: Sustainability Transitions

Part of an Elementa Special Feature: Land and Sustainable Food Transformations

Published: August 23, 2024 **Accepted:** July 10, 2024 **Submitted:** May 25, 2023

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

