



INSTITUT DE HAUTES  
ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES  
ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT  
GRADUATE INSTITUTE  
OF INTERNATIONAL AND  
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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*Common Struggles, Different Roots: Indigenous and Landless  
People's Food Sovereignties in Southern Brazil*

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## Abstract

*Focusing on the Guarani Mbyá and the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Santa Catarina, this thesis explores the similarities and differences between indigenous and landless food sovereignty. It shows how their narratives are intertwined and how their unique legal and cultural positionalities shape their food practices. Brazil's high land concentration and dominant agri-food practices put pressure on both groups. This pressure generates similar food sovereignty practices to preserve their food systems while promoting favorable public policies. Uniquely, the MST, as part of the settler society, sees agrarian reform and food practices as a means to change the Brazilian land and food system. Instead, for the Guarani Mbyá, food practices are an integral part of their culture and a way to preserve their self-determination. The Guarani case illustrates the complex, non-linear relationship between mental health and access to traditional food production and consumption, both within their territories and in public spaces.*

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# Introduction

*“There are times when you go hungry, but the problem is not hunger, the problem is the desire to eat”<sup>1</sup>.*

Brazil has one of the highest rates of land concentration in the world. It originated in the colonial period and worsened with the Green Revolution during the military regime in the 1970s. The most marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples and peasants, suffer the most from the consequences in favor of large landowners. Food sovereignty is a means to better articulate and coordinate action among these groups against the current agri-food system. Food sovereignty is an umbrella term for the multiple understandings of food and practices that emerge from a particular group's struggle. Recognizing the commonalities and differences within food sovereignties allows for systemic and horizontal thinking about the forms of pressure and underlying power. It allows for a dynamic analysis of the inequalities within our food systems, giving a better insight into the positionality of these groups within it.<sup>2</sup> This study explores the interwoven narratives of the landless workers' Movement (MST) and indigenous communities in Brazil, examining how their struggles for land, identity, and survival under the pressures of agribusiness and historical dispossession shape their distinct yet sometimes overlapping conceptions of food sovereignty. It seeks to unpack the implications of these converging and diverging paths for the broader discourse on food sovereignty, highlighting the need to recognize and address the complexities inherent in these movements' pursuit of justice and self-determination. The research inquires on *“How do the positions of the MST and indigenous groups in Brazil shape the pursuit of food sovereignty, and what are the implications for the broader debate on food sovereignty and peasants' rights?”*

## Methodology

The research used an exploratory approach to *“push the boundaries of our basic assumptions, refine and ultimately improve [...] theoretical paradigms”<sup>3</sup>* through case study analysis and fieldwork. Legal and social status are interrelated. Therefore, the theoretical interdisciplinary review locates the subjects in their context and, from there, how they understand and articulate their food sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> This analysis is then followed by the characterization of national and state agrarian change, MST and indigenous context, and food sovereignty. The Brazilian case is highly relevant due to the high concentration of land, the presence of indigenous peoples, the uniqueness of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), and the increasing pressure on land. The southern state of Santa Catarina was chosen because of its particularities and relatively low coverage in the literature on indigenous and landless issues. As analyzed in the section 2.2, the state has a relatively lower concentration of land and a higher presence of small plots compared to the rest of the country, a historically conservative ruling class, and, nationally, one of the highest Human Development Index (HDI), GDP growth, and GDP per capita. The northern mesoregion shows an accentuation of all these



Figure 1. State and Northern mesoregion of Santa Catarina (Produced by the author. Data from OpenStreetMap).

<sup>1</sup> Participant 5, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: *“Tem épocas que passa fome. Mas o problema não é a fome, o problema é a vontade de comer”*

<sup>2</sup> Montterubio-Solis et al., 2023; Whyte, 2018; Daigle, 2017

<sup>3</sup> Darian-Smith and McCarty 2017, 96

<sup>4</sup> Beitin, 2012; Kappler, 2013; Piquard, 2022; Irgil et al., 2021; Keohane, 2011

trends, hosting the richest city in the state, Joinville, and some of the fastest-growing municipalities, such as Araquari, as well as a relatively concentrated presence of indigenous groups, especially the Guarani Mbyá, and MST settlements. Finally, the analysis of the data elaborates the findings of the fieldwork and answers the research question.

Data collection was conducted primarily through interviews and observations, supported by documents and multimedia materials provided directly by the participants. Due to the limited access, the research relied on snowball sampling as the primary sampling strategy. Access to indigenous and MST communities is highly constrained by relationships of trust, requiring privileged intermediaries. Given the researcher's access to these contacts in the region, a focus on this area was favored. A total of six interviews were conducted in March 2024, three with Guarani Mbyá from the indigenous territory (TI) Aldeia Tarumã BR (Araquari-Balneário Barra do Sul), including the SESAI coordinator covering all indigenous peoples in the northern mesoregion, and three with MST settlers from the settlements (*assentamentos*) of *Conquista do Litoral* (Garuva), *Herança do Contestado* (Mafra), and *Terra Livre* (Canoinhas). Five interviews were presencial with the researcher hosted in their settlements, and one MST-related online. To focus on heterogeneous leadership figures, a purposive sampling strategy was used. Specifically, in the TI, chiefs (*caciques*) and vice-chiefs (*vice-caciques*) were interviewed, while in the *assentamentos*, having a more horizontal structure, participants comprise influential people in the communities. The *assentamentos* have two property structures: one having a collective ownership model and two have two different forms of hybrid ones. A semi-structured interview format was used with 15 open-ended questions. The questions were adapted and made understandable to the interviewees and divided into three categories: Personal worldview and self-description; Relationship to land and food; and Food Sovereignty practices. Food sovereignty was directly mentioned only once, but its constitutive elements were inquired about to make the questions more accessible. Interviews were transcribed and coded using inductive and deductive coding, resulting in the identification of the core of meaning as the basis for a thematic content analysis approach to identify specific trends. The consent of the participants was obtained according to the Brazilian legislation as well as the guidelines of the Geneva Graduate Institute, with emphasis on Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), through several consultations with local academics from the IELUSC University in Joinville (SC). The issue of the identification of the TI and indigenous people interviewed was of concern, given the episodes of violence to which they were subjected. Aside from explicit consent for publication, the violence reported in this research has already been reported and directly linked to the TI in other open online sources and reports or openly denounced by the participants in public forums, adding no additional level of exposure to these communities.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, the Guarani Mbyá highlighted multiple times the issue of translating their thoughts into the formal institutional language, therefore, while all the quotes from all participants will have the original transcription in Portuguese in the footnotes, concepts that are particularly salient for this group will be fully quoted.

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<sup>5</sup> Hardy et al. in Herrera, 2004; Robinson, 2014

# 1. Landless and Indigenous Food Sovereignities

## 1.1. Food Sovereignty, Power and Land: Theoretical and Legal Perspectives

From a theoretical and human rights perspective, the definition of food sovereignty is constantly debated. Historically born in Latin America in the 1990s as a response to the increased priority given by governments to food security, it seeks to consider the social and political dimensions behind food production and consumption. It focuses on efforts to achieve more human-centered and environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable agriculture and food systems.<sup>6</sup> Crucially, food sovereignty is articulated primarily through other rights. For the sake of clarity, after a brief historical analysis to understand the rationale behind the term, the analysis of the legal corpus constituting food sovereignty will be used to articulate its conceptual and legal evolution.<sup>7</sup> The term was first introduced at the World Food Summit in 1996 by the La Via Campesina movement. The aim was to defend the rights of those working on the land and promote an alternative vision of food production and consumption. Food sovereignty was seen as *“a set of reactions to neoliberal globalisation and the industrial food system that is presented as an alternative approach predicated on the dispersal of power”*<sup>8</sup> emphasizing seed rights, agrarian reform, and working conditions. Given the wide range of actors within La Via Campesina, the promotion of the linkages between people, territories, cultures, and food was combined with a rejection of one-size-fits-all solutions in favor of localized ones and advocacy for the rights and empowerment of a wider range of groups, including indigenous peoples.<sup>9</sup> The turning point for the food sovereignty movement was the 2007 International Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty in Selingue, Mali. The Forum produced the Nyéléni Declaration, which defines food sovereignty as *“the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems”*<sup>10</sup>. The definition has been articulated in six pillars that advocate: (1) a people-centered and human rights-based approach to food; (2) the valorization of food providers and their livelihoods; (3) placing consumers and providers at the center of decision-making; (4) local control of territory and its products with local providers and ensuring *“the right of local communities to inhabit and use their territories”*<sup>11</sup>; (5) the valorization and preservation of local knowledge; (6) and environmental sustainability.<sup>12</sup>

The link with the right to food has been recognized since the beginning, in 2004, the first UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food stated the importance of examining alternative models, such as food sovereignty. The importance of food sovereignty was then recognized by the second one in *“the possibility for communities to choose which food systems [...] food sovereignty is a condition for the full realization of the right to food”*<sup>13</sup>. In 2016, we find the key interception with women’s rights with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee General Recommendation No. 34 which calls on State parties to *“ensure the realization of the right to food and nutrition of rural women within the framework of food sovereignty and ensure that they have the*

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<sup>6</sup> Nyéléni Forum, 2007; Oliveri, 2016

<sup>7</sup> Araújo, 2014; Calafate, 2018; Azzariti, 2021; Shrinkhal, 2021; Golay, 2020

<sup>8</sup> Andrée et al. 2014, p. 11 in Mann, 2019

<sup>9</sup> Lombardi et. al, 2018; da Silva and Monteiro, 2023; Rocha and Liberato, 2013; Abdul et al., 2023

<sup>10</sup> Nyéléni Forum, 2007: 1.

<sup>11</sup> European Coordination Via Campesina, 2018: 15

<sup>12</sup> Nyéléni Declaration, 2007; European Coordination Via Campesina, 2018; Golay in Alabrese et al., 2022

<sup>13</sup> De Schutter, 2014: ph. 50

*authority to manage and control their natural resources*”<sup>14, 15</sup>

The main document considered for this analysis is the 2018 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), which is the only declaration that explicitly recognizes both the right to food and food sovereignty (Art. 15) and the right to produce food (Art. 5). Overall, UNDROP seeks to address the complexity of the relationship with food, with particular attention to historically discriminated groups. Accessibility to food is seen in both economic and physical terms (Art. 15.2), as well as in terms of participation (Art. 10), information (Art. 11), and access to justice (Art. 12). The Declaration also includes rights related to the dignity and integrity of peasants - the right to life (Art. 6); the right to legal personality (Art. 7); the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, opinion, expression and peaceful assembly (Art. 8); and the right to an adequate standard of living (Art. 16) - a safe and socially and culturally appropriate environment - working conditions that ensure their safety and health (Art. 14); a safe, clean and healthy environment (Art. 18); and to drinking water and sanitation (Art. 21); and health (Art. 23) - and the right to organize for the protection of their interests (Art. 9) and to education and training (Art. 25).<sup>16</sup>

“*[L]and is not only a resource for producing food, generating income and developing housing, it also constitutes the basis for social, cultural and religious practices and the enjoyment of the right to take part in cultural life.*”<sup>17</sup> The connection to the land is at the core of the definition of what a peasant and a landless person is and what they are fighting for. UNDROP sees peasants as those with a “*special dependency on and attachment to the land*”<sup>18</sup>. This understanding of land underpins the importance given in the Declaration to the individual and collective right to access, control, and manage land (Art. 5, 17, and 28) and to adequate housing (Art. 24). These include, *inter alia*, the prohibition of arbitrary or unlawful displacement and eviction and the recognition of natural commons (Articles 17.3 and 17.4). It allows for a better linkage between the rights of individuals and their ability to realize them through access to resources. It also recognizes their positionality within economic and political systems. Land-related policies can have a disproportionate impact on women, indigenous peoples, rural communities, children, and small farmers, with effects ranging from economic to cultural to mental health.<sup>19</sup>

The trajectory of food sovereignty is different in each region based on its history, society, and the articulation of agriculture and food systems. In Latin America, smallholder agriculture did not decline after the Green Revolution, but rather its conditions deteriorated in favor of large plantations, which partly explains why the food sovereignty movement was born in this region. Thus, at the regional level, particular attention is paid to the expansion of export-oriented agribusiness and the consequent transformation of land tenure, as well as to indigenous perspectives, given the region's colonial legacy.<sup>20</sup> At the regional level, food sovereignty was recognized in 2012 by the Organization of American States (OAS) with the Cochabamba Declaration on Food Security with Sovereignty in the Americas, the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament adopted the Framework Law on the Right to Food, Food Security and Food Sovereignty, and the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of the Americas (ALBA) adopted several food sovereignty instruments. A food sovereignty framework can be found in national constitutions (Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia, while it is implicit in Venezuela's), with Brazil

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<sup>14</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2016: ph. 64

<sup>15</sup> Golay in Alabrese et al., 2022

<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Council, 2018; Golay, 2023; Golay in Alabrese et al., 2022; Tigino et al. in Alabrese et al., 2022

<sup>17</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2022, ph. 1

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Council, 2018

<sup>19</sup> Cotula in Alabrese et al., 2022; Human Rights Council, 2018; Golay, 2023

<sup>20</sup> Chappell et al., 2013; Mann, 2019

including the right to food but not food sovereignty. It can also be found in national policies (Cuba, Dominican Republic, Paraguay, and Argentina)<sup>21</sup>.

## 1.2. Indigenous Food Sovereignty

As seen in the section 1.1., the fluidity and vagueness of food sovereignty is a source of debate. The diversity within La Via Campesina has led to a deliberately vague definition to allow it to adapt to the struggles of different marginalized groups. The understanding of it has gradually broadened from agrarian reform and peasants' rights to the promotion of agroecology and greater questioning of food practices and food systems.<sup>22</sup> Over time, the focus on indigenous food sovereignty has grown. Indigenous peoples share common struggles and interests with non-indigenous ones regarding their demands for access to land, food production, subsistence, and autonomy. In addition, both groups are strongly affected by agricultural policies and rural development. Therefore, UNDROP recognizes and integrates the rights of indigenous peoples as part of the "Other Peoples" it covers. As it explicitly excludes a hierarchy of rights, the Declaration allows for synergies and expansion with the broader indigenous rights, in particular, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and ILO Convention No. 169 Concerning Indigenous Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. UNDROP's Article 17 emphasizes the importance of recognizing communal and customary land tenure systems, including collective use of the commons, not only for food production but also as part of the right to an adequate standard of living (Art. 16) and a safe and socially and culturally appropriate environment (Arts. 14, 18, 21 and 23).<sup>23</sup>

Crucially, however, UNDROP lacks the right to self-determination. Indigenous sovereignty does not have a fixed and agreed meaning, ranging from self-determination in a strict Westphalian sense to increased empowerment, autonomy, recognition, and agency over themselves and their territory. In the broadest sense, the UNDRIP recognizes the *"right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development"* (Art. 3) and differentiation through the *"right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture"* (Art. 8).<sup>24</sup> The international jurisprudence has not interpreted it as an absolute right. ILO Convention No. 169 states that *"the use the term 'peoples' in this Convention shall not be construed as having any implication as regards the rights which may attach to the term under international law"*<sup>25</sup> and UNDRIP (Art. 46) states that indigenous peoples may exercise autonomy or self-government in their local affairs without prejudice to the territorial integrity of their host state. La Via Campesina chose the term sovereignty to challenge its traditional understanding, but while some struggles are shared with the rest of the food sovereignty movement, there are fundamental differences between indigenous and non-indigenous practices and understandings. Indigenous food sovereignty must be understood in the context of the coexistence of two societies, one of which, the settler society, exercises an asymmetrical power over the other, the indigenous one.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, as discussed by Shrinkhal (2021), this asymmetrical engagement requires a unilateral translation effort on the part of

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<sup>21</sup> Golay in Alabrese et al., 2022; Chappell et al., 2013; Azzariti, 2021; Araújo, 2014

<sup>22</sup> Lombardi et al., 2018; Grey and Patel, 2014; Daigle, 2019

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Council, 2018; Bessa and Gilbert, 2022; Bessa and Gilbert in Alabrese et al., 2022; Lombardi et al., 2018; Cotula in Alabrese et al., 2022

<sup>24</sup> General Assembly, 2007

<sup>25</sup> International Labour Organization, 1989

<sup>26</sup> Cumow and Helferty, 2018; Mesquite, 2018; Kujawa, 2015



the indigenous communities into the dominant framework.<sup>27</sup> According to Abdul et al. (2023), indigenous food sovereignty has four characteristics in the literature: traditional knowledge, promotion of traditional foods, community ownership, and environmental sustainability. These four elements highlight how replacing traditional practices with new forms of production and consumption leads to the incorporation of indigenous peoples into settler society and the deterioration of the relationship between communities, territory, and culture. A condition that many indigenous peoples are already experiencing through the consumption of industrialized foods and the intensive cultivation of cash crops in their lands. Food practices become a means of avoiding the disempowerment generated by cultural uprooting and incorporation into settler society.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, indigenous food sovereignty is often primarily concerned with maintaining traditional practices and disengaging from Western and post-colonial practices to ensure self-determination over their livelihoods, cultures, lands, and food systems. Ultimately, indigenous food sovereignty is where these forms of self-determination become expressions of decolonization.<sup>29</sup> As Grey and Patel (2015) argue, “*a foundational part of the decolonization project: spotting the lie*”<sup>30</sup> and in this context, food sovereignty allows for a critical look at how food systems perpetuate certain practices over indigenous peoples, and how their food-related counter-practices become “*the continuation of anti-colonial struggles in ostensibly postcolonial contexts*”<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Shrinkhal, 2021

<sup>28</sup> Ioris, 2020; Monterrubio-Solis et al., 2023; Ioris, 2020; Rocha and Liberato, 2013; Costa & Silva, 2017; Abdul et al., 2023; Barbosa et al. 2022

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.; Whyte, 2018; Costa and Silva, 2017; Lombardi et al., 2018; Ioris, 2020

<sup>30</sup> Grey and Patel, 2015, p. 3

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

## 2. The MST and Indigenous Peoples in Brazil and Santa Catarina

### 2.1. The National Dimension

#### 2.1.1. Agrarian Change in Brazil

Latin America has the highest concentration of land in the world, and Brazil has one of the highest concentrations in the region. In the country, 0.3% of the top landowners own a quarter of all agricultural land, while the largest tenth percentile owns 73% of it<sup>32</sup>. Looking at the Gini index, Brazil has a high inequality index of 0.73. There is a higher concentration in the large plantation states, such as Mato Grosso (MT) and Mato Grosso do Sul (MS), and a lower concentration in the states with small plots and family farming in the south, such as Santa Catarina (SC) (Gini 0.63) - as seen in Figures 2 and 3 and section 2.2.<sup>33</sup> The main reason for the current situation is the land tenure system. Brazil has never carried out an agrarian reform and, consequently, land inequality has never been addressed. There has always been a preference for agriculture over agrarian policy.<sup>34</sup> The land tenure system was established in colonial times (1500-1822) and structured around captainships and plantations (*fazendas*) to ensure loyalty and increase sovereignty and exports, creating the *senhores da terra* (land elite). In the nineteenth century, the abolition of slavery and decolonization led to the *Lei da Terra* of 1891 to privatize land. In practice, the law formalized the previous ownership structure while curbing the demands for land by peasants and freed people, who often worked on the same plantations.<sup>35</sup> The military dictatorship (1964-1985) exacerbated the concentration and inequalities of the existing land regime to achieve its goal of transforming Brazil into an agricultural superpower. It promoted intensive and mechanized monoculture, leading to the Green Revolution.<sup>36</sup> Small farmers were increasingly unable to compete and, with the democratization in 1985 and the introduction of the current constitution in 1988, several attempts at social land reform were made, but most of them failed. In this context, the congressional lobbies of the land elite have played a key role, either preventing the introduction of redistributive and protective norms over time or reducing the effectiveness of the norms introduced through their influence on federal and state implementers. To date, Brazil is the only country in Latin America that has not abolished the *fazenda* system.<sup>37</sup> The strong power of large landowners therefore means that Brazil has what Carter (2010) describes as a conservative land reform. In this regime, land is distributed in small amounts and change occurs only under pressure from organized groups and in isolated cases within a broader context of human rights violations.<sup>38</sup>



Figure 2. Gini Index of Land Tenure in Brazil (DATALUTA Network, 2017: 34). Modified by the author for clarity. The lighter areas have a Gini Index closer to 0 and the darker areas closer to 1.2

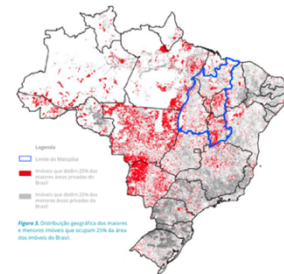


Figure 3. Geographical Distribution of the Largest and Smallest Estates in Brazil (Pinto et al., 2020: 11). Modified by the author for clarity. Areas in red represent the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of the largest estates, while those in gray represent the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of the smallest.

<sup>32</sup> Pinto et al., 2020

<sup>33</sup> IBGE 2011; DATALUTA Network, 2017; Pinto et al., 2020; Pacheco and Meyer, 2022

<sup>34</sup> Barbosa, 2021; Ferron and Troian, 2019; Hendlin, 2019

<sup>35</sup> Pinto et al., 2020; Wolford, 2003; Ferron and Troian, 2019; Fernandez, 2023; Wittman, 2009

<sup>36</sup> Welch, 2022; Hendlin, 2019; Wittman, 2009; Wolford, 2003; Lerrer and Medeiros, 2014; Stavenhagen in Rosset et al., 2006

<sup>37</sup> Barbosa, 2021; Ferron and Troian, 2019

<sup>38</sup> Hendlin, 2019; Wolford, 2003; Lalach et al., 2006; Lerrer and Medeiros, 2014; Wolford, 1996; Ferron and Troian, 2019; Loera, 2004

### 2.1.2. The MST, Assentamentos, and Food Sovereignty

In the 1980s, small farmers saw their land holdings diminished due to the Green Revolution and the increasing concentration and fragmentation of land. As a result, competition for access to land intensified, as did rural poverty. With the weakening of the military government and democratization, the *ligas camponesas* emerged to organize rural workers and small landowners.<sup>39</sup> The largest and most successful was the Landless Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra - MST*), founded in 1984 in the southern state of Paraná (PN). The goal of the MST is to oppose the increasing concentration of land and the exploitation of peasants. In this context, promoting alternative food systems becomes an act of resistance against the dominant Brazilian agribusiness. Unlike in the large plantation states, the ability of southern peasants to organize through the support of their cohesive communities, including Catholic and Lutheran ones, allowed MST to flourish. This link to local social networks explains why the movement's actions are structured around occupying large landowners' properties to turn them into *assentamentos* (settlements). The argument is that big landowners use the land inefficiently and leave it uncultivated - the slogan was land for those who work it. According to the MST, their actions are occupations, not invasions, because these plots fall under Art. 184 of the 1988 Constitution on the effective and social use of land clause.<sup>40</sup> Especially within conservative land reform, “*If we don't occupy, we don't prove that the law is on our side [...] The law is only applied when there is social initiative, that's the rule of law*”<sup>41</sup>. Art. 185 was approved following a strong advocacy from civil society groups that included many members of the MST.<sup>42</sup> In almost 40 years, the MST has supported the creation of approximately 2,300 settlements with more than 800,000 families and 1.5 million active members (Settlements distribution: Figure 4).<sup>43</sup>



Figure 4. MST Land Occupations (2000-2016) (DATALUTA Network, 2017: 48). Modified by the author for clarity.

Organizationally, the MST is both decentralized, with the *assentamentos* and their families as its building blocks, and nested. The movement acts as an intermediary between the *assentamentos* and their cooperatives and between them and the national institutions. The settlement process begins with a group of "prospective settlers" who, with the support of local MST members, churches, unions, and politicians, select a suitable plot of land. Once selected, a coordinated occupation creates an *accampamento* (camp) and begins a dialogue with institutions to transform it into a settlement. In this phase, clashes with law enforcement and landowners can occur, with cycles of eviction and occupation that can last for decades before recognition. In the settlement process, settlers from other *assentamentos*, relatives, friends, neighbors, religious communities, and associations support the new settlers in terms of numbers, and material and logistical needs. The level of tension or cooperation at the local level varies greatly depending on the relationship between the campers and the rest of the community.<sup>44</sup> At the state or national level, the MST negotiates with the institutions to transform the camp into a settlement. This is both a legal and political process that is facilitated by the presence of the PT, the party of President Luiz

<sup>39</sup> De Andrade and Serra, 2020; Wolfrod, 2003; Lerrer and Medeiros, 2014; Loera, 2004; Ferron and Troian, 2019; Hendlin, 2019

<sup>40</sup> Brazil, 1988: Art. 184 "it is within the power of the union to expropriate on account of social interest, for purposes of agrarian reform, the rural property which is not performing its social function, against prior and fair compensation in agrarian debt bonds with a clause providing for maintenance of the real value, redeemable within a period of up to twenty years computed as from the second year of issue, and the use of which shall be defined in the law."

<sup>41</sup> Stédile, 1999: 115 in Loera, 2004 Translated by the author. Original text "Se não ocupamos, não provamos que a lei está do nosso lado. É por essa razão que só houve desapropriações quando houve ocupação [...] A lei só é aplicada quando existe iniciativa social, essa é a norma do direito"

<sup>42</sup> Hendlin, 2019; Barbosa, 2021; Borsatto and Carmo, 2013; DeVore, 2015; Wolford, 1996; Lerrer and Medeiros, 2014; Wolford, 2004

<sup>43</sup> Fernandes, 2023, p. 1448; DATALUTA Network, 2017

<sup>44</sup> De Andrade and Serra, 2020; Fernandez, 2023; Loera, 2004; Wolford, 2003; 2004; Hendlin, 2019

Inácio Lula da Silva, in power. The regional MST networks are also important since the initial cultivation of crops, apart from self-sufficiency, can only count on the movement for distribution.<sup>45</sup> The settlement phase, if successful, allows the MST to grow its reputation for land acquisition that, combined with the presence of family and friends already in place, leads many to join either in the same or other settlements. Thus, many join the MST for its effectiveness in obtaining land rather than for the ideological underpinnings behind it.<sup>46</sup>

Once the land is granted, it is first converted into federal land by the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), the federal institution in charge of settlers and settlement issues. According to Fabrini (2002), most land is granted in the *interior* of a state, i.e., not in coastal or urban areas. INCRA defines an *assentamento* as independent agricultural units located where a rural estate used to be, with each unit given to families unable to obtain land by other means<sup>47</sup>. By law, all settlers must be registered with INCRA to remain on the plot, receive loans, and access services from the federal government. The MST is not recognized as an official intermediary, but the unofficial relationship between the MST and INCRA officials is key to achieving collective outcomes. The land is initially held collectively through a "Declaration of Rural Property" (*Declaração de Posse de Imóvel Rural*), a form of usufruct granted by INCRA. Over time, based on local needs, INCRA may issue legal titles for family plots, the "Certificate of Rural Property Registration" (*Certificado de Cadastro de Imóvel Rural*), which obliges the settlers (*assentados*) to pay the nominal annual rural property tax but allows them to have a recognized legal link to the land. The size of each plot depends on the size of the family, the topography, and its productivity. Only the assigned family or collective can work the land. It cannot be rented, and its ownership cannot be transferred, only inherited. If the land is not cultivated, the family or collective cannot keep it. Based on this legal status, there are three forms of property management within settlements:

1. Individual ownership: Families receive individual plots of land, with each one responsible for its production, distribution, or cooperation with other families or organizational structures.
2. Collective ownership of land and means: the settlement and the MST cooperative centralize planning. Collective ownership of property and labor is considered social by the movement and aims to guarantee a fair redistribution for all.
3. Hybrid forms: the most common form of organization, in which some families, often relatives, share the land, or the settlements have some form of shared commons or machinery.

While the movement has led to many settlements, its size and complexity have led to several instances of internal tension and conflict. When tenure or organizational tensions arise, understanding local dynamics is critical. Situations have ranged from abuse of power by leaders to free-riding and the erosion of settlers' ability to promote their interests. There are *assentamentos* where people belong to other associations, often because of divergent views on MST. Nevertheless, for practical and organizational reasons, some families do not affiliate with the movement but still coordinate with it.<sup>48</sup>

The federal government also provides credit and subsidy programs, such as the Special Credit Program for Land Reform (*Procera*) and food baskets (*Cestas Básicas*). It is often the main purchaser of the settlers' agricultural products for its national programs, Food Acquisition Program (PAA) and National

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<sup>45</sup> Wittman, 2009; De Andrade and Serra, 2020; Fernandez, 2023; Loera, 2004; Wolford, 2003; 2004; Hendlin, 2019; DeVore, 2015; Wolford, 1996; Lerrer and Medeiros, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Wittman, 2009; Wolford, 2004

<sup>47</sup> INCRA, 2019 in Ferron and Troian, 2019

<sup>48</sup> Devore, 2015; Pérez, 2015; Wittman, 2009; De Andrade and Serra, 2020; Wolford, 2003; DeVore, 2015; Ortiz Pérez, 2015

School Feeding Program (PNAE). The latter, known as *Merenda Escolar*, is particularly important to settlers. The program requires public and nonprofit schools to provide healthy and varied food. The *Merenda Escolar* requires that at least 30% of the food supplied comes from local small farmers, prioritizing INCRA settlements, including those of the MST. The law allows farmers to have pre-determined stable prices and purchase quantities, as well as accessible financing for cultivation.<sup>49</sup> Overall, even if it does not intervene daily, the federal government remains its landlord, supervisor, and creditor giving it considerable power over the assentamentos. The Bolsonaro government has shown the extent of this by restricting access to these programs.<sup>50</sup>

Looking at the MST's food sovereignty approach, the movement was born to prevent the eviction of peasants while promoting the occupation and creation of settlements. As the number of settlers increased, there was a gradual shift to national and networked action. The creation of several local and state cooperatives (CPPS, CPA, and CCA) and national coordination (CONCRAB) made it possible to better organize food distribution, settlement support, new camps, and peasants' rights promotion and defense.<sup>51</sup> This mode of action is considered the implementation of agrarian reform by replicating the industrial production of food with a different mode of work in the field.<sup>52</sup> The MST seeks to promote cooperativism within and between settlements. They promote horizontal decision-making, shorter production and distribution processes, and cooperation to achieve political and economic gains.<sup>53</sup> Within the settlements, the settlers decide on the rules of self-government and their representatives. The affiliation with MST implies active participation in the life of the movement. This includes its educational activities, which range from political courses aimed at understanding their rights as producers, food relations, and agrarian reform, to technical courses related to the agrarian, logistical, and bureaucratic skills needed to run the settlements.<sup>54</sup> In the late 1990s, internal and external critiques emerged regarding the mode of production within the settlements. The initial focus on ensuring food security and land by any means necessary, including intensive agriculture, was sidelined in favor of agroecology, sustainable farming, Creole seeds, and ethical supply chains. The movement, as a prominent member of La Via Campesina, had a broader reframing toward food sovereignty as a means of structuring collective action to resist the dominant food system in economic, social, and cultural terms. However, while this shift is clear at the national level, local experiences are more mixed, based on local production conditions and the known difficulties of shifting to agroecological practices.<sup>55</sup>

### 2.1.3. Indigenous Peoples, Rights and Food Sovereignty

The Portuguese government, and later the Brazilian one, has historically viewed indigenous peoples as an obstacle to development and access to resources. The goal was to transform what was perceived as inhabited land, first into areas incorporated into the sovereign sphere of the Portuguese Crown and later into profitable areas. The implementation of the Green Revolution under the dictatorship further accelerated these trends with the last expansion to the west of the country and the encroachment on existing indigenous lands. In particular, this period saw a sharp increase in occupations of indigenous

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<sup>49</sup> Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação, 2022; Brazil. 2009. *LEI Nº 11.947, DE 16 DE JUNHO DE 2009.*; Gov.Br. "Agricultura Familiar." Accessed May 21, 2024.; Gov.Br. "Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento Da Educação." Accessed May 21, 2024.

<sup>50</sup> Borsatto and Carmo, 2013; Hendlin, 2019; Wolford, 1996; Lerrer and Medeiros, 2014; Prez, 2015, DeVore, 2015; MST, 2023

<sup>51</sup> Pérez, 2015; Ortiz Pérez, 2015; Borsatto and Carmo, 2013; Fabrini, 2002

<sup>52</sup> Loera, 2004; Wittman, 2004; 2009

<sup>53</sup> Pérez, 2015; Ortiz Pérez, 2015; Borsatto and Carmo, 2013; Fabrini, 2002

<sup>54</sup> MST, 2023; Hendlin, 2019; Borsatto and Carmo, 2013; Wolford, 1996; Prez, 2015; Lerrer and Medeiros, 2014; DeVore, 2015; Wittman, 2009; Ferron and Troian, 2020: 7

<sup>55</sup> MST, 2023; Lerrer and Medeiros, 2014; Hendlin, 2019; Wittman, 2003; Wittman, 2004; ; Borsatto and Carmo, 2013

land as a solution to provide land to landless people while not taking it from the large landowners.<sup>56</sup> Since 1988, with the new Constitution and Republic, the federal government has discontinuously dealt with indigenous issues, slowing but not stopping the erosion of their autonomy. Support for indigenous peoples has been characterized by top-down food, agricultural, and social policies (such as *Bolsa Família*) aimed at guaranteeing their basic needs while undermining their autonomy by transforming them into poor and marginalized people. Given the size of the country and the diversity within indigenous groups, a high degree of contextual knowledge is required.<sup>57</sup>

Concerning indigenous rights, for most of Brazil's history, indigenous peoples have not been recognized as having any rights within the legal system. They have lived under a principle of guardianship, being considered incapacitated subjects, which has generally led to their forced incorporation into Brazilian society. During the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly, coordinated action allowed for the recognition of their partial right to self-determination and customary land and knowledge in the new Constitution of 1988. The aim was to end the absorption and tutelage in favor of their right to their way of life, health, socio-cultural defense, and hybrid citizenship. Chapter VII (Arts. 231 and 232) of the Constitution led to the official recognition of indigenous cultural and social organizations, differentiated treatment, the recognition of the original rights of the traditional occupiers' land, and the federal government's obligation to implement these principles. This recognition does not guarantee property rights or promote full self-determination. Art. 20 states that “*The following are property of the Union: [...] XI – those lands traditionally occupied by the Indians*”. Therefore, indigenous lands are federal lands. Art. 231 establishes four principles for the recognition of indigenous lands (TI): permanent population, relevance to the activities of the inhabitants, essential for the maintenance of their well-being, and necessary for their physical and cultural reproduction. According to Decree 1775/1996, the National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI), the federal agency in charge of indigenous affairs, carries out the process of demarcation of lands. For a TI to be recognized, FUNAI conducts an anthropological study, hears the objections, and sends the boundaries of the territory to the Ministry of Justice for approval. The land is then physically demarcated by FUNAI and homologated by decree of the President of the Republic. In practice, the process is usually long. Meanwhile, the land is actively protected only after homologation.<sup>58</sup> For this research, it is important to highlight that Arts. 6 and 196 of the Constitution recognize the right to health, while Art. 231 guarantees the right to a differentiated treatment and the duty of the government to enact it. These constitutional premises led to the promulgation of Laws No. 8080/1990a and No. 8142/1990b, which require the Public Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde*, SUS) to guarantee them. Arts. 6 and 227 recognize the right to food and adequate food, and the same principle of differentiation and obligation of the State to enact them is applicable.<sup>59</sup>

Overall, the Constitution has a technical understanding of indigenous issues. The state's approach to indigenous peoples has always been ambivalent, promoting big agribusiness as well as protecting their rights. The main challenge to indigenous lands remains squatting and land grabbing by large landowners and industry. Since the historic victory of Arts. 231 and 232 of the Constitution, there has been a continuous erosion of their legal rights due to the lack of enactment and the introduction of several laws by the historically prominent Amazonian and rural congressional blocs (*Bancada Amazonica* and *Ruralista*). The main trends have been the obstruction of laws that facilitate the implementation of

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<sup>56</sup> Hendlin, 2019; Welch, 2020

<sup>57</sup> Welch and Coimbra, 2022; Barbosa, 2022

<sup>58</sup> Barbosa, 2021; Brighenti, 2013; Silva, 2018; Calafate, 2018; Terras Indígenas no Brasil, 2024b

<sup>59</sup> Lacerda et al., 2024; Brazil, 1988

indigenous rights, the gradual transfer of jurisdiction over indigenous issues to decision-making spaces where these groups have more influence and indigenous peoples are not represented, the introduction of the right of contradiction for agribusiness and mining companies throughout the demarcation process and attempts to introduce the *Marco Temporal* (Temporal Framing). The latter is based on the legal reasoning that the only lands potentially recognizable to become indigenous are those effectively occupied at the time of the enactment of the Constitution. It severely limits the ability of indigenous peoples to demarcate new lands, given the conditions and limitations that existed before the Constitution. In 2009, the Supreme Federal Tribunal (STF) used this legal theory in a ruling, confirmed its relevance in 2019, and overturned it in 2023 after an extraordinary appeal. Meanwhile, a significant number of demarcations have been halted or delayed. Nevertheless, there are still several legislative attempts to test the limits of the decision.<sup>60</sup> The administration of President Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2023) represented a continuation and exacerbation of these trends. During the 2018 election campaign, Bolsonaro promised multiple times that he would not concede a “millimeter”<sup>61</sup> of land to indigenous peoples and actively promoted the *Marco Temporal*. Key posts in the federal agencies that directly and indirectly protect indigenous peoples have been filled by people ideologically close to the presidency, especially in FUNAI. During his mandate, the leadership of FUNAI effectively halted all processes related to the demarcation of the TIs while undermining the indigenous safeguards during the demarcation process. In 2020, FUNAI introduced Normative Instruction 09/2020, which authorizes individuals to file claims for certification of private property and plot’s placement in the real estate market within pending indigenous lands.<sup>62</sup> As argued by one of the participants, “*there has never been a government that was good for the Brazilian indigenous population [...] [but] the last government was to kill us*”<sup>63</sup>.

Regarding indigenous food sovereignty, while efforts to centralize actions outside of specific advocacy campaigns are increasing, actions related to indigenous food systems often lack coordination and centralization. Spatial or ethnic affiliation is the primary aggregator. Therefore, the heterogeneity of groups and locations leads to more localized actions. Moments of land reclamation, such as *Retomada*, and local food and cultivation initiatives are growing, but the explicit discourse on indigenous food sovereignty is still limited.<sup>64</sup>

#### 2.1.4. Landless and Indigenous Peoples’ Food Sovereignties

Brazil presents a strong socio-cultural heterogeneity, reflected in the diversity of land tenure. However, this diversity is being affected by a pervasive pressure on land through reterritorialization and value extraction generated by agribusiness and large monocultures. As a result, the most vulnerable groups are marginalized physically, socially, and economically. In this context, “*Landless peasants and indigenous groups threatened with the removal of their territories are similar in their calls for justice and basic rights, even if the substance of these claims manifests differently*”<sup>65</sup>.<sup>66</sup> The relationship between this land pressure, which is transforming into agrarian and food pressure, and indigenous, peasant, and landless

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<sup>60</sup> Lalich et al., 2006; Abdul et al., 2023; HRW, 2022; Carvalho, 2000; Hendlin, 2019; Brighenti, 2013

<sup>61</sup> survivalinternational.org, 2024

<sup>62</sup> HRW, 2022; Conselho Indigenista Missionário (Cimi), 2023

<sup>63</sup> Participant 2, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*Nunca teve um governo que foi bom para a população indígena brasileira [...] [mas] o último governo era para nos matar*”

<sup>64</sup> Barbosa, 2021; Lombardi et al., 2018; Kujama, 201

<sup>65</sup> Hendlin, 2019, p. 120

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.; Little, 2002 in Gabriel, 2017; Welch, 2020

communities is evolving, context-specific, and complex. Both the MST and the indigenous groups have significant internal differences. The MST presents itself as a movement that people join, even pragmatically, because they share a similar value system or basic goal (i.e., getting land). Indigenous people have the defense of their land and customs as their common denominator. Looking at the shared struggle, the MST has demonstrated its support for the indigenous cause as part of the struggle against land invasions, the focus on local knowledge, seeds and food practices, and ideological support for the anti-colonial cause. The movement defines indigenous peoples as “friends of the MST”. Nevertheless, isolated tensions have arisen at the local level.<sup>67</sup> Brazilian literature shows continuity with the food sovereignty theory seen in the first chapter. The MST and indigenous peoples, while being distinct groups, face strong land pressures. Each group's response depends on the specific impact of this pressure on them and their original legal and social context. This is also true for their food sovereignty. The MST and the landless represent the marginalized of the settler society. Their empowerment is shaped by a shared understanding of food sovereignty, political justice, land tenure, and agriculture that, while opposing the dominant food system, still emerges from the settler culture. The interaction between people, food, and land for indigenous peoples often transcends Brazilian political, consumption, and production relations. It is rooted in preserving their culture while dealing with their food practices. To summarize, “*Indigenous peoples’ movements do not demand just any land, but rather their land, and they want control over their land and territories*”<sup>68</sup>. In this context, claiming a right and interacting with other institutions in Brazilian society, whether cooperative or conflictual, becomes an act of translation and partial loss while the MST's goal is to achieve agrarian reform and the transformation of Brazilian society. In line with the broader theoretical framework, we can observe that the national dimension shows a food sovereignty orientation of both groups in terms of resistance to land encroachment. For indigenous peoples, this encroachment is a continuation of their colonial and post-colonial disempowerment. Meanwhile, the land tenure system that created the landless and the conservative agrarian reform, while having its roots in Brazilian colonial history - as seen in section 2.1.1. - is still an internal process of settler society and shares its underlying dynamics.<sup>69</sup>

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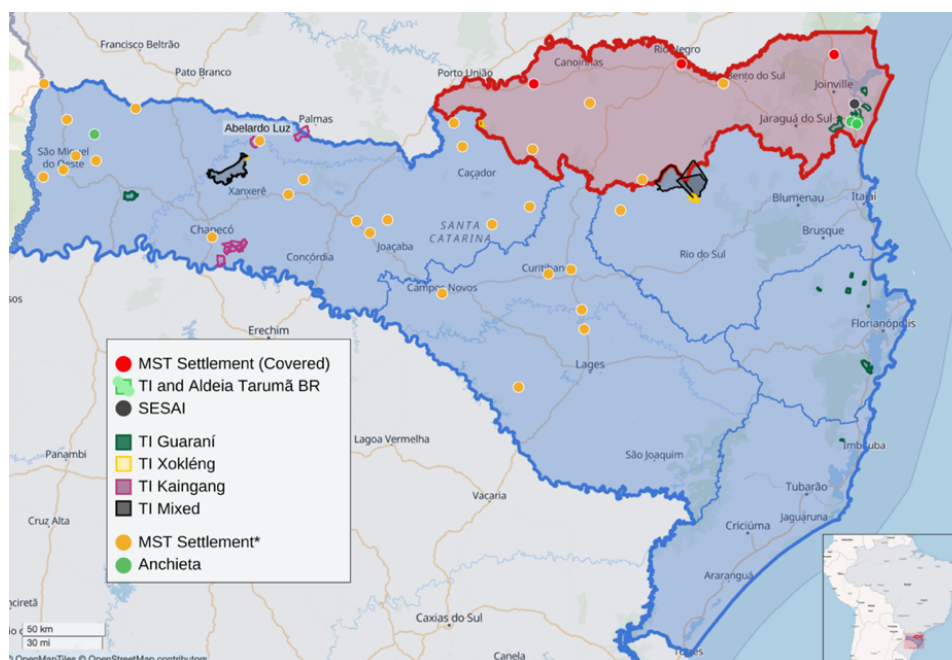
<sup>67</sup> Hendlin, 2019; Grey and Patel, 2014; Wolford, 2003

<sup>68</sup> Stavenhagen (2005), p. 208

<sup>69</sup> Barbosa et al., 2022; Hendlin, 2019; Grey and Patel, 2014



## 2.2. The Local Dimension: The Northern Mesoregion of Santa Catarina



**Figure 5. Indigenous lands and MST settlements in Santa Catarina** (Produced by the author<sup>70</sup>). The state is divided into mesoregions, with the northern one in red. SESAI is the Secretariat of Indigenous Health. Anchieta is the main Creole seed market in the state.

The State of Santa Catarina is one of the wealthiest in Brazil, fourth in both GDP per capita<sup>71</sup> and Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>72</sup>, with a high economic growth of 3.7% in 2023<sup>73</sup> (national growth 2.9%<sup>74</sup>). Agricultural and wood products represent one-third of the exports<sup>75</sup>. The northern mesoregion is rapidly developing in economic, industrial, and urban terms. Joinville is the 25<sup>th</sup> largest city in Brazil<sup>76</sup> and the municipality where the studied indigenous land (TI) is located, Araquari, has had a population growth of over 80% in the last than ten years.<sup>77</sup> For this research, it is important to highlight that Santa Catarina is a well-known conservative state. Except for the landslide victory of Lula in 2002, the state has always voted in favor of center-right or right-wing candidates. In the last election, Bolsonaro received 69.27% of the vote in the state (national result: 49.10%), with the region of Joinville showing an above-average result with 77.34% support.<sup>78</sup> As seen in section 2.1.3, while indigenous peoples have never received adequate support from the government, the election of Bolsonaro and his hostile attitude towards this group, as well as his labeling of MST settlers as terrorists due to their ties to the PT, Lula's party, means that the state presents a rather peculiar situation for both groups.

\* The MST settlements not covered by the author only indicate the city where it was possible to verify the presence of one or more of them. The data on MST settlements is highly disaggregated. As a result, other MST settlements may be present but not verifiable.

<sup>70</sup> gov.br, 2024; INCRA, 2024; Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação, 202; Rolla, 2016; MST, 2024

<sup>71</sup> IBGE, 2020 in Governo de Santa Catarina, 2023, p. 2

<sup>72</sup> IBGE, 2024

<sup>73</sup> SECOM, 2024

<sup>74</sup> IMF, 2024

<sup>75</sup> Governo de Santa Catarina, 2023, p. 4

<sup>76</sup> Ferreira, 2023

<sup>77</sup> Laurindo, 2023

<sup>78</sup> Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2024



the indigenous group of the participants from Aldeia Tarumã BR (see Figure 5). The Mbyá have a cosmology strongly linked to their territory and holistically to health, food, and other cultural manifestations. The prominent belief is that no one owns the land, but they recognize traditional territories inhabited by their ancestors, who have now achieved immortality in the *Terra sem Mal* (land without evil). Today they occupy a vast territory divided into small plots (see Figures 7 and 5). Within their ancestral territories, there is an internal migration to lands with more natural resources. The Mbyá have a relatively strong and articulated linguistic and religious unity compared to other Guarani, even considering the distances and heterogeneous contexts around them. Currently, their main struggle is related to the demarcation of land and the preservation of their communal and food systems, especially given the high number of children in the settlements (aldeias).<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Faller Tagarro, 2019; Povos Indígenas no Brasil, 2024a; Gabriel, 2017

### 3. Analysis

The analysis is divided into three sections for a logical progression towards answering the research question. The first section will define the participants and their understanding of their positionality and local context. The second will examine how their identity and environment influence their relationship to the land and food systems. These two parts will provide the context for answering the research question in the third part and articulate the similarities and specificities of how both groups understand and enact food sovereignty practices. Participants mentioned food sovereignty once. The researcher expected this because explicit knowledge of food sovereignty is either lacking, as it is for indigenous peoples, or is sidelined in favor of other frameworks, such as agrarian reform. Therefore, the study used the theoretical framework to categorize specific actions and understand them as assimilable to food sovereignty. The analysis is based primarily on interviews and observations made by the researcher during visits to the settlements (*assentamentos* for MST and *aldeias* for indigenous peoples). Relatively more space is devoted in some sections to the characterization of the Guarani Mbyá, since the gap in the literature is greater than for the MST, as can be seen in chapters 1 and 2. The analysis includes supporting materials, mainly YouTube videos and two reports, one - CIMI, 2023 - related to the human rights violations against the Aldeia Tarumã, and the second - Lacerda et al., 2024 - product of an award-winning collaboration between the Tarumã and local public health officials.

#### 3.1. Guarani Mbyá and the MST in the Northern Santa Catarina Mesoregion

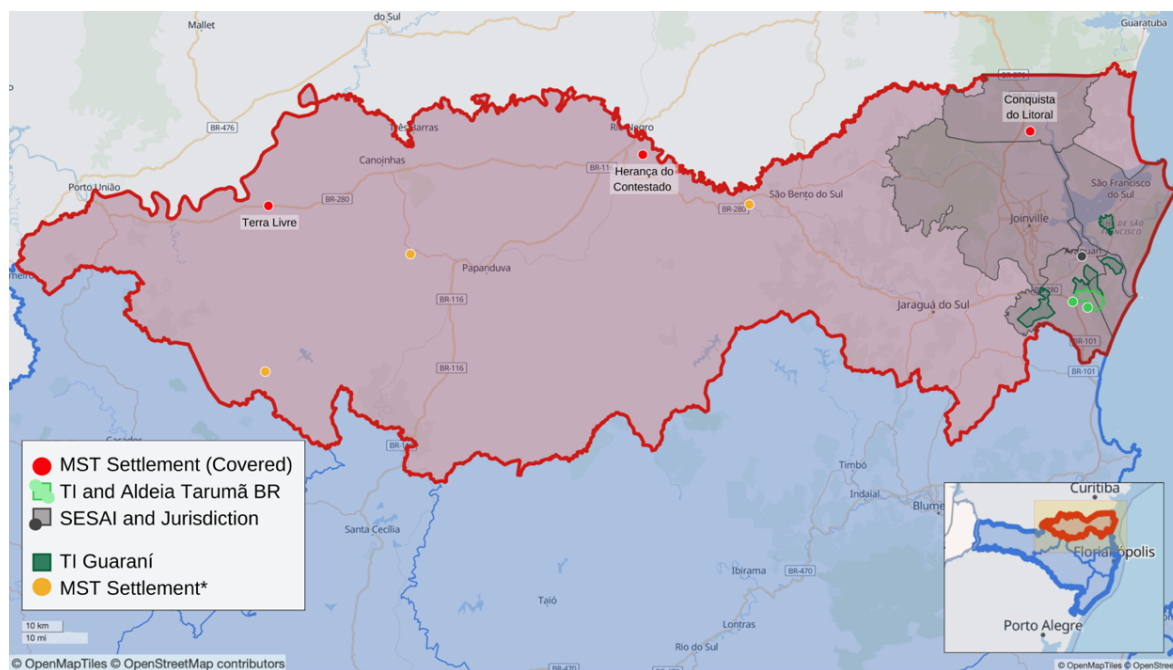


Figure 8. Guarani Indigenous Lands (TIs) and MST Settlements in Northern Santa Catarina. (Produced by the author<sup>85</sup>). The map highlights the research area of analysis, focusing on the visited MST settlements (with names), the Aldeia Tarumã, and the Secretariat of Indigenous Health (SESAI) center. The area covered by the SESAI center is also highlighted.

\* The MST settlements not covered by the author only indicate the city where it was possible to verify the presence of one or more of them. The data on MST settlements is highly disaggregated. As a result, other MST settlements may be present but not verifiable.

<sup>85</sup> gov.br, 2024; INCRA, 2024; Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação, 202; Rolla, 2016; MST, 2024

The indigenous land (TI) and settlements of Aldeia Tarumã BR are between the town of Araquari and Balneário Barra do Sul. It has a relatively small size of 2.68 thousand hectares with about 40 people in 12 families. The territory is part of the ancestral land of the Guarani Mbyá, and they are the third generation to move to this area.<sup>86</sup> The concept of demarcated spaces was imposed on them as these groups moved freely within these territories of traditional occupation. The participants were part of the leadership of the territory (one *cacique* and two *vice-caciques*, two women and one man), including the coordinator of the local health center (*Polo Base*) of the Secretariat of Indigenous Health (SESAI) covering five municipalities (Araquari, Balneário Barra do Sul, São Francisco do Sul, Garuva and Joinville) (see Figure 8). The *Polo* implements the right to health and differentiated treatment within the Public Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde, SUS*) for 13 municipalities. The indigenous health team provides health services by directly visiting the different aldeias and assisting patients in the hospitalization process for more complex problems. The *Polo* also collects health information, which the federal government processes and sends back.<sup>87</sup>

Of the 13 territories in the region, 10 are waiting for homologation. Tarumã belongs to this group. The land was delimited in the 1960s but officially demarcated in 2010. They are waiting for the last major step for recognition (see section 2.1.3.).<sup>88</sup> The length of the process and the nature of the violence perpetrated against the Tarumã aligns with the literature. The main land pressure they experience is a product of increased urbanization, industrialization, and resource extraction around them. “*The white man [...] looks at this, he doesn't see it as a living forest. He sees it as inactive capital*”<sup>89</sup>. As recounted by the participants and reported by the Missionary Council for Indigenous Peoples (CIMI), their lands have been repeatedly invaded. They have received numerous death threats and intimidations, mainly from industrial companies and hunters. In the last four years, people burned their houses, tried to abduct some of the settlers, violated the 300 m buffer zone around the TI, and tried to build roads and pipes without permission. A later overturned fraudulent demarcation of an adjacent private plot led to the destruction of the community houses, the prayer house, the bridge, the chicken coop, and the clay oven (the only indigenous one in the area). Currently, parts of the indigenous lands are inaccessible to the communities, albeit illegally, and threatened when they try to enter them. The diversion of a river and the opening of new wells on the border of the TI for industrial and residential purposes severely limited the access to water, abruptly drying up the indigenous wells within historically water-rich communities. Outside the TI there is no water problem. According to Participant 1, this increases the pressure on them to leave. The reduced access to land and water led to a visible increase in malnutrition, especially for women and children, according to data prepared by the federal government for the *Polo*. Overall, they are a “*community threatened in this sense, because of the territory*”<sup>90</sup>. The risk to their lives led to their inclusion in the Federal Program for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (PPDDH), which in practice allows them to ensure the enforcement of their rights at the local level.<sup>91</sup> From a human rights perspective (see Chapter 1), it is observable a violation of their indigenous and peasant rights. Looking at UNDRIP, these include the right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) (ILO Convention No. 169 and UNDRIP); the right to land, territories, and resources (Arts. 25, 26, 27, 28); the right to life, physical and mental integrity (Art. 7); the right to culture and cultural heritage (Arts. 11, 12, 13); the right to a safe and healthy environment (Art. 29); the right to water (Art. 25); the

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<sup>86</sup> Lacerda et al., 2024, p. 92

<sup>87</sup> Participant 1, 2024; Participant 2, 2024; Participant 3, 2024

<sup>88</sup> Meira and Klein, 2022; Participant 1, 2024; Participant 2, 2024; Participant 3, 2024

<sup>89</sup> Participant 1, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*O homem branco [...] olha pra isso daqui, ele não vê isso aqui como uma floresta que tem vida. Ele vê como um capital inativo*”

<sup>90</sup> Participant 3, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*comunidade ameaçada nesse sentido, por causa do território*”

<sup>91</sup> Terras Indígenas no Brasil, 2024a; Assessoria de Comunicação do CIMI, 2022a, 2022b; CIMI, 2023; Participant 1; Meira and Klein, 2022; Ferrarez, 2023

right to development and well-being (Arts. 20, 23, 24); and the right to security and peaceful enjoyment of property (Art. 30). In addition, according to UNDROP, their rights to access, control and manage their land, including the prohibition of forced evictions (Arts. 5, 17 and 28); to a safe and socially and culturally adequate environment (Arts. 14, 18, 21 and 23); and to drinking water and sanitation (Art. 21) have been violated. As denoted by Participant 1, these violations are happening in two municipalities with relatively high Human Development Index (HDI).

The MST settlements present a different situation. As seen in the footnotes to Maps 5 and 8, the data related to the MST settlements is highly disaggregated and, according to Participant 4, deliberately so by the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA). Nonetheless, the MST does not publish this data. According to participants 4 and 5, who have been active in the movement since its inception, there are about 200 assentamentos and between 5,500 and 7,000 settlers in Santa Catarina. Only the city of Abelardo Luz (see Figure 5) has more than 2,000 families. The strong presence of MST settlements in the west is due the movement being born there - Abelardo Luz is close to Paraná, the founding state of the MST - and then gradually moved to the coast. The presence of small plots of land also applies to the assentamentos. The research covered three of them. Two visited in person, *Conquista do Litoral* (Conquest of the Coast) and *Herança do Contestado* (Heritage of the Contested), and one, *Terra Livre* (Free Land), covered by an online interview (see location in Figure 8). *Conquista* is based on collective ownership and consists of 11 families. The settlement covers 93 hectares, but 80% is non-cultivable Atlantic Forest (*mata atlântica*). Participant 4 moved to the settlement after a spot became available as they invited his father. *Herança* houses around 20 families. The settlement has a hybrid mode of ownership, where one family has collective ownership of land among siblings, and the rest is managed individually by other families. Participant 5 struggling family used to work for a landowner then his mother became part of the first occupation in the state. *Terra Livre* is the most recent of the three, as the occupation began in 2005, and is the only one that has not yet completed the process of land recognition, waiting for INCRA officialization. It is also the smallest, with six families. It has a hybrid model in which the native forest (*mata nativa*) is collectively owned and can be foraged by anyone. Peculiarly, Participant 6 moved from an urban area and was able to settle on a plot of land previously owned by the landowner where his parents worked 40 years ago. “*Nobody planned it, and in fact, it happened naturally*”<sup>92</sup>. The settlements face two crucial pressures. The first is climate change. The alternation of droughts and waterfalls destroyed *Conquista* plantations and tarps three times in recent years. Secondly, according to participants 4 and 5, the increasingly complicated relationship with the local municipalities due to the increased privatization within the public administration and the political polarization in the Santa Catarina and law enforcement becoming harsher and less tolerant.<sup>93</sup>

### 3.2. The Relationship with Food and Land

The relationship between the Guarani Mbyá, land and food, while generally in line with the broader literature, presents its peculiarities. The *nhande reko*, “*The Guarani way of understanding*”<sup>94</sup>, is the representation of the broader Guarani cosmology. Land is not seen as a bidimensional environment, water, air and the weather events within it are seen as interconnected and sacred. “*The productive and*

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<sup>92</sup> Participant 6, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*Ninguém combinou isso aqui, e, na verdade, aconteceu naturalmente*”

<sup>93</sup> Participant 4, 2024; Participant 5, 2024; Participant 6, 2024

<sup>94</sup> Participant 2, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*modo de entender Guarani*”

*financial relationship that non-indigenous people have with the land does not correspond to the relationship given by the indigenous population, which is one of identity. The territory and lands are connected with possibilities for life and collective construction*"<sup>95</sup>. As argued by Participant 1, you can rebuild houses, but their ancestors are buried there. The indigenous lands (TIs) are what remains of a whole indigenous continent<sup>96</sup>. The relationship with food is part of this understanding: "*When we eat, when we plant, when it is not separate, you know? It is not separate. It is all sacred. [...] It is all in Nhanderu*"<sup>97</sup>, Nhanderu being the creator of the present world. Therefore, the practices related to land and food are a constitutive part of the identity and culture of the group.<sup>98</sup> In the Aldeia Tarumã, two concepts coexist. The first one is that the TI is a place to breathe fresh air, "*even if not 100% pure*"<sup>99</sup>, and be in contact with the earth. The second is that it is a *terra do mal* "*land of evil, that is born and that dies [...] [that] absorbs many bad things*"<sup>100</sup>, including the pollution of the surrounding industries, making it too acidic. In their cultivation, they do not use fertilizers because, according to Participant 2, the plants would not grow as they already have the specific genetics for the land. They cultivate specific indigenous seeds, but their diversity has decreased over time due to their land's changing characteristics and size. Within the Aldeia, both the cultivation of traditional seeds and the collection of medicinal herbs in the forest are practiced. Nowadays, they can cultivate and collect food for three or four months of autonomy, and for the rest of the year, they must rely on federally given and often industrialized food. "*Indigenous leadership, fighting so that our children can have a life with dignity, have food, have abundance. We haven't achieved it yet, but we are fighting*"<sup>101</sup>.

In this context, a special preparation is necessary to purify the food to consume it. The cultivation requires specific processes that can last up to 10 or 20 years so that the food, through traditional preparation, is more resistant to the impurities of the land. The guardians of traditional knowledge, *karai* (elder man) and *kunha karai* (elder woman), play a crucial role. The elders are the ones who bless the food and explain the rituals to purify it<sup>102</sup>. An example mentioned by all the participants was the preparation of indigenous corn and sweet potatoes. The blessing of the former, when planted and harvested, was defined as a moment when "*the spirit meets, where the spirit renews*"<sup>103</sup>. "*We pray over the food inside the prayer house. And then, the next day, we share it. The key to the mystique*"<sup>104</sup>. The elders ask permission from the spirits of the land to eat it with a smoke ceremony, a moment of bondage with the children who are an integral part of the consecration. These rituals are important to transmit the practices to the new generations. The women prepare the grain to consecrate their work and give it to the girls to consecrate them as well.<sup>105</sup> The specific dietary habits that characterize the Tarumã also need to be observed. The critical moments of life - from birth to the beginning of adulthood: the change of the male voice, and the first menstrual cycle for women - require strict diets. It includes not eating sugar, meat, peanuts, sardines, or much salt, not hunting (even if they do not do it much), not eating dinner, and not eating seafood at any time. The restrictions often include relatives, from the breastfeeding

<sup>95</sup> Lacerda et al., 2024, p. 93. Translated by the author. Original text: "*A relação produtiva e financeira que é dada à terra pelo não indígena não corresponde à relação dada pela população indígena, a qual é identitária. O território e as terras se conectam com possibilidades de vida, de construção coletiva*".

<sup>96</sup> Participant 3, 2024; Participant 1, 2024; Participant 2, 2024; Lacerda et al., 2024

<sup>97</sup> Participant 1, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: "*Quando a gente come, quando a gente planta, quando não é separado, sabe? Não é separado. É tudo sagrado. [...] É tudo em Nhanderu*"

<sup>98</sup> Lacerda et al., 2024

<sup>99</sup> Participant 2, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: "*apesar de não ser 100% puro*"

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. Translated by the author. Original text: "*terra do mal, que nasce e que ela more [...] [que] absorve muita coisa ruim*"

<sup>101</sup> Participant 1, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: "*liderança indígena, estar lutando pra que nossos filhos tenham vida com dignidade, tenham alimento, tenham abundância. Ainda não conseguimos, mas estamos lutando.*"

<sup>102</sup> Participant 2, 2024; Participant 1, 2024; Participant 3, 2024; Lacerda et al., 2024; ASIE UFSC, 2018

<sup>103</sup> Ação Saberes Indígenas na Escola UFSC, 2018. Translated by the author. Original text: "*o espírito se encontra, onde o espírito se renova*"

<sup>104</sup> Participant 1, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: "*A gente reza os alimentos dentro da casa de reza. E daí, no outro dia, a gente compartilha. A chave da mística*"

<sup>105</sup> Participant 2, 2024; Participant 1, 2024; Participant 3, 2024; Ação Saberes Indígenas na Escola UFSC, 2018.

mother to the father and siblings. These rules are specific to the Guarani of this region and “*let's put it like this, it's not a norm, but it's a requirement that the very resistance of life leads us to. So, food brings more of this sense*”<sup>106</sup>. They recognize the importance of individual preferences and beliefs. The reason for this selective consumption is found in how the soul is sensitive in these moments of life and, given that everything is connected and has an effect, it could alter their development in life by attaching the soul to the form of life consumed. Therefore, eating this food is decremental, even if not immediately, because it could create a “*crisis*”<sup>107</sup> later in life. The question is not only related to the quality of the food planted in a potentially polluted land. A differentiated diet is important as most food comes from federal baskets (*cesta basica*) or private donations. Therefore, the focus is not limited to organic and natural food but also the type of food provided. As members of the Aldeia argued in an interview<sup>108</sup>, their food and language are the main things they cannot let go of, and food is the main discrimination inflicted from the outside. Overall, “*cultural manifestations highlighting territorial disputes as an essential issue for mental health*”<sup>109</sup>. The inability to obtain, access, and grow their traditional foods, while suffering external pressures to eat other ones considered healthy and necessary, has a significant impact on the people, leading to the development of a *djepotá* - psychological suffering/emotional illness<sup>110</sup>. For the collective work of the Tarumã and the SUS, it was possible to understand the articulation of mental health issues within the community and how altering “*the traditional Guarani diet could be the cause of the illness*”<sup>111</sup>. The collective work establishes a crucial link between food practices, land, and mental health.<sup>112</sup>

The MST settlements present a different understanding of their relationship between land and food. As effectively summarized by Participant 4, “*the objective of agrarian reform is the distribution of land to families with the goal of producing food. So, it is not a private good. It is for you to produce food; you live from it*”<sup>113</sup>. Participant 6 recalled the mythology of the Contested War of 1912-1916, often defined as a rebellion. It was the confrontation between local peasants and the federal government near the border between Santa Catarina and Paraná over the expropriation of land by a foreign company to build a railway. This event inspired the name of Participant 5's settlement. For the MST, coming from the South, it symbolizes the peasant resistance and what they can achieve when united.<sup>114</sup> Both testimonies show the historical and contemporary aspirations of landless peasants. “*The farmer who doesn't have a plot of land, his dream is to have a plot of land*”<sup>115</sup>, and the three participants frame their actions as the implementation of agrarian reform. Acquiring land empowers them to have the freedom of time, management and production. It also entails the ability to promote a different idea of collective engagement and food system. Nevertheless, “*one of the first points is to combat hunger [...] also, considering the diversity of food you must consume, it is about health*”<sup>116</sup>. Acquiring land is a long and difficult process, Participant 5 had to live with his family in a plastic tent for ten years before his land was recognized so that he could build a house. As the same participant argues, to get the land you must

<sup>106</sup> Participant 2, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*Digamos assim, não é uma norma, mas é uma requira, que a própria resistência da vida a gente leva a isso. Então, a comida ela traz mais nesse sentido aí*”

<sup>107</sup> Participant 2, 2024.

<sup>108</sup> IdeiaSUS Fiocruz, 2023

<sup>109</sup> Lacerda et al., 2024, p. 95

<sup>110</sup> Participant 1, 2024; Participant 2, 2024; and Participant 3, 2024; Lacerda et al., 2024

<sup>111</sup> Lacerda et al., 2024, p. 105. Translated by the author. Original text: “*dieta tradicional Guarani que poderia ser a causa do adoecimento*”

<sup>112</sup> Participant 1, 2024; Participant 2, 2024; Participant 3, 2024; Lacerda et al., 2024

<sup>113</sup> Participant 4, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*o objetivo da reforma agrária é a distribuição de terra, é para as famílias com o objetivo de produzir alimento. Então, ela não é um bem privado. Ela é para você produzir alimento, você vive dela.*”

<sup>114</sup> MST, 2015; Participant 6, 2024

<sup>115</sup> Participant 5, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*o agricultor que não tem praça de terra, o sonho dele é ter praça de terra*”

<sup>116</sup> Participant 4, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*um dos primeiros pontos é combater a fome [...] também, olhando para a diversidade de alimento que você tem que consumir, é a saúde*”



give everything, and to start cultivating means self-reliance and a new beginning.<sup>117</sup> Looking at section 2.1.2., legally speaking, the “*the objective is always to produce food [...] [because] it is for me to work for it. It is not for commercialization. That is the objective*”<sup>118</sup>. Once they achieved food security, all the participants mentioned different objectives. The first one is independence, especially from the large distribution. Participant 6, being in the first stages of the creation of the settlement, still focuses mainly on this aspect, including the attention to the legal recognition of the land to begin with the commercialization. The second reason, also mentioned by indigenous Participant 1, is the tastelessness and unhealthiness of the food in the supermarket “*because you are a bit of what you eat*”.<sup>119</sup> Two different elements were highlighted: the omnipresence of soy in most products in various forms and the frequent presence of the “T” (i.e., products containing transgenic ingredients). Within their assentamentos, they all produce vegetables, parsley, meat, corn, beans, cornstarch, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, and mandioca, and for their consumption, raise cattle. *Conquista* has more than 30 articles, including fish farming. The small size of their plot and the heat require them to produce quickly and cheaply. The settlement is almost autonomous, except for sugar, oil, and small items. *Terra Livre*, interestingly, has the native forest (*mata nativa*) collectively owned and gathers yerba mate and pine nuts from it. Another important goal for the settlements is to increase their sustainability. *Conquista* does not use chemicals or pesticides in its agriculture while not practicing agroecology. The same goes for *Herança*. According to participants 4 and 5, their constraints from the main do not make it possible to cultivate agroecologically. Regarding the use of Creole seeds, both settlements tried, but the plants did not grow, and the main center for this type of seeds, Anchieta (see Figure 5), is in the western part of the state, making it economically impractical. Participant 4 lamented the lack of public policies related to agroecology. Instead, people from *Terra Livre* are currently doing capacity-building activities within the movement trying to be agroecological. Because they are relatively farther west, they are closer to the communities working with the Creole seeds and are increasingly learning how to use them. The short existence of the settlement allows it to be more flexible and to try to implement immediately certain types of knowledge “*newer settlements, which are just starting now, start off on the right path*”<sup>120</sup>. Finally, they all agree that once they gain the land, the new challenge becomes its maintenance and the coordination with the larger group, be it the *assentamento* or the cooperative. They work in local cooperatives. At the state level, they are all connected through the label *Terra Viva*. The settlements all have different levels of dependence on the cooperatives. Some use the cooperative's trucks. *Conquista* now has refrigerated trucks and can provide logistics for other farmers.<sup>121</sup>

### 3.3. Indigenous and Landless Food Sovereignities: Common and Specific Perspectives

As the premise of this chapter indicates, participants do not use the term food sovereignty. The characterization of food sovereignty given in Section 1 structures how participants enact food practices to achieve “*healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems*”<sup>122</sup>. Participant 5

<sup>117</sup> Participant 5, 2024; Participant 4, 2024

<sup>118</sup> Participant 4, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*objetivo sempre é produzir alimento [...] [porque] é para mim trabalhar dela. Ela não é para comercializar. Esse é o objetivo*”

<sup>119</sup> Participant 1, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*porque você é um pouco daquilo que você come*”.

<sup>120</sup> Participant 6, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*assentamentos mais novos, que estão iniciando agora, comecem já no rumo certo*”

<sup>121</sup> Participant 6, 2024. Participant 5, 2024; Participant 4, 2024

<sup>122</sup> Nyéléni Declaration, 2007, p. 1.

effectively resumed the fundamental need behind what constitutes food sovereignty practices: “*There are times when you go hungry, but the problem is not hunger, the problem is the desire to eat*”<sup>123</sup>. In this last section, to answer the research question, the analysis will examine the similarities of struggle and responses that the Guarani Mbyá and the MST settlers share, each group's specific food sovereignty practices, and what makes them different.

The first element shared by both groups is the use of food practices to resist the pressures exerted by the Brazilian agrifood system through land encroachment, institutional discrimination, and the cultural pressures exerted, especially on youth, by commodities and processed foods. All the participants expressed the need to continue resisting and struggling to implement what is already their right. For the Mbyá, this means the homologation of the TI and differentiated treatment, and for the MST settlers, the recognition of the settlements and the overcoming of the resistance of the local communities to the implementation of the *Merenda Escolar*. They also emphasized the critical role of strong community ties and formal and informal networks, be they MST cooperatives or indigenous councils, in sustaining traditional practices, logistically supporting diverse food systems, and coordinating advocacy for institutional change. Overall, they aim to maintain the space because “*we are extremely happy within our lands, within our home. We are extremely happy here, despite the hardships.*”<sup>124</sup>. Everyone emphasized the resilience and long-term perspective of their food systems and way of life, unlike the rest of society. They observe the fragility and short-sightedness of the outside world. “*If an atomic bomb explodes [...] The indigenous population will know how to find the remedy. The indigenous population will know how to survive*”.<sup>125</sup> “*You can live without industry, but you can't live without food, you can't live without land*”<sup>126</sup>. It is interesting to note that Participant 6 specifically mentioned their ability, with the right management, to never run out of water and trees. There is an awareness of the legitimacy of their knowledge and practices for their ability to provide them with a healthier, more reliable, and sustainable life (i.e., the ability to achieve food sovereignty).<sup>127</sup>

Both groups understand the crucial role of Pillar 5 of the Nyéléni Declaration (2007) and the importance of supporting and sharing local food knowledge. Their main concern is that, as external pressures to conform to neoliberal food practices increase, they will not be able to pass on their knowledge to future generations. The question is how to maintain a specific way of life and how industrial food can change the taste and the desire. For the Aldeia, this happens through the food and services provided by the State, and for the MST, it happens through interacting regularly with the rest of society. On the indigenous side: “*From the moment a teenager, a girl, leaves the territory, she is already forced not to follow it anymore, and the same goes for the young mother when she goes to the hospital, she already deviates from the pattern [...] of what she could maintain there*”<sup>128</sup>. “*We don't know if the fourth, the fifth generation will still have this type of knowledge*”<sup>129</sup>. For the MST settlers, according to Participant 5, the greatest challenge is to maintain the family farm. Participant 5, emphasized to “*raise awareness from a very young age*”<sup>130</sup> and Participant 4 to “*teach the children to already learn to stay on the farm, which nowadays is one of the most difficult things, because technology is there [...] but they have to*

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<sup>123</sup> Participant 5, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*Tem épocas que passa fome. mas o problema não é a fome, o problema é a vontade de comer*”

<sup>124</sup> Participant 1, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*a gente é extremamente feliz dentro das nossas terras, dentro do nosso lar. A gente é extremamente feliz aqui dentro. apesar das mazelas*”

<sup>125</sup> Participant 1, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*Explodir uma bomba atômica. [...] A população indígena vai saber achar o remédio. A população indígena vai saber sobreviver.*”

<sup>126</sup> Participant 4, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*tu vai viver sem a indústria, mas se não vive sem a comida, se não vive sem a terra*”

<sup>127</sup> Participant 1, 2024; Participant 2, 2024; Participant 3, 2024; Participant 4, 2024; Participant 5, 20204; Participant 6, 2024.

<sup>128</sup> Cacique Aldeia Tarumã in IdeiaSUS Fiocruz, 2023. Translated by the author. Original text: “*a partir do momento que uma adolescente, uma menina, sai fora do território, ela já é obrigada a nao seguir mais e a mesma coisa a mãezinha quando vai nos hospital ela já foge do padrão [...] daquilo que ela poderia manter ali*”

<sup>129</sup> Participant 2, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*A gente não sabe se a quarta, a quinta geração vai ter esse tipo de conhecimento ainda.*”

<sup>130</sup> Participant 6, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*conscientizar desde pequenininho*”

*learn on the farm, otherwise we will have a generation in the future that will not have the food we produce today*<sup>131</sup>. A key challenge addressed by food sovereignty is the ability to shape education. The need to resist is linked to the external lack of understanding of their way of life. The dissemination of untold histories, such as the historical presence of indigenous communities in the Joinville area.<sup>132</sup> A concern shared by Participant 1 about the sole national and international focus on indigenous issues in the Amazon region. They also stress the importance of promoting, understanding and legitimizing their indigenous needs and remedies. The MST, on the other hand, wants to break the stereotype of being lazy and violent people by showing the quality and reliability of what they produce, the opportunities that the settlements can give to the landless, and the importance of specific historical events and rural massacres that are forgotten by the educational system. Finally, while recognizing the injustice of having to struggle to have their constitutional and legal rights respected, both groups understand the profound importance of finding allies and acting through institutions. Participant 5 explicitly mentioned the need to counterbalance the institutional power of the *bancada ruralista* (see section 2.1.3). Therefore, the need for institutional and political opposition to the dominant economic interests to preserve their food systems and ways of life becomes a crucial commonality in the mutual achievement of food sovereignty. In this context, all participants focused on the institutional struggle for land recognition, as seen earlier.<sup>133</sup>

Overall, the findings align with the arguments of section 2.1.4 and of Hendlin (2019). The ubiquitous presence of dominant agrifood system practices, especially within the Brazilian postcolonial system of large landowners, exerts significant pressure on all marginalized groups to be enclosed. In this context, sharing food sovereignty practices to maintain local knowledge and food systems, networking actions, and promoting favorable public policies becomes crucial to protecting these groups' right to food sovereignty and food, participation, organizing to protect their interests and information, freedom of thought, religion, and opinion, health and a safe, clean and healthy environment, education and training, and to access, control and management of land (see section 1.1.).

The research has shown how the key issues are broadly shared, but the analysis of specific practices reveals the fundamentally different worldviews behind the shared struggle. Sections 2.1.2. and 2.1.4. articulate how the MST structures its food sovereignty primarily by advocating and coordinating the efforts of landless people “*to change what some countries, for example in Europe or even in the United States, have already done with agrarian reform, to develop the country so that it becomes a first world country*”.<sup>134</sup> The belief is that “[*people*] *with and without land, it is the biggest struggle in the country*”<sup>135</sup> and that to obtain agrarian reform a marginalized group, the landless, can be empowered within Brazil’s economic and political system. In the process, they implement alternative and more sustainable food system. At the national level, when they have a better relationship with the government, they do it through the enactment of laws aimed at making sustainable smallholder agriculture economically sustainable, the Special Credit Program for Land Reform (ProCera), the Food Acquisition Program (PAA), and the National School Feeding Program (PNAE). Participant 4’s settlement prefers to deal with the state because of its guarantee of payment and fair and stable prices, as opposed to the risk of delayed or negated payments from the private sector, resulting in the inability to finance the next crop. At the

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<sup>131</sup> Participant 4, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*ensinar os filhos a já aprender a ficar na roça, que hoje em dia é uma das coisas mais difíceis, porque a tecnologia está aí [...] mas tem que aprender na roça, senão a gente vai ter uma geração no futuro que não vai ter o alimento que a gente produz hoje*”

<sup>132</sup> Vereadora Ana Lucia Martins, 2024

<sup>133</sup> Participant 1, 2024; Participant 2, 2024; Participant 3, 2024; Participant 4, 2024; Participant 5, 20204; Participant 6, 2024.

<sup>134</sup> Participant 4, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*para mudar aquilo que alguns países, por exemplo, na Europa, até o próprio Estados Unidos, já fizeram a reforma agrária para fazer com que o país desenvolva, para que o país se torne de primeiro mundo*”

<sup>135</sup> Participant 5, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*com e sem terra é a maior luta no país*”

local level, the determinants for their success are personal relationships and how much the community depends on their food production, particularly *Merenda Escolar*. The strong conservative nature of Santa Catarina and the three municipalities where the settlements reside still require an understanding of the specific local needs of the population and the importance of the settlement within the community. Specific local actors (e.g., churches) or actions undertaken by the settlements to give back to the communities that supported them (e.g., free food distribution during floods or the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>136</sup>) often shape these relations. The institutional and political struggle shows the central role of production for the movement and the settlers. Production is the means to self-sustenance and to legitimize their presence in the land and the community. At the level of the movement, the political dimension combines with the importance of the personal and logistical productive network to support the maintenance of existing settlements and the creation of new ones. The settlements supply each other, help with the larger distribution, and invite new people. The network allows the effective delivery of the *Merenda Escolar*. Collective action, both in terms of advocacy and greater reliability in delivery compared to the private sector, makes it possible to resist the privatization of the program. The introduction of not only MST food but also knowledge in schools is considered part of the achievement of agrarian reform. The aim is to transmit to the new generations the political and technical knowledge and the desire for small-scale agriculture. The federal government grants this type of special learning institute for small farming only to large settlements or groups of settlements. *Herança* recently received approval to build one, but there is strong resistance at the municipal level. Internally, facing social pressures and historical dreams of individual land titles while maintaining communal thinking is the main challenge. Externally, the main social battle is to show consumers the true value of food and the importance of buying local and fair-priced food. It is “*a huge challenge to get this out of people's minds and try to move to healthy food production, maybe on a smaller scale, but with healthier production*”<sup>137</sup>. The latter, combined with the lack of public policies and quotas in federal programs, is considered the main obstacle to the conversion to agroecology. In this context, the achievement of agroecology allows them to “*have and harvest your own seeds and not depend on agribusiness [...] it is a fundamental way, right? For us to always maintain quality, to always maintain tradition, right?*”<sup>138</sup>. Finally, the explicit use of food sovereignty is seen primarily at the national level. At the local level, the enactment of these practices and worldviews that empower the landless is apparent, while it is clearly culturally located within the broader Brazilian agricultural context. The primary goal is to allow the independence of this marginalized group through the acquisition and cultivation of land.<sup>139</sup> Simultaneously, the creation of the settlements allows for the restructuring of food relations because

*“When you start producing quality food, you also start to have a belonging, right? A belonging. You start to have a firmer mindset in that, in the purpose you have. And, of course, I have two small children, right? I always think, how are we going to give them poisoned beans, lettuce, cabbage, full of poison to eat? So, we start with awareness, right? And also, a different lifestyle”*<sup>140</sup>.

<sup>136</sup> MST, 2020

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. Translated by the author. Original text: “*um desafio enorme tirar isso da cabeça do nosso povo e tentar migrar para a produção de alimentos saudáveis, talvez em escala menor, mas com a produção mais saudável*”

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. Translated by the author. Original text: “*a riqueza que é você tirar e ter a própria semente e não depender lá da agropecuária [...] é uma forma fundamental, né? Pra gente manter sempre a qualidade, manter sempre a tradição, né?*”

<sup>139</sup> Participant 4, 2024; Participant 5, 2024; Participant 6, 2024

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. Translated by the author. Original text: “*Quando você começa a produzir alimento de qualidade, você começa também a ter uma pertença, né? Uma pertença. Você começa a ter uma cabeça mais firme naquilo, num propósito que você tem. E, com certeza, eu tenho dois filhos pequenos, né? Eu sempre penso assim, como é que a gente vai dar um feijão com veneno, um alface, um repolho, cheio de veneno para eles comerem? Então, a gente começa a criar consciência, né? E também um estilo de vida diferenciado*”

The MST and the Guarani Mbyá are marginalized groups fighting for their empowerment against Brazil's ongoing land concentration and agribusiness expansion. For the MST, however, the goal is to achieve agrarian reform for the landless within the Brazilian economic and political system. For the Guarani Mbyá, and indigenous peoples in general, *“to be born indigenous is to be born fighting”*<sup>141</sup> as they see themselves in the continuation of a process in which *“before the arrival of European populations. Our population, it was a population of millions who lived freely, well fed, well nourished, with everything”*<sup>142</sup> and now the indigenous lands (TI) are the only physical spaces of cultural preservation. *“Outside the TI, it's another vision”*<sup>143</sup>. Traditional knowledge strengthens the community and allows them to continue their practices. *“Space comes to nurture this kind of knowledge”*<sup>144</sup> and this is crucial because *“we can't escape it. If we start to deviate from this process, we end up changing many things. Not only in our lives but, if you think about the community here, the whole community will change”*<sup>145</sup>. The spatial dimension links to the communal one. The enactment of practices on indigenous land strengthens their collective identity. In contrast to the MST, the indigenous participants never mentioned coordination and the tension with the individual desire for land as crucial issues. In this context, we see the emergence of a *“process of meaning when it comes to traditional food”*<sup>146</sup> and the communal moment associated with it. *“Although we spend the whole year without what should be naturally ours [...] these moments, they are moments that strengthen us in our Guarani spirit”*<sup>147</sup>. Therefore, there is an implicit recognition of the limits of food security. They receive *“vitamin supplements, but it is not the same because you are taking away the people's way of being and living”*<sup>148</sup>. In this context, reduced access to land and water and the inability to cultivate their traditional foods through specific rituals becomes a cultural and identity issue.<sup>149</sup>

It is interesting to note how the interaction between non-indigenous society and indigenous food practices is in continuity with what is argued by Shrinkhal, 2021 (see section 1.2.). In the collective work between the Tarumã and the National Health System (SUS), both sides highlighted the difficulties of two aspects of the same problem. On the one hand, the lack of knowledge of indigenous practices by the public sector – *“it was not known to health technicians that inadequate nutrition could cause so many sequelae and psychological suffering in the indigenous population”*<sup>150</sup> – and the inability to understand what condition is affecting these individuals *“sometimes we go to the doctor, and the doctor doesn't know what type of disease it is”*<sup>151</sup> and its relationship to the remedies proposed. The adaptation of the multigenerational knowledge that produced the remedial aspects of food practices means that the remedies are tailored to their needs. Participant 2 lamented that the understanding of medication and time *“in the indigenous culture, it is completely different”*<sup>152</sup> from the one in the non-indigenous society, where the goal is to minimize the time of illness to return to work. The difference in perception shows the continuity between this understanding of time and remedy and the natural cycles of land cultivation

<sup>141</sup> Vereadora Ana Lucia Martins, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: *“Nascer indígena é nascer lutando”*

<sup>142</sup> Participant 1, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: *“Antes da chegada das populações europeias. A nossa população. Era uma população de milhões de pessoas. Que viviam livres. Bem alimentadas. Bem nutridas. Com tudo”*

<sup>143</sup> Participant 2, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: *“fora da T.I., é outra visão”*

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. Translated by the author. Original text: *“Então o espaço vem para alimentar esse tipo de conhecimento”*

<sup>145</sup> Participant 2, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: *“Não tem como a gente fugir disso. Se a gente começar a desviar desse processo, a gente acaba mudando muita coisa também. Não só na nossa vida, mas pensando aqui na comunidade. A comunidade inteira vai mudar isso”*

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. Translated by the author. Original text: *“processo de sentido aí quando se trata de alimento tradicional”*

<sup>147</sup> Participant 1, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: *“Por mais que o ano inteiro a gente passe na escassez daquilo que para nós seria natural. [...] nesses momentos, são momentos, assim, que nos fortalecem no nosso ser Guarani”*

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. Translated by the author. Original text: *“complementação de vitamina mas não é a mesma coisa. Porque você está tirando do ser do jeito de ser e viver do povo”*

<sup>149</sup> Participant 1, 2024; Participant 2, 2024; Participant 3, 2024

<sup>150</sup> Lacerda et al., 2024, p. 97. Translated by the author. Original text: *“Não era de conhecimento dos técnicos de saúde que a alimentação inadequada pudesse causar tantas sequelas e sofrimento psíquico na população indígena”*

<sup>151</sup> Participant 2, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: *“Às vezes a gente vai no médico e o médico não sabe que tipo de doença é”*

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. Translated by the author. Original text: *“na cultura indígena, ela é totalmente diferente”*

and food consumption. These differences must be understood in the context of the indigenous peoples' heavy dependence on government food supplies and subsidies. The government, with its strong emphasis on direct aid, has power over what kind of food enters the Aldeia. For example, Participant 1 mentioned that they cannot eat sardines at any point in their lives and they received 100 cans of it. They struggled to convince the nutritionist that they could not eat it. The Participant was also concerned about the unaccountability of the state when something happened. *“If all of a sudden something is eaten, and something happens to the child, whose fault is it?”*<sup>153</sup>. On the other hand, there is the constant and often unilateral need of indigenous peoples to translate their concepts and ideas into the dominant language. The mere interaction with public institutions and the legal system to obtain their rights becomes a form of absorption into the dominant paradigm. In the specific case of the Guarani Mbyá, the need to frame food issues, considered a spiritual issue, into a mental health one – as an example, *“it was explained that if a certain food is consumed in a certain phase of life (for example, women in the pregnancy/postpartum period), this can be a determinant of mental illness for the indigenous person”*<sup>154</sup>. The link with mental health is critical to the practical achievement of their rights through the change of public practices but it remains a forced translation of their condition and relationship to their food practices. In addition, the pursuit of this kind of knowledge or university education is often prejudicially seen by non-indigenous people as making them less indigenous, as lamented by Participant 1.<sup>155</sup>

The fieldwork confirms the theoretical trends highlighted in sections 1.2 and 2.1.4 regarding the role of indigenous food sovereignty within the broader indigenous cause. However, the lack of a structured approach within the specific Brazilian literature makes the promotion and legitimization of their traditional food practices part of the pursuit of their right to health within the national health and education systems. The institutional strategies of indigenous communities at all levels, including those of Tarumã, follow a specific logic based on an indivisible triangle: Health, education, and territory. Promoting traditional food practices can be considered an intersection between the three and is fought in all these areas through institutional actions and coordination. The first step is to promote action within indigenous communities after centuries of censorship and assimilation: *“We know how to deal with these things, but there are some villages that can no longer do it. They end up adopting other kind of things”*<sup>156</sup>. The second is to engage with institutions. The participants' community was also relatively closed but recently has increasingly engaged with institutions and appropriated the non-indigenous knowledge to lead to action. *“We managed to do all this, walking through the book”*<sup>157</sup> to create a *“space where we can achieve more”*<sup>158</sup>. Participants shared that the dialogues were not easy initially because it became clear how strictly institutions follow their guidelines, especially in nutrition. They know the legitimacy of their knowledge, did their research, and understood *“that most agencies listen through writing”*<sup>159</sup>. Overall, it is possible to observe how the indivisible triangle contains the main elements of indigenous food sovereignty seen in Chapter 1 because it can approach food beyond food security and aims to guarantee a more equitable and sustainable diet.<sup>160</sup>

Following the triangle, they focused on three dimensions to achieve their objectives. The first was to increase coordination at the local and national levels to protect their territorial rights. One of the

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<sup>153</sup> Participant 1, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: *“Se de repente a gente comer e acontecer alguma coisa para a criança, é culpa de quem?”*

<sup>154</sup> Lacerda et al., 2024, p. 97

<sup>155</sup> Participant 1, 2024; Participant 2, 2024; Participant 3, 2024; Lacerda et al., 2024

<sup>156</sup> Participant 2, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: *“a gente sabe lidar com essas coisas aí. Mas tem umas aldeias que já não conseguem mais. Acaba adotando outros tipos de coisas”*

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. Translated by the author. Original text: *“a gente conseguiu fazer isso tudo, caminhar através de livro”*

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. Translated by the author. Original text: *“espaço onde a gente está conseguindo mais coisas”*

<sup>159</sup> Participant 2, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: *“que a maioria dos órgãos eles aceitam através da escrita”*

<sup>160</sup> Participant 1, 2024; Participant 2, 2024; Participant 3, 2024; Lacerda et al., 2024

participants left her studies in pedagogy to get a law degree to activate the right institutions when people encroach on their land. Concerning education, they began to take an institutional role in the schools within the indigenous lands. Unlike most aldeias, the indigenous teachers represent 98% of the school body. In addition, they are the only ones in this area of Santa Catarina to have their own Specific Political Pedagogical Program (*Programa Político Pedagógico Específico* - PPP). It gives them the ability to design a program that allows them to teach their cultural practices, including the alimentary ones, and to promote them to the future generation: “*we must work with the seed outside the classroom, and it counts as a class*”<sup>161</sup>. Finally, the Aldeia Tarumã has shown strong initiative in the health field. At the request of the Council of Chiefs (*caciques*), Participant 1 became the coordinator in SESAI (the indigenous health center) to act as both a community leader and a federal official. She can systematically address the gaps in understanding between the needs of the local population and the solution offered by the SUS. The most relevant aspect of the non-linear articulation of the relationship between food sovereignty and health is how the SUS and the Guarani Mbyá use the right to health to represent their right to a culturally appropriate diet. Based on ILO Convention No. 169, the Brazilian Constitution, and Laws No. 8080/1990a and No. 8142/1990b (see section 2.1.3.), they were able to use the SSAI-SUS (the Sub-System of Indigenous Health of the SUS) to allow for differentiated treatment to receive “*comprehensive care, with the recognition of their ancestral knowledge, participation, and social control*”<sup>162</sup>. In a methodologically participatory and collaborative process, coordinated by local health professionals (part of FILCRUZ) but led by the *caciques*, they articulated their understanding and how they relate different concepts such as land, food, and health within the Guarani cosmovision (see section 3.2.). Through dialogue with the researchers, they were able to link their need to maintain their diet with their right to mental health. As argued in the article:

*“[The] conception of integrality that articulates the view of social, economic, political, and intercultural determinations in the health-disease processes is fundamental to understanding this experience. Addressing this topic with the Guarani indigenous community, various subjects crossed the debate, such as: understanding of territory, spirituality, respect for nature and elders, collective decisions in the villages, food, and its interaction with mental health.”*<sup>163</sup>

They “*handled the documentation and did the translation. It was quite difficult, but we managed to make it differentiated in the hospitals*”<sup>164</sup>. In practice, this collaborative process allowed them to create a menu (*Cardapio alimentar*) for hospitals. The menu is to be used by the medical staff when they visit indigenous people, especially young people and mothers. The different beliefs of each are recognized and respected. The public hospitals in the Joinville area have adopted the *Cardapio*. Participants 2 and 3 emphasize that there are still some resistances, such as the Brazilian food culture around consuming meat for the mother. The participants consider it a slow but growing process. “*All the patients who were hospitalized in the institution chose to maintain their diet according to their culture*”<sup>165</sup>, and even people from relatively distant Aldeias go to the hospitals with the *Cardapio*, functionally creating a new problem of access to care. The participants and their community are now fighting to have the *Cardapio* introduced in their schools as part of the differentiated *Merenda Escolar* and integrated into the broader

<sup>161</sup> Participant 2, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*a gente deve trabalhar com a semente fora da sala de aula e valendo como aula*”

<sup>162</sup> Lacerda et al. (2024), p. 85. Translated by the author. Original text: “*o cuidado integral, com o reconhecimento de seus saberes ancestrais, a participação e o controle social*”

<sup>163</sup> Lacerda et al. (2024), p. 95. Translated by the author. Original text: “*[a] concepção de integralidade que articula o olhar das determinações sociais, econômicas, políticas e interculturais nos processos de saúde-doença é fundamental para compreender essa experiência. o tratar desse tema com a comunidade indígena Guarani, diversos assuntos atravessaram o debate, como: entendimento sobre território, espiritualidade, respeito à natureza e aos anciãos, decisões coletivas nas aldeias, alimentação e interação desta com a saúde mental*”

<sup>164</sup> Participant 3, 2024. Translated by the author. Original text: “*fez esse sigilo e fez a tradução. Foi bem difícil, assim. Mas a gente conseguiu que fosse diferenciado nos hospitais*”

<sup>165</sup> Lacerda et al., 2024, p. 112. Translated by the author. Original text: “*a totalidade das pacientes que se internaram na instituição optaram por manter a alimentação de acordo com sua cultura*”

culturally specific education they are implementing. All indigenous participants see the *Cardapio* as a first step towards broader recognition and respect for their traditional practices, with the next step being traditional medicine. The current goal is to disseminate the *Cardapio* to other Guarani groups and the wider indigenous community nationally and internationally (the document and Lacerda et al., 2024 are currently being translated into several languages) as a form of best practice sharing and to shed light on the indigenous communities of southern Brazil, which are often ignored nationally and internationally, while suffering the highest levels of land pressure.<sup>166</sup> This approach to the interaction between indigenous health and food practices represents a new perspective within the Brazilian and general indigenous food sovereignty literature. It adds complexity to the non-linear relationship between food and empowerment that food sovereignty should strive for, both as an academic field and as a mode of action.

The case of the *Cardapio* allows us to articulate the crucial difference with MST. The type of institutional commitment required to achieve indigenous food sovereignty fundamentally challenges the underlying shared understandings within Brazilian society. In this sense, as argued in sections 1.2 and 2.1.4, indigenous food sovereignty becomes a means of self-determination for indigenous peoples. It is interesting to note how both groups focus on the importance of health, but due to this fundamental diversion, they articulate it differently. For the landless, it is the quality of the food produced and its cultivation. For indigenous people, it is the lack of well-being generated by their broader cultural eradication, which manifests itself, among other things, through food practices. Both groups are dependent and subject to the power imbalance with the federal state. However, the main risk for MST is economic disempowerment because the state makes its economic model viable. Meanwhile, for indigenous groups, it is the distress of being forced, either by necessity or external pressure, to consume food considered unsuitable while losing their cultural practices. It is emblematic that their food sovereignty strategies relate to the *Merenda Escolar* but for the MST on the production side and for indigenous peoples on the consumption side.

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<sup>166</sup> Participant 1, 2024; Participant 2, 2024; Participant 3, 2024; Lacerda et al., 2024



## Conclusion

The fieldwork confirms theoretical trends regarding the role of landless and food indigenous sovereignties in their broader contexts. Land concentration and agribusiness expansion created similar pressures for the landless and the Guarani Mbyá in Santa Catarina. In both cases, food sovereignty is a means of empowerment. For the MST, empowerment comes from acquiring land in a process that Carter (2010) describes as conservative agrarian reform. Land acquisition changes the food relations in the system by promoting small-scale, equitable, and sustainable production. The Guarani Mbyá's empowerment comes from preserving their land and maintaining their food practices. The fundamental difference lies in the cultural context of the emergence of MST. The movement has an oppositional relationship to the dominant food and land system. Nonetheless, it bases relations and meanings related to food consumption and production on a shared understanding of the world. The Guarani Mbyá, on the other hand, derive their meaning from outside the model that Brazilian settler society has produced, and their food practices deeply reflect this aspect. For indigenous peoples, promoting and legitimizing their traditional food practices as part of the quest for self-determination expands the understanding of the relationship between food and empowerment. The research sheds light on the importance of the articulations of food sovereignty generated by how specific groups respond to needs and opportunities. The case of the Aldeia Tarumã gives a new perspective on the non-linear relationship between health and food sovereignty. It links their struggle to maintain their culturally specific food system with their right to mental health by promoting the implementation of a Guarani menu (*Cardapio*) in hospitals and schools. They see this as a first step. The explicit use of the food sovereignty and UNDROP frameworks would more effectively leverage their rights within Brazilian institutions. However, we need to be aware that using an Indigenous Food Sovereignty framework, while beneficial to indigenous groups, can lead to the boxing in of indigenous knowledge into non-indigenous frameworks if not generated by the beneficiaries. According to Shrinkhal (2021), engagement for indigenous peoples often means translation, loss, and incorporation into the dominant framework. Further research on both indigenous food sovereignty and synergies between food sovereignties needs to critically consider the key differences between the two types of food sovereignty. Analyzing the different depths and specificities of the multiple struggles, as argued by the European Coordination of la Via Campesina (2018), is not about competition but cooperation. The common denominator between different food sovereignties serves to understand the underlying and pervasive inequalities in a society while the specific articulation of how they resist is crucial to understanding each group's conditions and solutions. Articulating multiple facets of food sovereignty can better network what is primarily localized action. The complexification of food sovereignty can entail a more critical approach to how the spaces of action of marginalized groups are affected by inequality and colonial legacies. Future research should focus on the settled vulnerable groups that are the "losers" of Brazilian colonization and its aftermath, such as *Quilombolas* (descendants of afro-descendent enslaved people who escaped from plantations and formed settlements), to understand how the same macro-phenomenon has different effects on their struggles and food practices. Finally, dialogue and interaction among the multiple food sovereignties can lead to more effective action and empowerment vis-à-vis the dominant land and food systems.

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## Interviews

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