



Theatre methods for food security and sovereignty: A Brazilian scenario

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ABSTRACT

After years of decline, hunger is again growing. In seeking ways to combat it, Brazil offers not just a relevant context for public policy and programming, but also an important conceptual framework for food and nutritional security. Socially and politically organized peasants deal directly with the concepts and practices of food security. Crucially, they are active in pursuing a food security definition that benefits them. One fundamental civil organization representing peasants in Brazil is the Landless Workers Movement - MST. Another, working closely with the MST, is the Borborema Trade Union Pole, which works according to the regional culture of its territory. Those civil organizations have agroecology as their farming methodology. Many theatrical practices use narrative as a tool to discuss or promote issues in communities. In general, these practices are diverse and fall under the concept of Theatre for Development – TFD. The article reviews TFD and proposes celebratory community-based theatre as a method for narratives motivating improvements for food insecurity situations. The Borborema Trade Union Pole formed a community theatre group and created a play entitled Pamonhada in the House of Dona Nene. The play presents a community-based construction of the concept of food security based on the relationships between the concrete experience of the farming families and the local reality of family farming.

1. The context of food security policy in Brazil

Throughout its history, Brazil has had a problem with inequality. Since colonial times, when its economy focused on foreign markets, the gap between the rich and the poor has always been stark (Wood et al., 1988; Almeida-Filho et al., 2004). Agriculture, Brazil's main economic driver, was based on latifundia, slavery, and monoculture. The Brazilian economy was structured at that point in time to be exclusively a producer. Brazil supplied the products it had to the international market, meeting its demands. To achieve this, some owners and entrepreneurs commandeered the people, using them as workforce (Santilli, 2009; Mazoyer and Roudart, 2010). Ultimately, Brazil evolved, developing an economy based on speculative exploitation of its natural resources, which was unstable in time and space. Parallel to the agro-export project, there was a small local subsistence economy that sustained peasants (Prado Junior, 1973). Despite the transformations for more than five centuries, the economy and social structure have not changed considerably in Brazil. Brazil continues to exploit its natural resources through irresponsible and unsustainable management (Codonho, 2014), while low pay and repressive labor laws exploit its people. Meanwhile, despite industrialization, agriculture still plays an important role in the economy (Goncalves et al., 2018).

Since 1997, food security has become a major issue in Brazil,

involving social mobilization and governmental action. At the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, with the participation of governments, civil society, and private organizations, the Declaration on World Food Security (FAO, 1996) was adopted. Participation at this important event brought Brazilian mobilization to the next level of importance.

This included the establishment of the Brazilian Forum on Food and Nutritional Security (FBSAN) in 1998, a national network of social organizations, researchers, and government technical specialists. The forum now has more than 100 affiliated institutions and was an important supporter of the reestablishment of the National Council for Food and Nutritional Security, CONSEA, by President Lula in 2003. The forum played an important role in forming the Council's agenda and in linking it with other networks concerned with food and nutritional security: land reform, 'solidarity economy,' agroecology, indigenous people, traditional populations, and so on (CONSEA, 2009; Chmielewska and Souza, 2011).

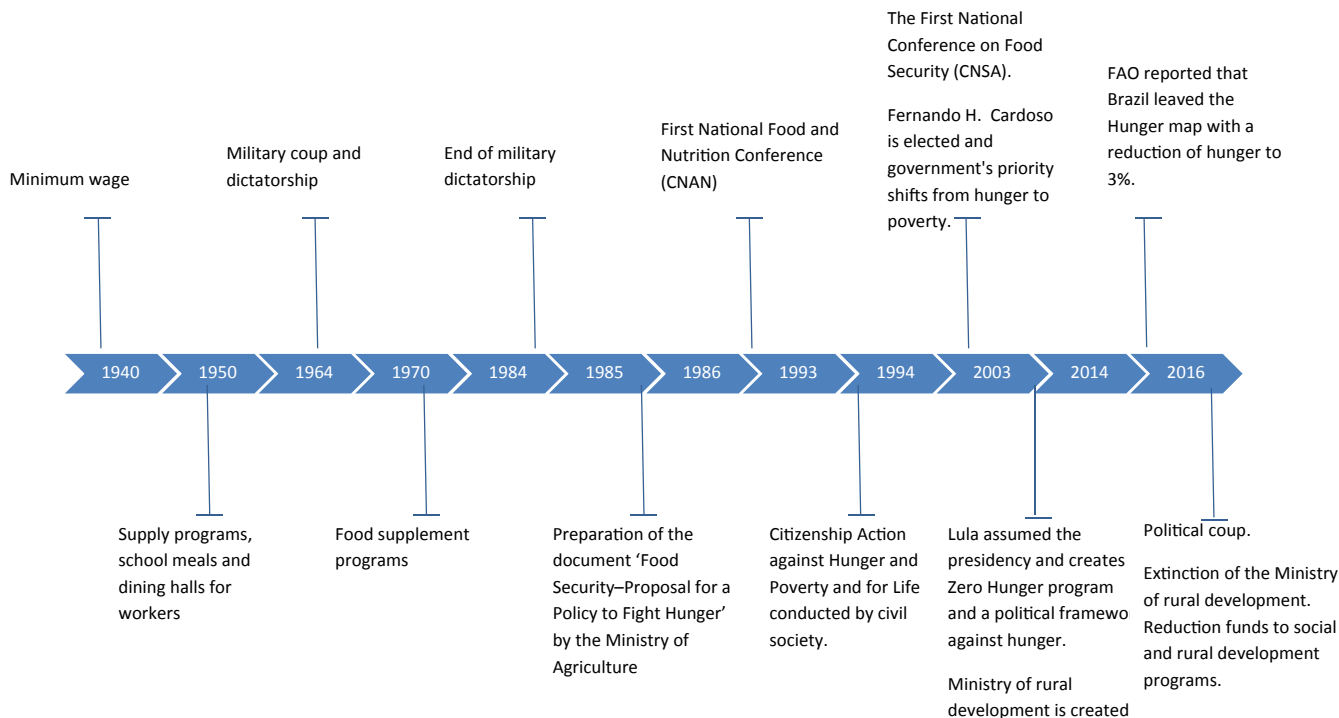
Rocha (2009) points out Brazil started to achieve many of the Millennium Development Goals, and this is widely credited to bold and innovative government policies backed by new forms of popular participation in social policy. These achievements are the result of a longstanding process of public intervention and broad social mobilization (see Table 1).

Brazil included the right to food among the social rights stipulated

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Table 1
Brazil food security Timeline.

BRAZIL FOOD SECURITY TIMELINE



in its constitution. Law 11.346 of food and nutritional security, supported by then President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on September 15, 2006, established a series of measures and actions. Among them was the creation of SISAN,¹ a national food and nutritional security system. It has developed a national plan and policy for this area with guidelines, targets, resources, as well as evaluation and monitoring tools composed of integrated actions and programs involving different sectors of government and society, in the search for sufficient and quality food for all (CONSEA, 2009).

There are two concepts at the base of the policies related to food security in Brazil: the right to adequate food and food sovereignty. The right to adequate food encompasses two indivisible dimensions: (a) the right to be free from hunger and malnutrition, and (b) the right to adequate food, where it is the duty of the public power to respect, protect, promote and provide, in addition to monitoring and evaluating the realization of this right, as well as guaranteeing the mechanisms for its enforceability (CONSEA, 2009). The widely accepted World Food Summit (1996) definition reinforces the multidimensional nature of food security and includes food access, availability, food use, and stability. At the same time, food sovereignty concerns the right of peoples to define their own policies and strategies for food production, distribution, and consumption. These two conceptual references have been used in the promotion of sustainable models for family-based production, in the approximation of food production and consumption, as well as in valuing the diversity of eating habits (CONSEA, 2009; Lang and Barling, 2012; Bond, 2018).

¹ Through SISAN, government agencies at all levels of government and civil society organizations work together to formulate and implement policies and actions to combat hunger and promote Food and Nutrition Security, as well as to monitor and evaluate the population's nutritional situation, defining the rights and duties of public power, family, companies, and society (CAISAN, 2016).

Although is almost consensual that familiar agriculture plays a major role in national food and nutritional security,² there is still a debate about the coexistence of different models of agricultural production, mainly divided in between smallholders and agribusiness. On the one hand, there is a narrative about agribusiness gradually taking over small farmers. Supporting this narrative is the argument based on the marginal economic gains made by small farmers compared to agribusiness (Malagodi, 2017). On the other hand, according to Malagodi (2017),

Evidence of the facts shows that the preservation of peasants as social class does not depend on the competition between small and large exploitation (Kleinbetrieb versus Großbetrieb), but represents a permanent situation of the agrarian structure in any capitalist country. And, therefore, family-based and peasant-based agriculture is a permanent segment of the agrarian structure; it is assumed that in any democratic country there must be consistent public policies for such agriculture, since all agricultural activity needs credit and public policies, and it will not be different for peasant and family farmers (Malagodi, 2017, 57).

From a capitalocentric representation of the economy, family-based and peasant-based agriculture fail in bringing profit. It is remarkable, though, that even without profit they have managed to subsist, and, in some cases, to live with quality of life promoting diversification of the

² According to data from the Agricultural Census of 2006 (IBGE), although family agriculture is minor in relation to agribusiness agriculture, it can be said that family agriculture is mainly responsible for guaranteeing the country's food security, since it accounts for 87% of the national production of cassava, 70% of beans, 46% of corn, 38% of coffee, 34% of rice, 58% of milk, 59% of pigs, 50% of poultry, 30% of cattle, and 21% of wheat. Additionally, according to the Census, it is also the main generator of jobs, comprising 12.3 million workers, corresponding to 74.4% of the total employed in the field (CONSEA, 2009).

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