



Agroecology as a public matter: an overlook through the trajectory of Brazil's National Articulation of Agroecology

A agroecologia como um problema público: um olhar a partir da trajetória da Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia

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ABSTRACT: The proposal of agroecology has emerged in recent decades inserted into non-hegemonic developmental alternatives, expressing itself broadly as a social movement, science, practice, and lifestyle. Several social movement organizations and NGOs of the agro-ecological field congregate in the National Articulation of Agroecology (ANA). This research sought to understand the formation and political organization of the ANA, which is understood as a network with heterogeneous connections and social actors, established in 2002 to promote policy formulation and exchanges between organizations working with agroecology. We followed ANA's trajectory to understand how the association promoted agroecology as a recognized public issue and represented itself as a social network, both for converging approaches and actions, as to oppose the agribusiness and to dispute public policies. The study begins with the historical reconstruction of the agro-ecological movement, from the initial steps of alternative agriculture to the spreading and defense of agroecology by different actors and sectors. As methodological tools, we conducted semi-structured interviews, participated in events and analyzed various documents. The action as a network, even in a horizontal effort, revealed concentrations, controversies and dynamics with different degrees of involvement. The study allowed us to observe the relationships and social processes that led to the formation of the ANA, as well as its form of action as a network and its representation as part of the agro-ecological movement. ANA boosted the political significance of agroecology as a frame, mobilized the actors to a public issue and to network shares with proposals for a new utopia.

Keywords: social movements; frame; public issue.

RESUMO:

A proposta da agroecologia emergiu nas últimas décadas inserida nas alternativas contra-hegemônicas de desenvolvimento, expressando-se de forma ampla como movimento social, ciência, prática e um modo de vida. Diversas organizações de movimentos sociais e Organizações Não Governamentais (ONGs) do campo agroecológico têm interlocuções na Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia (ANA). A pesquisa buscou compreender a formação e organização política da ANA, entendida como uma rede com heterogêneos vínculos e atores sociais, criada em 2002 para promover formulações de políticas e intercâmbios entre organizações que atuam com agroecologia. O fio condutor da pesquisa seguiu a trajetória da ANA para entender de que maneira promoveu a agroecologia enquanto um problema público a ser reconhecido e se expressou como uma rede social, tanto para fazer convergir posicionamentos e ações quanto para se opor ao agronegócio e disputar políticas públicas. O estudo parte da reconstrução histórica do movimento agroecológico, desde os passos iniciais da agricultura alternativa até a difusão e defesa da agroecologia por atores e setores diversos. Como instrumentos metodológicos, realizamos entrevistas semiestruturadas, além da participação em eventos e análise de documentos diversos, tendo como referencial analítico as noções de redes sociais e movimentos sociais, com uma abordagem relacional. A ação em rede, mesmo no esforço da horizontalidade, expressou concentrações, controvérsias e dinâmicas de envolvimento diversas. O estudo permitiu conhecer as relações e os processos sociais que geraram a formação da ANA, bem como sua forma de ação em rede e sua expressão como parte do movimento agroecológico. A ANA impulsionou o significado político da agroecologia como um *frame*, mobilizando atores, ações e propostas de uma nova utopia.

Palavras-chave: movimentos sociais; frame; problema público.

1. Introduction

In this paper, we analyze the emergence of agroecology and its expansion in Brazil based on the trajectory of the Brazilian National Articulation of Agroecology (ANA). ANA was founded in 2002 with the purpose of developing policy proposals and promoting exchanges between Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) and social movement¹ organizations which deal with the agroecological field. The approaches that allowed such relations implied understanding the emergence of agroecology as a public issue (Cefaï, 2002) as well as building a collective action. In addition, it was necessary to understand how these factors affected the creation and development of the agroecological field. The research questions that guided this study in ana-

lytical terms were: How did ANA build itself as a collective actor and a network? In this trajectory, how did ANA approach agroecology as a public problem and a frame²? (Bensadon, 2016).

This study originated from a masters thesis defended in 2016 in the Social Sciences Graduate Program on Development, Agriculture and Society of the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (CPDA/UFRRJ), under the supervision of Professor Leonilde Servolo de Medeiros. In order to conduct the study, we obtained access to primary data, such as: semi-structured interviews with various national leaders involved with the agroecological movement from the period between 2014 and 2016; analysis of various documents of ANA (national meetings and smaller conferences meeting minutes); and participation in some national events such as meetings and

¹ The term “social movement organizations” is used in the analysis of political opportunities, as in Tarrow (2009). We use this expression to differentiate the analysis of organizations from the theoretical analysis of social movements.

² For this study, we use the term “frame”, following Snow & Byrd (2010), Tarrow (2009), Cefaï (2002), and Cefaï & Trom (2008).

conferences. Such primary data was used to identify the actors, the main guidelines, the way of action and the consensual understandings of ANA with a dense description (Geertz, 1989). This description aimed at explaining and clarifying the phenomena and the social constructions developed from a specific interpretation³.

This paper is organized in three sections. In the first one, we highlight some issues related to the theory of social movements that base our analysis, and we articulate and conceptualize collective actor, frame and public issue. In the second section, we detail the process of development of the agroecological movement and ANA, considering their interfaces of convergence and divergence. Finally, in the last section, we present our final considerations.

2. The theory of social movements: a way to understand ANA's trajectory

The concept of social movement presents a multiplicity of meanings and has been studied in several theoretical approaches. Some of these approaches are: the resource mobilization theory (Olson, 1965), political opportunities (McAdam *et al.*, 2009), new social movements (Touraine, 2006), frames (Benford & Snow 2000; Cefaï 2002; Cefaï & Trom 2008; Snow & Byrd, 2010), repertoires of collective action (Tilly, 1978), everyday resistance (Thompson, 1998; Scott, 2002), recognition (Honneth, 2003; Fraser, 2007), the relationship with public policies and democracy (Bourdieu, 1990; Offerlé, 1998) and networks and social movements (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Scherer-Warren, 2008).

In this study, we opted for a methodological approach that does not limit the understanding of social movement to an organizational scope nor substantiate it (Melucci, 2001). This study is connected to the analysis of social movements in order to understand the heterogeneities of ANA as a collective actor and the efforts undertaken to maintain its unity around agroecology which are motivated by the criticisms and injustices that have been promoted since the agricultural modernization. This formation involved several oppositions, especially towards agribusiness⁴, and proposed alternatives, as well as a set of ideals and themes articulated to agroecology, as a proposal of a new way of life in society, through consensual discourses among its members (Melucci, 2001).

The category of social movements contributed to explain the foundation and maintenance of ANA by decomposing the elements of its collective action and to understand how this collective identity was formed. The process of evaluation and recognition of a collective identification between organizations has been a constant effort of ANA, and has also been remodeled through interactive and negotiated perceptions of opportunities and action connections. The unity of this collective actor was the result of exchange, negotiation, decisions and conflicts. This trajectory, which was motivated by certain social struggles, was also influenced by tensions in relation to different practices, conceptions, and structures among its actors. These tensions signaled the limits of consensus and of a political proposal, and the way actors dealt with their differences in these collective action processes.

³ This aspect is also present in hermeneutics, as in Ricoeur, P. *Interpretation and ideologies*. Rio de Janeiro: F. Alves, 1988.

⁴ Throughout ANA's documents, the term agribusiness appears with political meaning. The agroecological project identifies the nature and the consequences of the agricultural modernization domain made by agrarian elites for society as a way of capital creation and accumulation.

Considering its historical construction, it is noteworthy that ANA has been configured as a social network, since it mobilizes relations, resources, and meanings. It also seeks the “interconnection between different worlds and forms of knowledge, transcending specific institutional domains and interconnecting a great diversity of arenas” (Schmitt, 2011, p. 92, our translation). ANA was built from the structuring of these relations and connections.

During the investigation, the relational approach allowed the understanding of actors in their contexts of relations, influences, structure of connections, conflicts, and alliances. The social network was the product of a combination of goal-oriented action, chance and inheritance of previous connection patterns. It was also the result of the actors’ actions and intentions to form, maintain and influence this social network (Marques, 2006; 2007).

The emergence of agroecology started with alternatives to the Green Revolution⁵. Its development was associated with the construction of a frame and the formulation of criticisms, diagnosis, search for solutions, and mobilization for collective action (Benford & Snow, 2000). It re-signified popular and scientific knowledge and granted signification and cognitive meaning to a political action. ANA, as a collective actor organized in a network, acted to produce consensuses, articulate, maintain, and diffuse a new frame. It sought to understand the frame in terms of what it announces, formulates, negotiates, and constructs regarding agroecology as

a public issue that should be addressed. Thus, ANA became one of the representatives of agroecology. The collective actors sought to establish agroecology as a public issue in order to make it a relevant and recognized theme in society as well as to extend the discussion to several social public spheres and to practical actions (Cefaï, 2002).

This happened because social movements not only present ideas and significations, but also act as agents in the production and maintenance of understandings in society in order to guide and legitimize their own actions (Benford & Snow, 2000). The creation of frames as a procedural and interactive action that involves social movements’ actions generated interpretations and understandings on agroecology which are different from the traditional ones and modified the comprehension of the theme.

The trajectory of agroecology has mixed old and new issues, from the construction of alternative technologies to agrarian reform laws, through a set of frames that have connected events, experiences, and moral codes that were unified to form a new point of view. Agroecology, in this perspective, is not related to the originality of ideological elements, but to “the manner in which they are spliced together and articulated, such that a new angle of vision, interpretation, or understanding is provided” (Byrd & Snow, 2010, p. 329). We sought to understand the ideological elements that base agroecology, new discourse themes, values and targets of this public issue, and the interactive dynamics in the

⁵ The Green Revolution began in the US and Europe, especially after World War I, in order to modernize agriculture with state support. In Brazil, the Green Revolution has been developing since the 1960s and has resorted to the use of pesticides, GM seeds, mechanization, and large-scale monocultures in order to generate profit. This caused, for example, biodiversity loss and reduction, farmers’ dependence on supplying and buying companies – which are generally multinational –, farmer’s indebtedness and autonomy loss, and death and contamination of the environment. This process is also referred to as “conservative modernization”, since it maintained and accentuated the framework of land and economic concentration. In addition, the process has strong ideologies regarding its inevitability, and it acted directly in the agronomic formation. To understand the effects of the Green Revolution/conservative modernization, check Molina (2009)

construction of the agroecological frame (Cefaï & Trom, 2008). We also analyzed how the process of configuration of such agroecological interpretative framework developed among different social organizations (Tarrow, 2009) and may explain why certain actors engaged in this collective action.

In addition, the relation between social movements and the public power is, if not central, constitutive of the emergence and formulation of agroecology. Regarding agroecology, this interlocution was permanent and demanded public policies and the recognition of agroecology as a duty of the public power sector. The political confrontation supported by ANA occurred in an institutional level and used non-violent strategies (McAdam *et al.*, 2009), despite being questioned by some of its members. Moreover, ANA has acted towards the valorization of the daily work of the agroecological family farmers, in a daily resistance (Scott, 2002).

3. The emergence of the agroecological movement

The expanding of agroecology depicts the process of constructing frames. This process happened not only through the efforts of social movements, but also by the interactive dynamics between the actors and the search for sharing and re-creating these meanings and their similarities among multiple organizations (Cefaï & Trom, 2008). Thus, the potential of conviction and mobilization of a

social movement depends on its strategies of aggregation and consensus and its tactics of innovation, delimitation, and confrontation, and on the public authorities' ability to translate social movements' claims into legal devices or to institutionalize them as public policies, or still on the balance between opposing arguments and their visibility for the mass media. (Cefaï & Trom, 2008, p. 11, our translation)⁶

To briefly describe this process, the development of agroecology was preceded by the creation of alternative agriculture, especially in the 1980s, driven by the interaction between diverse elements such as social struggles for re-democratization and the crisis of the conventional production process (contamination, and indebtedness and resistance of farmers). Moreover, it was also driven by the increase of an environmental concern both locally and globally⁷.

The criticism to the Green Revolution came from the most famous agronomists and intellectuals in the Brazilian Meetings of Alternative Agriculture (EBAAs) in the 1980s. This worked as a pioneer space for the exchange of ideas and for the objection to agricultural model, in the midst of a military dictatorship. In addition, another historical actor in this period was the Project of Alternative Technologies, which is linked to the Federation of Boards for Social and Educational Assistance (PTA/FASE). This project promoted the identification, recognition and articulation of experiences with alternative agriculture in several regions of the country. These

⁶ “El potencial de convicción y de movilización de un movimiento depende de sus estrategias de agregación y de consenso, de sus tácticas de innovación, de delimitación y de enfrentamiento y también de la capacidad de los poderes públicos de traducir sus reivindicaciones en dispositivos legales o institucionalizarlas en políticas públicas, o aún del equilibrio entre los argumentos opuestos y su visibilidad para los medios masivos” (Cefaï & Trom, 2008, p. 11).

⁷ For example, the exchange of information between agronomists on international issues and their local action with farmers or the local effects, based on debates promoted by the United Nations (UN).

efforts were conducted by activists with connections to international networks and by agronomists hired by the project.

The alternative agriculture enabled a symbolic identification between causes, consequences, and solutions to the modernization of agriculture. Although it was not consolidated as a collective actor, due to a series of divisions during the EBAA's, the alternative agriculture had an initial role in creating networks inside agronomy and on increasing the entry and adherence of new actors. Moreover, it articulated agendas and historical issues, such as the agrarian reform and sought, in the case of PTA/FASE, the adherence of actors that could broaden the reach of the proposal, such as farmers and social movement organizations.

The notion of network was present in the PTA/FASE project: it spread and expanded in teams throughout the country and reformulated its role as "PTA Network", in order to broaden the proposal of alternative agriculture and generate greater autonomy for the dozens of NGOs involved. Then, in the late 1990s, the PTA Network verified its low capacity for interference in the national scenario, since its activity was limited to NGOs. Thus, this led to the preparation and mobilization of a national meeting, with the expectation of a greater number of adhesions regarding the public problem that it addressed.

The notion of agroecology is incorporated in the late 1980s, from the interactions between the PTA Network and Latin American actors, such as the Latin American Consortium on Agroecology and Sustainable Development (CLADES). An initial and important reference, who influenced such incorporation in Brazil, was the researcher and agronomist Miguel Altieri. This insertion expanded the field to scientific terms, and to the cultural

and environmental dimensions. In addition, this is articulated with historical processes of rural fights and of alternative agriculture.

Agroecology has been established as a conceptual reference mainly since the 1990s, with the maturation of the ecological analysis of agriculture and of the environmental awareness. This science encompasses different areas of knowledge, such as agricultural science, ecology, and rural development. In Brazil, broad and historical guidelines regarding rural social movements (such as the agrarian reform, valorization of the rural context, of women and of biodiversity, education, development of new markets, and youth) were incorporated in its discussions. In addition, it expanded the technical elements and incorporated political and value aspects in the scientific field and also in the relationship between men and women, and human beings and nature. Considering these, agroecology is not only a field of knowledge, but also another way of living in society and nature.

Until the 1990s, in the field of social movement organizations, agroecology's main claim was the productive inclusion, with the support of the state, despite criticism about the inadequacy of agricultural modernization for small farmers. The agroecology agenda in these organizations strengthened in the 2000s, as a result of their own agroecological productive experiences, interactions between the organizations that compose ANA and other actors that defend the agroecology agenda, discursive renewals, clashes with agribusiness, and effects of agrochemicals. This occurred mainly in the Brazilian National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG), in the Brazilian National Federation of Men and Women Family Farmer Workers (FETRAF), and in the Brazil's Landless Workers

Movement (MST). The agroecology agenda also gained space, and was approached in a different way, in Brazil's Small Farmers Movement (MPA) and was based on the previous experiences of other movements. Women's movements, for instance, started to demand space for discussion in the agroecological agenda and there was a strengthening of the coalition and identity around it (McAdam *et al.*, 2009).

The meeting and mobilization of different actors, such as advisors, activists and farmers, potentiated a new framework of struggles, from the denial of agricultural modernization to land conflicts, and expanded networks and political proposals, which contributed to the formation of a collective will. The adhesion to agroecology was a result of the reformulations of each social movement organization, in a permanent and reflective interaction. Therefore, the notion of agroecology encompassed and recognized aspects as varied as scientific and technical elements, economic viability for agriculture, cultural changes, and interaction between popular and scientific knowledge (Figure 1). The formulation of agroecology as a public issue involved controversies and different focuses by these actors, and was proposed in resonance with the rest of the society, based on an argument that sought to convince people and ask for their engagement (Cefaï & Trom 2008).

3.1. Agroecology as a field of research and knowledge

In the scientific field, studies on agroecology have been done mainly by the Agrarian, Biological, and Health Sciences. There are numerous and growing reflections on agrieological productive



FIGURE 1 – Hands and seeds symbolizing agroecology.
SOURCE: ANA.

experiences and case studies, especially regarding its impacts and diverse potentialities in modes of production, generation of work, and maintenance of families and communities, which show its great importance to these areas. Moreover, there are also studies on participatory, educational, and gender aspects, on rural development, public policies, and sustainability of practices, as well as on the transdisciplinary and epistemological insertion of agroecology in society.

Local investigations on themes related to agroecology also reveal several variables that influence the biological productivity and the economic efficiency of productive systems. However, although there is a diversity of empirical studies on the matter, there is also a tendency to fragment or to not analyze all economic, social, political, and environmental components. In addition, the social and cultural universe of the farmers is often not considered, and there is a lack of criteria and analysis on power relations and conflict (Schmitt, 2009; Molina, 2009). This situation reflects the way the theme has been inserted in the academic environment. It can also

be observed in the fewer studies based on a Social Sciences' perspective. These studies focused on the investigation of multiple places, forms, and moments in which agroecology has become a public issue (Cefaï, 2011).

Recently, two studies – one from Dornelas (2016) and the other one from Strauch (2015) – addressed the relationship between social movements and agroecology, but still without relating the power relations and the internal tensions of this field. The former addressed the construction of agroecological knowledge based on the Ecology of Knowledge. It also addressed the rupture of this construction with the colonialities of knowledge and power, and also ANA and its historical construction. The latter investigated how the agroecological experiences in the city of Paraty, in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), contributed to the resistance strategy of the peasantry regarding the intense process of deterritorialization.

In addition to agroecology, another concept used both in the academy and in social practices is “agroecological transition”. This concept encompasses the multiple factors and social dimensions involved in the transition to a more sustainable agriculture, such as the confrontation between worldviews, new identities, and conflict and negotiation processes. The agroecological transition initiatives are understood as social constructions, through the interaction between actors, resources, activities, and places in rural development pro-

cesses, since not all practices are identified with or represent an agroecological unit, expressing different levels of complexity and understandings of the field (Schmitt, 2009). In this sense, the concepts of agroecological transition and agroecology are still under construction and under dispute.

The breadth of agroecology in the scientific and social scopes, the importance of delimiting its public action, and its anchorage in the institutions refer to the plurality of points of view, with a multiplicity of actors and institutions that use it. In this study, we briefly identified the places where agroecology appeared as an object of political work, both for the framing of action and as an identity reference. We also perceived its dialogue with other social worlds and considered the controversies that involve this matter as part of the construction of such knowledge (Billaud *et al.*, 2015).

3.2. The creation of the Brazilian National Articulation of Agroecology

The growing diffusion of the notion of agroecology in the 1990s favored the 1st Brazilian National Meeting on Agroecology (ENA), in 2002. This meeting was initially promoted by the PTA Network, and various social movement organizations and academic groups already sensitive to the agenda were invited to participate, from which an organizing committee⁸ was formed. This meeting

⁸ NGOs: Advisory and Services for Project in Alternative Agriculture (AS-PTA), Ipe Ecological Center, Sabiá Center, Center for Alternative Technologies of Zona da Mata (CTA-ZM), Federation of Boards for Social and Educational Assistance (FASE), Amazon Working Group (GTA), Agroecology Advisory Group in the Amazon (GTNA) and Advisory Service to Rural Population Organizations (Sasop). Social Movements: National Articulation of Rural Working Women (ANMTR), National Council of Extractivist Populations (CNS), Brazilian National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG), Federation of Agronomy Students of Brazil (FEAB), Federation of Workers in Family Agriculture Southern Region (Fetraf-Sul), Brazil's Small Farmers Movement (MPA) and Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST). Networks: Brazilian Semi-Arid Articulation (ASA Brazil), Cerrado Network and Ecovida Agroecological Network. Academic groups: Study Group on Agrarian Reform of the Federal University of Mato Grosso (Gera-UFMT) and National Union of Schools of the Brazilian Agricultural Family (Unefab). Organization linked to the Catholic Church: Pastoral Land Commission (CPT).

began to deepen not only the technical dimension of the agroecological production but also its political dimension, aimed at fostering social development and change. In addition, it promoted self-identification among agroecology actors, such as family farmers, social movement leaders, researchers, agricultural extension agents, and advisors. Moreover, an initial diagnosis of the conditions of these actors and of the social demands they faced was made, with the aim to influence the context of the national and state elections of that time.

ANA was created after the 1st ENA and was composed by the members of the organizing committee of the meeting. ANA first activities began with working groups divided according to their topics of interest, such as: knowledge construction and technical assistance, conservation and biodiversity, the role of women in agriculture, financing of the agroecological transition, and food sovereignty and security.

In a more propositional way than the one the agroecology agenda indicated until that moment, the creation of ANA allowed and sought greater collective action by the actors of agroecology. ANA's trajectory shows a continuous construction of political opportunities based on a shared reading of scenarios in each political conjuncture, in order to mobilize consensus and actions (Cefai & Trom, 2008).

Four years later, during the election period of 2006, the 2nd ENA was held. This time the encounter deepened the initial questions that based ANA's cohesion, which started from the opposition to agribusiness, in a critique that allowed the union of actors and a growing social game of distinction (Bourdieu, 1990). In addition, the 2nd ENA reflected the pressure and expectations on the public policies for the extension of the agroecological pro-

posal, given the opportunity of interference and construction together with the federal government, which was under the management of the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT).

Since its onset, ANA appeared as a policy maker with a clear socio-state interface, establishing relationships with the state outside the formal spaces between state and civil society (Almeida *et al.*, 2014), which does not exclude its participation in councils and other negotiation spaces with the government. This relation included the tensions between autonomy and integration with the government and also favored the articulation of the agroecological field, the access to public policies, and a greater capacity of diffusion of agroecology as a public issue. Then, ANA established a conflictual cooperation with the state (Chechi, 2017).

In its trajectory, ANA initially sought to be a place of meeting and exchange between political actors. Through time, ANA was increasingly legitimizing itself as a political actor, with power of cohesion and resonance in the agroecological field, representing a political force. This legitimation happened especially due to ANA's greater dialogue with public policies and the mobilization of ENAs, which also led to more direct actions by ANA itself.

By the time of the conclusion of this study, the organizations and groups that integrated ANA were: Brazilian Association of Agroecology (ABA), Brazilian Semi-Arid Articulation (ASA Brazil), National Council of Rubber Tappers (CNS), National Collective of Urban Agriculture (CNAU), Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), National Coordination for the Articulation of Black Quilombola Rural Communities (CONAQ), Brazilian National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG), Federation of Agronomy Students of Brazil (FEAB), Bra-

zilian Peasant Women Movement (MMC), Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST), Rural Women Workers Movement of the Northeast (MMTR-NE), Interstate Movement of Babassu Coconut Breakers (MIQCB), Cerrado Network, Rural Women Entrepreneurs in the Amazon Network (RMERA), Ecovida Agroecological Network, Network of Agroecology Groups of Brazil (REGA), National Union of Cooperatives of Family Agriculture and Solidarity Economy (UNICAFES)⁹. In addition, there are the state and regional networks of agroecology, such as the Agroecology Articulation of Rio de Janeiro (AARJ), Agroecology Articulation of Minas Gerais (AMA), Agroecology Articulation of São Paulo (APA), Sustainable Agriculture Exchange Group (GIAS), from Mato Grosso, the project "Terra sem Males", ANA Amazônia Network, Juçara Network, Maniva Agroecology Network (REMA), from Amazonas, and the Agroecology Network of Sergipe (Resea). This diversity of organizations expresses a wide range of connections by regions, contexts, identities and biomes. In these organizations, NGOs that work at ANA, such as those that compose its Executive Branch: AS-PTA, CTA-ZM and FASE, which among other NGOs are present since the PTA Network, are also included.

In addition to the Executive Branch that operates, moderates and monitors ANA's activities, its other areas are: Executive Secretariat, which organizes its daily dynamics and projects; the various working groups formed according to topics of interest; and the National Plenary, which brings together the diversity of actors that compose ANA.

Recently, some institutions of other thematic fields have joined ANA's national meetings, as a

way to fulfill ANA's objective to obtain new adhesions to the agroecological frame, such as Northeast, Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo Indigenous People Articulation (APOINME), Brazilian Association of Collective Health (ABRASCO), Brazilian Forum of Solidarity Economy (FBES), Brazilian Forum on Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security (FBSSAN), World March of Women (WMW) and Brazilian Network for Environmental Justice (RBJA)¹⁰.

3.3. Interfaces: confluences and divergences in the National Agroecology articulation

From the access to ANA's national meeting minutes and their analysis, we perceive that there are relations between actors of the civil society with each other and of these with the public policies, in an argumentative repetition that tried to mobilize consensus. ANA showed itself as a diffuser of the agroecological proposal, selecting new allies and themes that could strengthen its objective, which expanded the reach of the social network of agroecology.

The meetings showed that one of ANA's modes of action and methodological approach was based on analyses and evaluations of the electoral conjunctures, seeking to influence future federal administrations. The contradictions perceived by ANA together with the Federal Government in themes such as collective health, women, environmental justice, and solidarity economy have paved the way for dialogue with other civil society organizations. This dialogue showed the overlap and predisposition of these themes for involvement with agroecol-

⁹ Source: <http://www.agroecologia.org.br/o-que-e-a-ana/>. Retrieved on 09.02.2016.

¹⁰ Source: <http://www.agroecologia.org.br/o-que-e-a-ana/>. Retrieved on 09.02.2016.

ogy. The discussions about these matters culminated in the holding of the Brazilian National Meeting of Dialogues and Convergences, in 2011, which promoted reciprocal translations and reciprocal intelligibility among different organizations based on the critique of the dominant development model (Santos, 2002). This reformulated the construction of agroecology, which was previously based on its opposition to agribusiness, and evidenced more widely the conflict between agroecology and the capitalist model of development. This reformulation facilitated ANA's approach with new actors and social struggles.

By analyzing ANA's history, it is possible to notice the existence of moments of greater dialogue with the government, such as in the creation of the Brazilian National Policy for Agroecology and Organic Production (PNAPO), in 2012, and in the preparation of Abrasco's Dossier: A Warning about the Impact of Pesticides on Health¹¹, which deepened the government interfaces with the civil society. These moments were not exclusive and were related to the tensions over ANA's priorities, results and conditions of action. There was a growing awareness in regards to the exhaustion of the partial fulfillment of the demands posed by the agroecology versus the state support which strengthens the agribusiness and the dynamics of concentration of capital.

These dialogues also happened during the 3rd Brazilian ENA, in 2014, which deepened the forms, channels, target, languages, and tools of agroecological communication (Figure 2) and debated several



FIGURE 2 – Objects used as representative symbols in the 3rd ENA, Juazeiro, 2014.

SOURCE: ANA.

themes. The meeting, which had as its mobilizing question “Why does it matter to society to support agroecology?”, was attended by various networks and civil society organizations, which helped to organize the event. The meeting was also attended by government representatives. As in the previous meetings, the themes debated on the 3rd ENA sought to influence public policies and the management of life in society, expressing the consensus in political letters that became an act that institutionalized and made the public statements official.

The 2014 ENA explicitly highlighted the process of mutual and dramaturgical identification of the agroecological collective action, in marking a “we” and “them” among sympathizers and opponents of agroecology, when problems were disclosed in a political arena and in public commu-

¹⁰ Dossier available on: <http://abrasco.org.br/dossieagrotoxicos/>. Four parts of the dossier were published. The first one is related to the theme of health and focuses on the causes of the problems and prioritizes the implementation of PNAPO. The second one addresses the theme of the environment and the third one focuses on popular knowledge and on the ecology of knowledge. The last one focuses on agroecology. The dossier was boosted with the Permanent Campaign Against Pesticides and For Life, which has the purpose of bringing people from the countryside and the city to the debate and of mobilizing the field of science (ANA, 2012).

nication processes (Cefai & Trom, 2008). This has been placed not only in the external, but also in the internal scope of agroecology itself, strengthening the identity of the movement.

In all the national meetings, documents and propositions, ANA tried to highlight agroecology through its experiences and the practices of its protagonists, farmers and family farmers, who were increasingly the main public of those events. Therefore, in a process of mobilization and national organization, they sought to provide empirical credibility, semantic congruence and greater adherence in the construction of this frame (Benford & Snow, 2000; Cefai & Trom, 2008). The ENAs were also constituted as a political repertoire (McAdam *et al.*, 2009), in the sense of linking claimants with the objects of claim, as a moment of meeting of these actors and of public actions held in the meetings, such as the seed exchange fairs and the marches and public occupations of 2014 (Figure 3).



FIGURE 3 – March at the 3rd National Meeting of Agroecology, Juazeiro, 2014.

SOURCE: ANA.

The ANA's documents we accessed expressed the effort towards reaching consensus and collective positions, constructing its vision as a collective actor. ANA aimed at legitimizing its discourses and interpretations of the world in science, communication, and the media, in order to promote the public recognition of agroecology.

From the interviews, we approach the dilemmas and confrontations existing in the articulation, based on different conceptions, strategies of action, power relations and interfaces in the ANA network. They showed dissonant positions and heterogeneities, reflecting social and institutional positions, such as the ones by NGOs and social movement organizations. In order to understand these discourses in their political-ideological references and in the capacity for political action, we verified several discursive matrices of the actors, such as religion (as the reference of Liberation Theology), productive rationality, Marxism, syndicalism and science. These matrices are also related and intertwined.

The concepts of agroecology expressed by the interviewed actors showed several possibilities of action, ranging from personal, cultural, economic and political expectations, which refer to the existence of several agroecologies. As an attempt to systematize, seven perspectives of the agroecological proposal, not necessarily mutually exclusive, were perceived, such as: 1) the perspective of action in larger scale and violent confrontation, inserted in the formation of a class or social movement; 2) the improvement of access to markets with higher value-added products; 3) the culture and endurance value of the experiences; 4) the political action that opposes itself to agribusiness and seeks the autonomy of farmers as well as the end of oppression against women; 5) the formation of social and economic networks for the

survival and maintenance of farmers; 6) the scientific and technological perspective of agroecology aiming to change the pattern of food production and the dynamics of knowledge production networks; and 7) lifestyle and utopia. These perspectives are in contact at ANA, among diverse worlds.

Another element observed was the explicit tenuous articulation among the actors in the ANA. This was made clear in the absence of mechanisms of action and connection between the organizations and the scales, with fluid and heterogeneous involvements. The strongest connections occurred among NGOs that historically promoted the agroecological agenda, from the PTA Network. The immaterial characteristic of ANA as a network organization that constitute itself among the interviewed actors, created expectations about the need for their agreement on objectives understood by their parties and on the effectiveness of the speeches. The greater the communicative extension or the intended scope of this collective actor, the greater the difficulty in seeing it, understanding it, and feeling part of it.

Network analysis did not refer only to the expectation of horizontality, but involved differences in access to information, resources, circulation, language and political power, that is, perceiving its degrees of segmentation, centralization and dispersion, as well as relations of mediation between people and organizations networks (Cefaï, 2011). This is materialized in tensions between social positions of technicians and farmers, and of NGOs and organizations of social movements. The political specialization of the NGOs with the proposal and reception of ANA increased their linking in the articulation: the actors did not dedicate themselves in the same way, nor with the same conditions.

Consequently, it also expressed tensions between representation and legitimacy within ANA.

ANA's existence was conditioned to articulating objects and problems that fostered the interactions and relations between the actors (such as ENAs, campaigns against pesticides, and construction of PNAPO), which also raised questions about how its network operation would be, in the face of pressure for results. This emphasized dilemmas about its form of action, whether in a more negotiated position, as it has demonstrated, or in a more conflictive way against agribusiness, through direct action on the productive and economic part in agroecological experiments. In a dynamic that is intended differently from the traditional hierarchical structures, these differences expressed the boundaries between the social changes defended by different actors and tensions. These tensions did not result in ruptures, despite the different involvements and engagements, and allowed the dialogue, the recognition and the exchange, as of the national seminars (Figure 4).



FIGURE 4 – 2nd National Seminar of ANA, Rio de Janeiro, February, 2015.

SOURCE: ANA.

The relationship with the state influenced its trajectory and performance, as seen in the opportunity to build public policies under the term of PT in the 1st ENA in 2002 and in the following ENAs. ANA sought to be a legitimate interlocutor with public policies, also perceiving the risks in excessive linkage with its times and guidelines, but driven by the very recognition of agroecology as an object of public policy. Thereupon, it used the strategy of political opportunism (Offe, 1984), with short-term gains in relation to the asymmetry of power regarding public policies and agribusiness, reflecting the pressure to join this political game.

If, on the one hand, ANA developed itself within the limits imposed by prevailing structures of political opportunity, on the other, it also changed the structures of opportunity, especially when consolidating a political identity around agroecology (McAdam *et al.*, 2009). According to Tarrow (2009), ANA's political confrontation was a response to changes in political opportunities and constraints, using actions based on dense social networks and connective structures against agribusiness supporters, which encouraged new adepts to the agroecological movement, as seen in the national meetings of 2011 and 2014.

4. Final considerations

The construction of the agroecological field started from a small change in the networks of agronomy and followed its diffusion to other social fields. We perceive the elements, links and actors in the relationships of this social network, which sought to build, from a cognitive practice, a collective will (Cefaï & Trom, 2008). The construction

of this social movement did not start from a localized interest, but was formed within a network of interpersonal ties that was gaining new targets and connections (McAdam *et al.*, 2009).

The theory of social movements allowed us to observe that the construction of this collective actor was not homogeneous, expressing ambiguities and heterogeneities, and that it had agribusiness as its main opponent, in the construction of a field of conflict. It also took advantage of political opportunities and interfaces to increase its political power, such as the construction of public policies and the linkage with organizations related to collective health, solidarity economy, environmental justice, feminism and sovereignty, as well as food security.

ANA became a formulator and diffuser of agroecology, without expressing discontinuities between social movements and institutional policy, indicating strategic choices regarding their resources, opportunities and constraints (McAdam *et al.*, 2009). It articulated elements of justice, morality and respect for social diversities. At each new interface, agroecology was re-signified, reaching new audiences and identity adhesions, searching for semantic bridges with negotiated translations, expressing itself as a network of influence, modifying and adjusting its frame of collective action according to the target audience (Benford & Snow, 2000). The plurality of interpretations of agroecology did not matter as much as the political arrangements allowed by this political banner, extending historical social demands for social change and allowing cohesion in ANA, in terms of a joint political influence (Tarrow, 2005).

The notion of agroecology was the main element of cohesion among diverse actors, and ANA itself acted directly in such proposal. This built

a sense of development, covering several social themes, not restricted to the productive aspects. It thus sought to outsource the frame of agroecology as a public issue, using mediators such as the political representations participating in the articulation, the creation of its own means of communication, and the holding of national events, such as the ENAs. Even without placing it as an ambiguous concept, we perceive the multiple meanings and controversies of agroecology for the actors interviewed, which contributed to create a provisional unit between heterogeneous movements in mobilization processes and alliances of a multiorganizational field (Mische, 2002).

This construction expressed agroecology as a frame: it started from the diagnosis and identification of the problem, from the consequences of agricultural modernization and agribusiness; it created prognoses that raised claims and possible options such as alternative agriculture, attracting new actors as well as networks and organizations of social movements, academic field, and public policies; and it sought operators for collective action, translating dialogical links between social universes that motivated the adhesion to agroecology, in a dynamic process of this construction. The diverse elements of the sociocultural context interfered in these framing processes, either constraining them as the agribusiness agenda advanced with state support, or facilitating them, with the construction of PNAPO, the interference in the electoral periods, and the greatest resonance of health and environmental concerns in society (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Therefore, “the costumes of revolt are woven from a blend of inherited and invented fibers into collective action frames in confrontation with opponents and elites” (Tarrow, 2009, p. 118). On the

other hand, the elasticity and broad scope given to the agroecological frame may weaken its proposal and meaning, or even trivialize it, by covering extensive demands from the actors in their contestation process and their internal disputes and disaggregations. Also, the bridges generated between the actors that integrated ANA, given their congruence with agroecology, involved different universes, including political perspectives in tension, but did not cause paralysis in their capacity for collective action, although with different and fluid involvements at ANA. At the same time, this experience can approach the construction of a master frame (Benford & Snow, 2000) because it is generic and flexible, driven by different situations and objectives, seeking to achieve resonance in the social environment in order to be connected with certain conjunctures and political actors.

The attraction of new adepts and themes that incorporated the agroecological agenda occurred explicitly in some interfaces. For example, while the alternative agriculture only denounced the contaminations of the agrochemical model, the agroecology articulated this denunciation with a scientifically qualified discourse. This discourse was aligned with national research institutions, such as universities, Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) and the National Institute of Cancer José Alencar Gomes da Silva (INCA), which have technologically and scientifically proven the contaminations and deaths owing to the use of pesticides. Moreover, the search for articulation with the rural social movements that presents the agenda for agrarian reform has strengthened agroecology, especially in its dispute for the territories and in the challenges for its productive expansion, given the restricted access and territorial permanence of family agriculture as well

as peoples and communities throughout the country. In the women's movements, agroecology was already present in the practices of women farmers who inserted issues on violence against women and gender equity in the agroecological field in an irreducible way.

The interactionist perspective of the agroecological frame was also evident in the mobilization of public policies in the pre and post-electoral periods, when the agenda was intensely demanded, allowing a greater political and social density for the construction of an Agroecological Brazil. Especially in times of crisis and questioning of the social system, such as the global challenges in 2011 and the crime in the Rio Doce Basin in 2015, agroecology has been reaffirmed as an alternative development as well as a denunciation instance.

All this collective mobilization of public actors had several pragmatic consequences besides constituting the agroecological social movement. Among these consequences, the construction of public policies of agroecology, such as the processes of PNAPO and the National Plans of Agroecology and Organic Production (Planapo) in two periods (2013-2015 and 2016-2019), the politicization of various dimensions of individual and collective life, and the establishment of a new field for science and technology within the food system and in the production of knowledge are a few of them. According to Cefaï (2011), ANA reshaped the fields of experience by promoting institutional innovations, launching agroecology as a new public issue and seeking its implementation in public action devices.

In the current situation of rupture of the democratic process and attacks on social rights, with the tensions of a deepening neoliberal agenda, another political moment opens up for ANA's actors. These

tensions may or may not potentiate the political confluence between its organizations and constrain the government for democratic and participatory practices. Moreover, they may also go against the retreat of political opportunities in the institutional sphere, which can again modify the construction of this agroecological frame.

Finally, in this experience, agroecology proved to be a myth, approaching the social effects of a utopia and of a politically mobilizing dream, in the face of the conflicts and interests that surround the concept. Out of social reality, agroecology recreates itself in it, forming a new utopia (Girardet, 1987).

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