

3. Creole seeds festivals as a strategy of the peasant movements

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1. Introduction

In contemporary societies, we place much of our hope on the potential social movements have for fighting against perverse social tendencies and for proposing more desirable future alternatives. Based on these premises, this chapter focuses on the investigation of seed-related movements. More specifically, we try to understand how they arise; their criticisms and propositions; and how they work towards transforming society.

Actually, rather than solely presenting a universal approach to these movements, we aim at investigating their emergence and operation in the south of Brazil. After observing them, we identified specificities in their current strategies, as they systematically resort to hosting festivals, which lead us to wonder: how do such festivals contribute to these movements?

Considering the scarcity of studies on these festivals in the context of social movements, mainly those regarding seeds, we guided this study towards the reconstitution of the origin and operation of seed-related movements in the south of Brazil, focusing on local initiatives and how festivals might contribute to them.

In our approach, we situate the local initiatives of the movements related to seeds in their connection with the alternative agriculture movement. Based on this perspective, first, we present the origin of the alternative agriculture movement and then examine the movements related to seeds in the south of Brazil, presenting their local initiatives while highlighting the festivals in their relationship with them.

2. The emergence and trajectory of alternative agriculture movements in Brazil

From the post-war, the Brazilian State adopted an interventionist / developmentalist orientation. In agriculture, such orientation leads to a support of “modernization”: a broad project on economic and social transformation, based on productive specialization, mercantilization, and the incorporation of science and technology in agriculture.

As modernization progressed, the perverse social and environmental consequences of this project became more evident.¹⁵ From a social point of view, there was an increase in land concentration, social differentiation, and rural exodus. Inequalities were further accentuated in the 1980s as a global economic recession led to market restrictions for the export of agricultural commodities, an increase in the costs of production, and macroeconomic imbalances characterized by inflationary dynamics. The difficulties of coping with the challenges associated with this scenario resulted in small farmers’ indebtedness.¹⁶

In a context of increasing political mobilization over the acknowledgment and expansion of citizenship rights and democratization, the intensification of agrarian conflicts, whether related to the demarcation of indigenous lands or the relocation of families due to infrastructure constructions such as water dams, explains the emergence of social movements contesting the established order like the “Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra” (Landless Workers’ Movement or MST), the “Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens” (Movement of People Affected by Dams or MAB) and gender rural movements (Stephen, 1996), which marked the history of these agrarian movements in the south of Brazil (Navarro, 1996).

¹⁵ Graziano Neto (1982) named the process as “conservative modernization” and Graziano da Silva (1982) as “painful modernization”.

¹⁶ We believe it is important to keep the terminology “small farmer” used at that time, since the expression. “Family Farming” started being used only from the 1990s.

However, one must recognize that the political mobilization process seen in this scenario took several forms. Different from land-related movements, this process strengthened and renovated trade union structure, politicizes the technological model for agriculture, also leading to the emergence of urban movements that projected ecologist/environmentalist agenda over rural ones (Ferreira, 1999).

Among these movements, the one related to the politization of the “technological issue” in agriculture had a particularly distinct configuration mainly towards its proposal and institutionality. The influence of the context in its proposal is evident: highlighting the influence of the ecologist criticism and social criticism towards unsustainability and the excluding character of modernization in agriculture. Regarding the institutionality, criticism was over the way and format (top-down) of the State intervention in the development.

To understand the emphasis given to technology, one should consider the direction of the theoretical discussions about development that took place in Brazil at the time. Then, it is necessary to consider the influence of the Dependency Theory over a more radical academic criticism that had been established since the second half of the 1960s (Santos, 2000). All of this helped them question the evolutionist discourses about development and modernizing public policies. We can stress that the critical discussion around the national technology dependency (Rattner, 1980) impacted as a problematization around the technology dependency in agriculture. Under these milestones, critic academic studies contributed to the explicitness of the geopolitical and class interests underlying specific economic and social Brazilian policies, including agriculture-related ones (Delgado, 1985).

Thus, one of this criticism’s contributions refers to the explicitness of particularist economic interests underlying the modernization of agriculture, revealing the links of agricultural policies with the foreign capital geopolitical strategies, since a great part of agricultural inputs production and food processing agro-industries supporting such

modernization were foreign-owned (Sorj, 1986).¹⁷ Another contribution refers to an awareness of the social perversity of the pattern for the economic income distribution under the industrial agriculture model.

Furthermore, critics draw attention to the tendency of a loss of autonomy of the farmer in the management of crops associated with dependence on "technological packages" from agricultural research organizations, differentiated by species/varieties grown. These criticisms were endorsed by representatives of professional class entities, researchers, and social activists, who, based on various intervention strategies, sought to contribute to reversing the course of rural development. This process is at the origin of the alternative agriculture movement, which is composed of multiple influences. Luzzi (2007) draws our attention to the importance of the "Federação de Associações de Engenheiros Agrônomos do Brasil" (Brazilian Federation of Agronomists or FAEAB), which in the 1980s was led by former leaders of the student movement and carried the banner against pesticides. Its political stance influenced Brazilian agronomy professionals, encouraging them to face environmental conflicts.

The interactions between researchers and activists fertilized the movement for Alternative Agriculture. The author explains that other researchers, such as Adilson Pascoal, Ana Primavesi, José Lutzemberger, and Sebastião Pinheiro, were also taking part in international debates on alternative models of agriculture, having become exponents of this movement on the new nationwide debates. Discussions on this topic were conducted during regional, state, and Brazilian Alternative Agriculture conferences. Thus, the tendency to politicize the topic led to the recognition of the need to discuss alternatives to the industrial agriculture model, giving rise to a specific movement within the diversity of emergent movements, which came to be known as the alternative agriculture movement (Luzzi, 2007).

¹⁷ This period is known both as the genesis of "agro-industrial complexes" (Sorj, 1986) and as "agricultural industrialization" (Graziano da Silva, 1987; Muller, 1989).

From the politicization of the technological issue, the actors involved in the alternative agriculture movement recognized the need for searching new technological models that were suitable for the circumstances small peasant farmers faced. A singular interpretation of the technological demands of small farmers was adopted, considering that they demanded technologies that should enable them productively but with models that neither represented the intensification of their subordination to corporations' strategies nor jeopardized their future production capacity. In other words, they pursued "alternatives" that could provide greater autonomy to the small farmer (Almeida, 1994). Several alternative schools have contributed with these farmers by identifying technological alternatives, as the "low input agriculture" (Reijntjes et al., 1992) and the "appropriate technology" movement (Fressoli; Arond, 2015). The main challenges faced by the alternative agriculture movement were related to the identification of alternative technologies for the small farmer by: a) reviewing the cultivation techniques, since these were uncritically imported from European countries; b) development of machine and equipment suitable for the circumstances of small farmers; c) low input agriculture methods, such as green fertilization for conservation and fertilization of the soil, and alternative forms of pest and disease control; d) domestic production of seeds; and e) promotion of associative forms for an alternative social organization of production.

Scholars of the alternative agriculture movement in Brazil recognize the importance of "Projeto Tecnologias Alternativas" (Alternative Technologies Project or PTA) - developed between 1983 and 1990 as a special project of "Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional" (Federation of Organs for Social and Educational Assistance or FASE), considered the embryo of the alternative agriculture movement. In its structuring, the project team sought to know alternative experiences in progress in Brazil. First in states like Maranhão, Ceará, Pernambuco, Paraíba, Bahia, Minas Gerais, and São Paulo. Later, in the south of Brazil, where some organizations were already working, such as "Associação de Estudos, Orientação e Assistência Rural" (Association Studies, Guidance, and Rural Assistance or ASSESOAR), in the state of Paraná, and "Centro

Vianei de Educação Popular” (Vianei Center of Popular Education)¹⁸, in the state of Santa Catarina, in addition to other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The group of organizations that already had alternative experiences with agricultural production, and started contributing amongst themselves and with FASE, were then named Rede PTA (Interlocutor, 2015).¹⁹

With this configuration, the alternative agriculture movement recognized NGOs as one of its main actors. This does not mean, however, that they were developing work independently of other organizations working in rural areas. The historical records show the historical articulation of NGOs with sectors of the church and organizations of an emerging unionism (Landim, 2011), which facilitated the subsequent incorporation of some of their proposals by farmers representative entities and social movements.

During the democratization process, despite of neoliberal orientation of the early 1990’s, the mobilization of actors from the country tried to make sure public policies were more adequate to the needs and demands of small peasant farmers, and that they not only resulted in local, regional, and/or national governmental programs, but also that these farmers got the right to participate in their design and implementation (Petersen et al., 2013; Bosetti, 2017). The “Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar” (National Program for the Strengthening of Family Agriculture or PRONAF), active since 1996, was a starting point followed by a diversity of policies to support sustainable rural development based on family farming, implemented under the administration of “Partido dos Trabalhadores” (Workers’ Party or PT) from 2003 to 2016 (Grisa and Schneider, 2015). Then, after the 2000s, governments with popular origin recognized the need to face the challenge of sensitizing society in general to the importance of establishing new references for rural development. By observing the set of public policies for rural development, it is possible

¹⁸ The activities at “Centro Vianei” started in 1983 as a high school project linked to the Diocese of Lages, SC, Brazil.

¹⁹ Sidersky, Pablo Renato. Interview given to the authors in 2015. Santa Maria, RS, Brazil.

to identify that - in some institutional spaces - there was an evident internalization of the agroecological perspective. From 2004, the “Política Nacional de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural” (National Policy of Technical Assistance and Rural Extension or PNATER), for instance, started to be oriented to the promotion of the agro-ecological transition of Brazilian family farming (Petersen et al., 2013). Another advance on this same matter was the formulation and implementation of the “Política Nacional de Agroecologia e Produção Orgânica no Brasil” (National Agroecology and Organic Production Policy in Brazil or PNAPO) (Sambuichi et al., 2017). All things considered, one can see how the political-institutional context changed substantially throughout the 2000s, having become more favorable towards the scaling of proposals from alternative agriculture movements (Almeida, 2018). In this context, we reinforce the relevance of expanding the list of actors that starts to have actions politically identified with the agroecological perspective including in this list both NGOs, as entities representing farmers, social movements, rural extension government organizations, research organizations, universities and even some private organizations.

In this more favorable political-institutional environment, non-governmental organizations advanced with Agroecology and started a methodological reflexion. Likewise, it is identified that the criticism of the state intervention pattern (top-down) contributed to the design of modalities of action more identified with popular education, participatory methodologies and local action (Petersen and Dias, 2007). This way, one should consider that social movements founded over the problematization of the technological issue in agriculture differ from other previous social movements, as they focus much on a purposive dimension and local action (Wezel et al., 2009). By the same token, several authors nowadays recognize that Agroecology is science, practice, and movement. The perspective of Agroecology had strengthened in Brazil since then, reaching entities representing farmers (Picolotto and Brandenburg, 2015), social movements (Borsatto; Carmo, 2013), the academy, and finally, some governmental institutionalities (Paulino and Alves Gomes, 2020). This

context was, too, more favorable to political alliances and network articulations.²⁰

Around 2015, a new change in the political-ideological environment in the regional context of Latin America is seen. The ascension of governments with more liberal political-ideological hues implied in the gradual disorganization of public institutionalities created for popular participation, formulation, and implementation of policies and projects oriented to sustainable rural development based on family farm (Sabourin, 2018). From then on, many alternative agriculture NGOs started reviewing their agendas and their political alliances focusing on social transformation. We observed, both internationally and internally, a significant investment in the construction of alliances among alternative agriculture actors, food sovereignty movements (Holt-Giménez, 2013) and consumers (Darolt et al., 2016), the use of development strategies based on the provision of proximity and institutional markets (Niederle et al., 2013), product differentiation, and political articulation for agrifood system reconfiguration. These political and strategic rearrangements have resulted in a predisposition to a greater appreciation of cultural diversity, territorial identities, and sustainability. Regarding sustainability, agrobiodiversity and biodiversity were gradually being recognized as important to the stability and resilience of agroecosystems. Hence, a deeper reflection over the relationship among culture, environment, and plant breeding policies was stated, providing important conceptual changes in the discussion on development, sustainability, and food sovereignty, stressing their connection to the conservation of agrobiodiversity (García-López et al., 2019).

This way, the actors of the alternative agriculture movement, in addition to approaching issues related to the incidence of productive practices on agroecosystems and living conditions of farmers, have been

²⁰ For the alternative agriculture movement we highlight the “Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia” (National Agroecology Articulation or ANA) and “Associação Brasileira de Agroecologia” (Brazilian Agroecology Association or ABA) creation, in 2002 and 2004 respectively.

seeking to incorporate the food security challenges, consumers desires and systemic perspectives on agriculture. Based on this, these actors should consider the need to guide agriculture towards a more sustainable food production, as people advocate food must be accessible, healthy (as a result of the adoption of an alternative technological model), with the specificity of a culturally valued flavor (related to creole genetics and the cultural tradition of food preparation) (Pelwing et al., 2008). Therefore, agrobiodiversity conservation has been gaining prominence and also being seen as part of a strategy for food security and the production of healthy, culturally valued, and differentiated food.

3. The seeds movements and their connection with alternative agriculture movements

The recovery of the origin of the alternative agriculture movement's history, as treated in the previous section, refers to the 1980s, when a critical view of the technological model of industrial agriculture was built and disseminated. We can say that this same environment led to the construction of a critical view of the general trends in the production and use of seeds in agriculture, with an emphasis on the internationally pioneering contributions of Pat Mooney (1987). To understand the nature assumed by this criticism in Brazil, it is worth considering that this was carried out both from the perspective of national interests, and from the perspective of the farmer's interests.

Concerning seeds, the State has historically played a fundamental role in the improvement and distribution of seeds as part of a strategy to promote agricultural development. Diverging views on the desirable future for the seed sector became evident with the discussion on the "Lei de Proteção de Cultivares" (Plant Variety Protection Act), which started in 1977. Protests revealed the concern over the possibility of seeds abiding by the dynamic of foreignization and oligopolization that had been observed in other sectors of agriculture. Although the foreignization of companies in this productive sector was delayed when compared to other sectors in

agriculture (Sorj, 1986; Wilkinson and Castelli, 2000), it was preceded by endeavors to create legal frameworks favorable to capitalist investments. According to Paschoal (1987), some researchers noticed that in spite of the use of the term “Variety Protection”, its content focused on the patenting of cultivars. This was, in fact, the real interest of seed corporations, which already controlled the market in several countries. We can, then, consider that critics have drawn attention to the trend of seed appropriation by international private corporations. Considering this an undesirable trend, critics called for the permanence of the state's protagonism to defend interests, technological autonomy, and national agricultural development.

From the perspective of the farmer, the criticism addressed the negative implications of the use of "seeds from private corporations" in production systems of peasant agriculture. The approaches by Paschoal (1983), for example, elucidates the logical basis of “technological packages”, explaining the inter-relationships among genetic improvement, crop systems, and the uses of industrial input. The author argues that the “improved” seed demands the use of pre-determined input to manifest their productive potential. As a result, the use of industrial seeds was then seen as a mechanism that led to the dependency of other industrialized input, mainly from foreign agro-industries, and, consequently, to increase such dependence and loss of farmers’ autonomy.

Critics highlight the oligopolistic character of input producing agro-industries, mainly seeds, whose dynamic is seen as a contributor to an uneven distribution of income in agriculture. We believe that these arguments have provided alternative agriculture actors with a better understanding of the importance of focusing on the seed issue to enable alternative models of agriculture. Since then, many actors of alternative agriculture have taken on this challenge, giving rise to various local initiatives. At the same time, we assume that the contact with small farmers reinforced this view on the need to prioritize the seed problem. Such assumptions are justified given the identification of difficulties in accessing seeds (for their costs), in addition to perverse trends in seed appropriation and control by foreign corporations, as yet commented. We understand that the critical view consolidated in these processes

established the basic demarcations of critical discourses related to the use of seeds of corporate origin in agriculture, in addition to explaining the emergence of proposals that converge in the valorization of “creole” seeds, perceived as enabling the desired autonomy of farmers.

The same critical arguments were reported when discussing the legal regulation of the use of transgenic seeds from the mid-1990s (Silva, 2011). Critics who problematized trends in the seed production from the perspective of national interests warned that the use of transgenic seeds is associated with the implementation of an even more oligopolized and foreignized productive structure. Furthermore, other problematizations emerged from the perspective of national interests because they realized that the use of transgenics implies a high risk to the health of the consumer and the biotic components of ecosystems.

On the other hand, critics who started from the farmer's perspective pointed out that the cultivation of transgenics maintains (and aggravates) the dependence on technological packages of industrial origin, which justifies the concern regarding the distribution of income, being even more restrictive when it comes to the autonomy of the farmer in the production of his own seeds.

Considering the high risk associated with the use of this technology (transgenic seeds), the actors recognized the importance of strategies aimed at clarifying public opinion and impacting the processes that define the legal frameworks. Thus, while demanding the democratization of decision-making processes related to the use of this technology, the actors recognized the need for articulation and political action at local, national, and global levels to counteract and reverse these trends (Peshard and Randela, 2020). In this context, we can see an “autonomisation” regarding seed-related movements, being organized base on a common agenda worldwide. However, in this articulation, there is no loss for the local action dimension, which, in Brazil, is being updated in line with the alternative agriculture movement.

The identification of many actors with the perspective of Agroecology brought important seed-related discursive and social practices changes. We can consider that Agroecology, by emphasizing the importance of

adaptation processes (autoecology of species) and interactions between species for the stability and resilience of agroecosystems, contributed to highlighting the threat posed to farmers by genetic erosion processes.

The reflections around the strategies for the conservation of genetic resources led to questions about the productivist and mercantile direction of genetic improvement processes. We understand that the position of Bonneuil et al. (2011) regarding the changes in the varietal innovation regime translates the essence of the criticism and proposals brought by the actors who identify with Agroecology. The authors explain that the productivist (Fordist) model of plant breeding conventionally adopted was oriented to the selection of genetic material that presented a superior performance in relation to a restricted set of predetermined parameters and that could be recommended for as many farmers as possible, providing the artificialization of crops through the use of industrial inputs, which ensured the productive potential of these "improved seeds". By contrast, the alternative model (named post-Fordist) claimed the inversion of such logic by emphasizing that the selection of species should be based on their adaptation to the environment, not the opposite way around, in addition to questioning the authority of scientists as solely responsible for defining the parameters for the decisions over seed improvement direction.

Such positions tend to turn into proposals of dynamic management of crops, as they enable "the diversification and adaptation of populations to diverse environments, practices and uses" (Bonneuil et al., 2011, p.211) According to Petersen et al. (2013, p. 42), "the best technical option to managing genetic resources in agriculture is the social use of a wide intraspecific diversity in each region, instead of the generalized use of one or few varieties that are supposedly superior to others". These changes in the direction of genetic improvement have, then, potential implications for the design of local initiatives related to seeds.²¹ It is about recognizing the

²¹ By committing to biodiversity conservation, they internalize the criticism to the static conservation strategies, and also recognize that the "maintenance of diversity and the evolutive/adaptive potential of a species depends mainly on the groups that contribute to the next generation as they are submitted to evolutionary pressures (selection, deviation, mutation, and

potential of a community-based and/or territorial model of shared and participative genetic resources management, which had already started in the mid-2000s (Machado et al., 2008). In this context, the term "seeds from agrobiodiversity" assumes greater political valorization.

Furthermore, it is observed that the shared and participatory model of genetic resource management has proved to be especially timely for development initiatives which value territorial diversity and identity, those related to food sovereignty and security, and to food quality differentiation strategies. This occurs because in this context the pressure for standardization and homogenization does not apply with the same intensity as in the commodity markets (Stella and Kageyama, 2006). Hence, these actors tend to value the cultivation of creole varieties that present aesthetic, flavor, cultural or nutritional content distinctions. These dynamics were observed by Bonneuil et al. (2011) in a European context, emphasizing the association of a post-Fordist varietal innovation process and initiatives for the promotion of "typical local products".

The review conducted here indicates that the agroecological movement incorporates a significant diversity of actors and that each one can – or not – incorporate actions related to the use of seeds in their work, as well as assume its own perspective and criticism as they see fit. Thus, several circumstantial factors contribute to the involvement of a diversity of actors in the seed movements, and the presence of different specific emphasis in their local initiatives.

4. The trajectory of local seed initiatives in the south of Brazil

Many of the seed-related initiatives in the south of Brazil are connected to religious actors who were the pioneers of this social and political mobilization in rural areas. They worked with the rural poor who lived from agriculture. Such circumstances lead us to the questions: Who were these social groups? Why was the work with seeds so relevant in its

migration), and on the connection among several compartments [conservation and selection]" (Bonneuil et al., 2011, p. 210).

context? What did the actors in the seed movement propose? The clarification of these issues requires contextualizing the formation of the Southern agrarian space and then introducing the trajectory of local initiatives related to seeds.

Despite the existence of pioneer agricultural colonization initiatives during the XVIII century, this strategy for agricultural occupation was only intensified throughout the XIX century, leading to the establishment of rural communities of European immigrants, mainly German and Italian. These colonization initiatives were the base of family farming, playing an important role in the occupation process of the southern territory with the migration of their descendants in search of new land. They moved both from the East (the coast) to the West (inland) and from the South to the North (from “Rio Grande do Sul” (RS) to the states of “Santa Catarina” (SC) and “Paraná” (PR)), consolidating family farming in this space. According to the 2017 Agricultural Census, family farming constitutes 78,04% of the total amount of agricultural settlements in the south of Brazil.

The family farming livelihood strategy in the south of Brazil closely corresponded to the peasant model (Lamarche, 1998), but changed significantly from the postwar, as public policies were incisively oriented to the promotion of agricultural modernization. Thus, according to the descriptions made by Brum (1985) regarding the changes observed in the state of RS, before modernization, family farmers managed diversified production systems, providing products both for family subsistence and to be regionally sold. Still, according to Brum (1985), modernization intensified mercantilization, resulting in a decrease of production for subsistence while increasing the production of commodities, mainly wheat and soybean. Hence, presenting a livelihood strategy closer to modern family farming (Lamarche, 1998), integrated into national and/or global economies. The major mercantile orientation was associated with a technical transformation of production through the mercantilization and the adoption of a specific technological package for each crop, pursuing an industrial agriculture model (Paschoal, 1983).

Close the end of the 1970s, the perverse social and environmental consequences of this industrial agriculture model of production became more evident, reflecting a national trend. In general, critics affirm that the adoption of this model has sandwiched farmers, who started depending on the supply industry, financial capital (obtaining credit from banks), extension and agricultural policies, and product processing industries (Baggio et al., 1984). This process has also accentuated the loss of autonomy of farmers, resulting in an increasing economic vulnerability, especially of those who started focusing their production on specific raw materials for agro-industries under contract.

Within this context, a group of actors noticed the severity of the “modern agriculture crisis”, recognizing the need to ensure their support for small farmers who were facing vulnerability and poverty. The problematization of technology in agriculture also got more support from a group of actors and scholars that, around that same time, were becoming aware of the socially excluding and environmentally perverse character of the industrial agriculture model, in addition to seeing an opportunity to develop an alternative for agriculture.

Within this movement, some protagonist actors have religious origins, like: FASE founded in 1961; and ASSESOAR, an organization of farmers founded with the support of Belgian priests and people connected to “Juventude Agrária Católica” (Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth), founded in 1966, and to Brazilian Caritas, founded in 1956. These actors worked with the rural poor and were characterized by their assistencialism at first. However, throughout the 1970s, they politicized their operation. This change followed the new guidelines of “Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil” (National Conference of Bishops of Brazil or CNBB), held in 1974, which, in turn, sought to draw closer to social guidelines of the Second Vatican Council and the Medellín Conference – under the Theology of Liberation. Because of that, in 1980, Caritas took over the project “Educação Popular” (Popular Education) while working with “Comunidades Eclesiais de Base” (Base Ecclesial Communities or CEBs) and with several Organisms and Social Pastorals, such as “Conselho Indigenista Missionário” (Indigenous Missionary Council or

CIMI), founded in 1972; “Comissão Pastoral da Terra” (Pastoral Land Commission or CPT), founded in 1975; and “Comissão Pastoral Operária” (Workers’ Pastoral Commission or CPO), created in 1970.

The technological issue began to be addressed by popular education organizations and by others that sought to be associated with the ones, and that were specifically created to deal with it. In this period we have, for example, the formation of “Centro de Apoio ao Pequeno Agricultor” (Support Center for Small Farmers or CAPA)²², linked to the “Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana” (Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession or IECLB), and the articulation of “Rede PTA”, previously described in this chapter.

According to the records available, the recognition of the importance of the works with seeds is early. In the South of Brazil, access to seeds was a real problem. The government policies for the agricultural modernization conditioned access to credit to the use of selected and certified seeds (Brum, 1985). The use of this type of seeds started being perceived as unsatisfactory, considering that farmers had to pay high prices for the hybrid seeds, and their use required other specific industrial inputs. Assessor’s magazine, named Cambota, warned at the time that the chemical industry was buying the seed industry, which could lead to greater control over the agricultural activity as such companies would sell both the seeds and the inputs, also known as tie-in sale. Under these conditions, there was an endeavor to ensure access and return autonomy to both farmers and the community in the production of seeds. The experience of ASSESOAR with seeds, for example, has intensified since 1985.²³ They started developing some work training groups in Alternative Agriculture, in addition to maintaining a Seed Bank. As their work went

²² Recently renamed, “Centro de Apoio e Promoção da Agroecologia” (Center of Support and Promotion of Agroecology or CAPA) is a non-governmental organization, created by IECLB, in 1978. In its origins, one of its worries was the advance of industrial agriculture over the so-called small farmers.

²³ There is also some reference of this kind of work developed by other entities at the time, such as Centro Vianeí, CAPA and Cetap.

on, they realized that with the intensification of the use of hybrid seeds, many ancient varieties of seeds, appreciated by farmers, started disappearing, such as seeds of wheat known as “Fontana” and “Peladinho”, and of “Cateto” and “Asteca” corn. This scenario, therefore, legitimated the creation of “Banco de Sementes Nativas” (Native Seeds Bank). In addition to enabling the preservation of locally valued varieties that were endangered, it also represented the possibility of independence from the industrial inputs and seeds. In southwestern Paraná, during the 1980s, around 1000 farmers produced their own corn seeds, green fertilizers, beans, and wheat (Assessor, 2008). At that same time, collaborative work was started in order to generate technical knowledge on the landraces, especially “creole” varieties of corn.

One of the works developed by ASSESOAR focused on corn, an essential component of the diverse production system of small peasant farmers. It combined the Seeds Bank with the implementation of demonstrative areas of crop varieties, known as “parcelões” (big parcels). The work was developed this way for three years, from 1987 to 1990. In like manner, there was an increase in the articulation among actors focusing on conducting broader experiments. The corn network (“Rede Milho”), for example, started being designed in 1986 and 1987, and had “Centro Vianei de Educação Popular”, ASSESOAR, “Fundação para o Desenvolvimento Economico Rural da Região Centro-Oeste do Paraná (Foundation for the Rural Economical Development of the Middle West region of Paraná or RURECO)”, “Centro de Tecnologias Alternativas Populares (Center for Popular Alternative Technologies or CETAP)”, and “Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuaria” (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation or EMBRAPA) as some of its participants. The participants agreed to promote conjoined actions to rescue and test creole seeds. After 1990, Rede PTA took over this articulation, creating “Rede Sementes PTA”. Its main initiative regarding seeds was the event “Ensaio Nacional do Milho Crioulo” (ENMC), conducted in a partnership with EMBRAPA, which expanded the space for technical debates about creole seeds within popular entities, in addition to including them in the agenda of official research (David, 1998). This experimental work let these agents

gather a certain amount of specific knowledge about landraces and ecological agriculture, inspiring other important works and partnerships with government agricultural research institutions, as “Instituto Agronômico do Paraná” (Agricultural Institute of Paraná or IAPAR)²⁴ and EMBRAPA.

Around the 1990s, a differentiation process of the strategies of the seed movement actor is seen. While some NGOs disarticulated the initiatives for the maintenance of the seeds bank and experimental work, other actors invested in the qualification of this strategy, being noteworthy for their political repercussions.

Some movements and farmer representative organizations started investing in genetic improvement and commercial-scale production of seeds, aiming to meet the needs of local small peasant farmers by offering seeds at a lower cost and greater rusticity (Bosetti, 2017) and advance in consecution of a food sovereignty political project (Almeida, 2018). The same happened with the initiative conducted by the “Sindicato dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura Familiar de Anchieta” (SINTRAF/Anchieta, SC) with MPA. According to Canci (2002), after a period of trade unionism effervescence during the re-democratization of the country, around the 1990s, unions went into crisis in the face of the neoliberal project. This representation crisis affected the economic support of trade unions. To solve part of this problem, unions developed welfare activities, such as the exchange of hybrid seeds.

Noticing the need to oppose to this model of industrial agriculture, the union of Anchieta, began its own seed production program, which also included green fertilizers and the creation of small agro-industries. According to Vogt et al. (2007), this initiative was formalized in 1996 with a partnership among SINTRAF/Anchieta, the city hall, and NGOs, around

²⁴ Iapar is a government agency that was aware of the especificities of small farmers and that developed with them some initiatives to generate technology appropriate for the 1980s. The project “Viabilidade da Produção de Sementes Melhoradas ao Nível de Comunidades de Agricultores”, for example, focused on a “homemade” production of good quality seeds with low cost, which were compatible with the socioeconomical reality of theses farmers.

the “Programa de Produção Própria de Semente”, which aimed at the rescue and conservation of landraces, having the previous work of ENMC as its base. Low agricultural incomes and the crisis of the conventional economic activities of the families made farmers look for the program.

This initiative focused much on corn because it is widely used by farmers in animal breeding. In the case of Anchieta, the initiative led to the identification of landraces of potential use, selecting varieties that present conventional quality parameters, such as homogeneity, predictability, productivity, stability, and other desirable characteristics. The desired differential was related to the good development of varieties under local conditions, even with low external input use. In 1998, the union became part of “Movimento do Pequenos Agricultores” (Small Farmers’ Movement or MPA), providing greater visibility to their work with seeds. According to Canci (2002), a work on the genetic improvement of seeds started in 1998, which led to the creation of 15 varieties called MPA, three of which were developed in Anchieta, MPA 01, MPA 02, and MPA 03.

These advances allowed the recognition of the varieties on the “Cadastro Nacional de Cultivares Locais, Tradicionais e Crioulas” (National Database of Local, Traditional, and Creole Cultivars), which enable farmers to be included in public policies and have access to financing and insurance programs (Almeida, 2018). In like manner, we can mention the creation of “Bionatur”, within MST, around 1997, which focused on the production of “agro-ecological seeds” (Silva et al., 2014).

Throughout the 2000s, under a political environment more favorable toward a sustainable rural development based on family farming, seed-related local initiatives with different formats take over and gain greater political visibility. The church, which was at the origin of these mobilizations, continued to act in local initiatives, either as a protagonist, as a partner, or as a supporter. One of the first aspects worthy of record refers to the growing academic engagement and government support for the initiatives of NGOs or organizations representing farmers, even observing cases of the leading role of governments in local initiatives. While some actors maintained and reinforced the strategies defined in the previous period, the entry of new actors, exploration of new economic

opportunities, and access to new references and strategies related to the conservation of agrobiodiversity contributed to the differentiation of the performance of others.

In this sense, we can consider that initiatives led by farmers' movements and representative entities maintained some identification with the initial proposal to provide generation and access to appropriate technologies, with the greater purpose of the economic viability of farmers and their organizations. Thus, initiatives such as those led by the MPA and MST continued to advance and strengthen. This implies investment on seed improvement, but also a option for creole seed "massification" by cooperative formation (Oestebio) for scaling seed processing and distribution (Almeida, 2018). For these advances in the period, access to public policies was essential, because they allowed investments to be made in the expansion and consolidation of seed production chains, professionally and under the control of their organizations (Bosetti, 2017; Almeida, 2018).

Among NGOs historically connected to the alternative agriculture movement, we highlight initiatives that are based on the community mobilization, but also delegate responsibilities to a specific group of individuals known as "seed guardians", turning them into the protagonists of the conservation of species, local varieties, and related knowledge; and other initiatives that foster the conservation of agrobiodiversity by all individuals, indiscriminately.

The institution of the "guardians" is a strategy that allows greater professionalization in seed production, especially if associated with genetic improvement initiatives. It is also noted that the institution of guardians allows greater control over the purity of varieties in the context of an increasing threat of contamination of seeds by transgenics (Silva, 2011).

Assesoar's performance, in turn, is an example of the second type of initiative. During the 2000s, with the advent of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), their efforts were directed to fostering the "living bank" or "free seed" through a new strategy known as "Festas das Sementes" (Seeds Festivals) (Assesoar, 2008). The entity, then, does not

take control over the rescue and development or conservation of the varieties. For Assesoar, both the seeds and their genetic code, as well as life in general, should not be privately owned. This way, their operation neither intend to professionalize the production of seeds nor to enable the seed business, but rather guarantee that both the biodiversity and the free access for farmers are preserved. That is to say, they affirm that knowledge and seeds must be available to everyone, and, consequently, it should be considered as World Heritage, i.e. one should not have to pay for its access (Calegari and Duarte, 2006).

Finally, in a retrospective approach, we have identified that while previous initiatives tended to prioritize mobilization around the most cultivated species (especially corn), current initiatives tend to enlarge the set of agrobiodiversity species – including non conventional edible plants.

5. Creole seeds festivals in the strategies of social movements

Asking about the contributions of the festivals to the strategies of these movements tensions the popular representation about them, since the term “festival” is generally used to refer to social gatherings with recreational purpose and fraternization, which is why it may seem strange to question the existence of a different meaning for it other than the recreational. Then, how do festivals contribute to these movements?

This question refers to a discussion of NGOs, held in the 1980s, on the meaning of economic projects. According to Landim's records (2011, p. 65), at that time, a relative consensus was established around the notion that [...] productive projects are not contradictory to those of popular education. They are an aspect, a strand, an unfolding of popular education itself, and, in this sense, they must be well articulated. This concept of “productive” project implies, for example, in the gestation of a model of agricultural development based on technology, organization of production, and commercialization distinct from the currently hegemonic ones, as well as the definition of alternative policies valid for the social movement.

Under this circumstance, we would assume that the seeds festivals, an increasingly common type of event²⁵, are part of a group of strategies that could both contribute to change the local conditions, and, at the same time, bear the utopias of the movement. Considering the extension restrictions for the present work, we emphasized the investigation of the instrumental contributions of the festivals for local initiatives of these movements.

To unveil the contribution of seeds festivals within the agro-ecological movement, we resorted to the characterization and analysis of the following events, ordered from the oldest to the most recent: a) “Encontro Diocesano de Sementes” (Diocesan Seed Meeting), in the central region of RS; b) Feira Regional de Sementes Crioulas e da Agrobiodiversidade (Creole and Agrobiodiversity Seeds Regional Fair), in the Centro- Sul region of PR and the Planalto Norte of SC; c) Dia da Troca das Sementes Crioulas (Creole Seeds Exchange Day), in the Centro-Serra region of RS; d) Festa Nacional de Sementes Crioulas (National Creole Seeds Festival), in west region of SC; e) Festa Regional de Sementes (Regional Seeds Festival), in the south-west region of PR; and f) Festa das Sementes Crioulas (Creole Seeds Festival), in metropolitan region of Curitiba (PR).²⁶ To support the analysis, documents, and studies related to these events were previously consulted. Additionally, we also sought to participate in at least one “celebration” of each event between 2014 and 2016.²⁷ Participation in each celebration followed the methodological principles of participant observation, with records through the use of a field notebook and photography. Informal and semi-structured interviews were

²⁵ Despite the inexistence of a systematic inventory, several indicators point to an increase on the number of seeds festivals happening in Brazil. In fact, we here assume the equivalence among the terms festivals, fairs, trading day, and meetings, as we see them as festive events. However, this study focuses only on popular and cultural festivals, excluding the analysis of events hosted in Brazilian cities, such as commercial, industrial, farming and cattle raising expos.

²⁶ Through this selection, we tried to encompass the diversity of initiatives. In RS, for example, there are other great traditional and impactful festivals (audience related), as “Feira Estadual de Sementes Crioulas e Tecnologias Populares de Canguçu”, being held since 2002, attracting around 20.0000 people every year (Pieve et al., 2017).

²⁷ In addition, we later went to other editions of these festivals. By 2019, all of them had been observed for, at least, two editions.

conducted with participants and the promoters, respectively. Interviews were also conducted with qualified informants (researchers), in order to clarify specific questions regarding the social movement and the context of the festivals.

In their description, we start from the identification of the most prominent actors who promote each of the parties, the characterization of the local initiative, the history of each festival, and then we perform an analysis of the practices that compose them, trying to distinguish the singular ones – characteristic of these parties and that justify their realization. This frame is based on the presumption that the actors who promote local initiatives have a characteristic pattern of action and that these festivals have a relationship of continuity while differentiating this pattern by introducing practices characteristic of festive events and also singular practices that have a greater connection with seeds local initiatives.

5.1. Creole seeds festivals and their singularities

Each festival studied has its own history, confirming that seed-related festivals are not born in a void. The festivals, in these terms, represent the renovation of local strategies. As a rule, each party has its particularities regarding the actor who promotes it, the local initiative in which it is included, and the most prominent singular practices, as it can be observed in the following description.

Among the festivals analyzed, “Encontro Diocesano de Sementes” is one of the oldest events. It is promoted by “Diocese de Santa Cruz do Sul” (RS) and CPT, in partnership with other organizations. The narratives available indicate that this event emerged in the context of a historical work conducted by this actor with vulnerable groups and in favor of ecological production/Agroecology. They also explain that the event itself started as part of a campaign to raise seeds that would be shared with families from a newly conquered settlement. The campaign was successful and revealed that there were large quantities of creole seed varieties preserved and used in the daily lives of farmers. In order to continue the

mobilization, in 2000, the “Diocese” held five Seminars on Agroecology in the region, with the first “Encontro Diocesano de Sementes Crioulas” taking place in 2001. Since then, the Diocese's role in seeds involves a diverse set of actions, with an emphasis on: a) the identification of families of farmers who have behaved as "historical guardians" of creole seeds; b) encouraging farmers to rescue, multiply and maintain a living bank of creole seeds by their annual cultivation; c) the creation of a Creole Seed Solidarity Bank for the distribution to groups in vulnerable condition; d) developing activities in the training school for the rural youth; and e) promoting “Encontro Diocesano de Sementes Crioulas”, which is celebrated annually (Caritas, 2016). Among this actor's characteristic practices, we find the acts of religious celebration, lectures on Agroecology, and, in this case, space is also granted to the presentation of experiences on alternatives to the dependence on tobacco growing. Similarly, it is common to find cultural presentations, tables with craftwork, and agro-ecological products exhibitors in the Diocese's festivals. Among the singular practices, we can see creole seeds of corn, beans, and rice being exposed by some guardians invited from other regions, usually packed in 1 to 2kg pet bottles for sales, and, most importantly, the exchange of seeds, which assumes its own rituality. Participants usually bring seeds, which are exhibited on a large table. From this moment, they no longer belong to those who brought them, since at the end of the event they are shared – spontaneously or chaotically – in a popular festival style. It should be noted that when seeds are about to be exchanged, the amount of each species or variety available is small. Because of that, seeds are usually either placed in packs containing less than 100 grams or made available without any packaging, including seedlings.

The “Feira Regional de Sementes Crioulas e da Agrobiodiversidade” is coordinated by “Coletivo Triunfo” (Collective Triunfo), AS-PTA Agricultura Familiar e Agroecologia (AS-PTA Family Farming and Agroecology) and unions from the “Federação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura Familiar” (Federation of Workers in Family Farming or FETRAF). The genesis of this event refers to 1999, when a group of women

from the municipality of União da Vitória (PR), with the support of AS-PTA, organized a municipal meeting to exchange seeds. In 2000, this meeting expanded and was then called “Primeira Feira Municipal de Sementes Crioulas”. As other cities in the region also created their municipal fairs, they noticed the opportunity to hold, complementarily to municipal fairs, the “Primeira Feira Regional de Sementes Crioulas e da Agrobiodiversidade”, which took place in 2002, with the participation of municipalities from the region of “Planalto Norte Catarinense”. At first, these regional fairs were organized by community groups, associations, rural workers' unions, women's groups, partner institutions, young students, family cooperatives, public agencies and other social movements and then, since 2010, they started being promoted by “Coletivo Triunfo”.

This collective assembles agents willing to carry out initiatives around seeds and has coordinated and promoted actions related to the rescue, genetic improvement and availability of creole seeds. This conservation strategy is based on the work of guardians who, in addition to growing seeds, mainly corn – sometimes in the form of a task force, also operate in the breeding of varieties, which has a distribution that goes beyond the festival itself. An agro-industry to process corn products has been recently created.

In the search for community involvement, work is promoted in schools and seed festivals are organized. In this context, this event includes characteristic practices of trade unionism rites, of festive events and its own singular practices. Among these characteristic practices, we include the debates, workshops, lectures, short courses, seminar, and exhibitions that are held. Moreover, together with the cultural program, a common characteristic of festivities, we also have their singular practices, such as the presentation of school initiatives related to seeds and, most importantly, the exchange of seeds. For this specific practice, it is common for communities to be responsible for its organization, in order not to repeat varieties. The guardian figure, then, places himself by the table and “negotiates” or donates the seeds. In this case, the exchange, commercial or not, depends on the interaction between who brought and who takes the

seeds. Both their identities and the concern with the biological aspects of the material to be sown are preserved.

In the case of the Anchieta initiative, the festival is promoted by SINTRAF, AS-PTA, and MPA. In 2000, they held the first “Festa Estadual do Milho Crioulo”, in a partnership with MPA (Vogt et al., 2007). In 2002, though, the event started having a national scope, similar to MPA, and was then renamed “Festa Nacional do Milho Crioulo” (National Creole Maize Festival or FENAMIC). It was considered the first festival with this scope, gathering about 15,000 participants and exhibiting almost a thousand varieties of different species. Since 2004, however, the event is known as “Festa Nacional de Sementes Crioulas”, not being identified exclusively with corn as before. The work with creole seeds gave the city, in 1999, the title of “Capital Catarinense do Milho Crioulo”, and, in 2017, of “Capital Nacional de Produção de Sementes Crioulas”. Among the actor’s characteristic practices, closely related to unionism rites, the 2018 program, for example, included the exhibition of the regional production and training activities related to Agroecology and creole seeds. Among the practices common in festivities, they had cultural activities and acts of religious celebration, while particular ones are related to the trading of seeds.

The event “Dia da Troca das Sementes Crioulas”, a day to exchange creole seeds, has been held since 2002 and has as its main promoters “Associação Rio-grandense de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural” (EMATER/RS) and “Associação dos Guardiões de Sementes Crioulas de Ibarama” (Ibarama Creole Seed Guardians Association). Likewise, they have a partnership with “Universidade Federal de Santa Maria” (Federal University of Santa Maria or UFSM) and EMBRAPA unit, located in Pelotas, RS, which also currently work as promoters of this event.²⁸ Thus,

²⁸ The origin of festive gatherings for creole seeds in this city refers to the work with seeds conducted by CAPA, which worked with Agroecology and had structured a project with the farmers affected by the dam “Hidroelétrica Dona Francisca”. The project involved the creation of a Seed Bank and their participation in “Ensaio Nacional de Sementes Crioulas”. This initiative was later taken over by the local office of EMATER/RS.

the characteristic practices of these actors involve lectures and short courses, which are articulated with the practices of festive events, such as cultural presentations and exhibitions. The singular practices refer to the exchange of seeds, which, in this case, lasts two days. That is, in this event the exchanges are not restricted to a specific moment during the festival, taking place during both days in the program. The first day of the festival is entirely reserved for the exchange of seeds while during the second, the exchanges and other activities take place simultaneously. More specifically, the first day is more informal, with no intensive program, being dedicated to a free interaction among participants and seed guardians. On this occasion, those who are interested in the seeds talk directly to the guardian, and farmers often take this opportunity to buy a larger volume of seeds. On the second day, they set the table and, in addition to the exchange of seeds, there are didactic spaces with lectures, workshops, among others. On this day, exchanges also usually come as sales of some grams of all kinds of seeds available. For this reason, the space for interaction of the public with the guardians is one of the foundations of this festival, and the exchange of seeds is personal, as it is performed directly with the guardians.

The “Festa Regional de Sementes do Sudoeste do Paraná” began in 2004. It is held by “Fórum de Entidades da Agricultura Familiar” (Forum of Family Farming Entities), and has ASSESOAR and CAPA in its leading role, in cooperation with CPT and MST. This festival constitutes the main action of ASSESOAR in its work with seeds. The rituality of the festival includes actors’ characteristic practices, like the promotion of educational activities, practices common for festive events, like cultural activities, but also singular practices, such as the seeds exchanges held. In these festivals, the seeds brought by the participants are exhibited on a large table and, from that moment on, they no longer own them. Then, the seeds are identified as they write down where they are from and by whom they were produced. This type of information allows the evaluation of the size and quality of the “Living Seed Bank” that the party feeds. Throughout this process, the identity of their producers is merged into a collective. As a result, the seeds become a product directed at the masses, with no

commercial value. At a certain moment of the festival, in a ritualized way, participants are allowed to access to the table so that each one can select the genetic material they are interested in.

The “Festa das Sementes Crioulas”, first held in Mandirituba in 2013, is coordinated by “Associação Brasileira de Amparo à Infância” (Brazilian Association of Child Support or ABAI) and “Fundação Vida para Todos” (Life for All Foundation), with crucial support from CPT, and has strong participation of Associação de Agricultura Orgânica do Paraná (Association of Organic Agriculture of Paraná or AOPA). The recognition of the entity as an organization that relates to the struggle for life constituted a symbolic capital for ABAI, which is expressed by their care with abandoned children and drug addicts. The festival of ABAI follows a rituality just like religious events, with the characteristic practices of these celebrations combined with educational and mystical activities. In this event, the singular practice of seeds exchange takes a particular format: guardians are invited to exhibit, exchange, and sell small amounts of seeds at modest prices.

From what has been presented here, we notice that these festivals can be perceived as the continuity and complementation of an organization's performance within the education and mobilization in favor of agroecological transition. Thus, the format of the festivals, the importance given to educational activities, religious celebrations, exhibitions, and cultural presentations correspond, in part, to the profile of the agent who promotes them.

Despite the usual incorporation of some actor's daily practices, in the festival these practices assume distinct character. Some festivals, though, do not conform to the formal pattern for a learning process, as they create conditions for the exchange of popular knowledge, such as the knowledge and evaluation of the guardian, which is shared with anyone who asks him, during the exchange, about the seeds he cultivates. In reference to celebration and other festive practices, we would like to highlight the importance given to contents specification. In this sense, we could advocate in favor of singularities and complexities of all festival practices.

The main emphasis in the festivals here described, however, is given to their unique practices, like holding the “seeds exchanges”. These practices are, too, differentiated since there are variations about who can bring up seeds to festivals, what species and varieties are appreciated, with seed quality control are considered desirable, the exchange norms and ritualization around seeds, for example. This leads us to indagate why these variations occur.

5.2. Approximations to contributions of festivals to local initiatives

From what has been exposed, we highlight the connection between this set of festivals and local initiatives. On the whole, we can understand these festivals as great contributors to the local initiatives they are bound to. Creole seeds festivals are organized in a way that guarantees the "seeds exchange" as their central activity, that has an instrumental value for local initiative by their importance for the convergence of materials (seeds) and knowledge in the same place. But the festivals also contribute to animate local initiatives by promoting the engagement on it. However, even though all the festivals observed take part on initiatives to promote the rescue, preservation, and multiplication of seeds, the perspectives of the actors in this field have differences.

From the format assumed by the festivals, we can interpret that a set of actors identifies with the purpose of "sensitization" to the problem of seeds in agriculture. Their actions aim both at informing about ongoing trends in agriculture, problematizing them in the light of principles of defense of life, revealing the potential of agrobiodiversity, and, sometimes, treating it as a gift, which is why they advocate the care and sharing of resources. In this perspective, we could include some festivals promoted by Dioceses and festivals related to the perspectives of territory community conservation. In our study, we focused on the festivals "Festa das Sementes Crioulas", "Encontro Diocesano de Sementes" and "Festa Regional de Sementes do Sudoeste do Paraná". For "Festa das Sementes Crioulas", the records indicate that with the promotion of this event, its organizers invest this prestige to 'take care' of the creole seeds. According

to them, their motivations to hold the festival refer to the near extinction of creole seeds in the metropolitan region of Curitiba. When asked about the meaning of the Mandirituba's seed festival in the trajectory of ABAI, interviewees observed that seeds and Agroecology have always been part of the therapies offered to the people that ABAI rescues. In the case of the "Encontro Diocesano de Sementes", the records accessed indicate that the festivals play an important role in allowing poor families to access new genetic material, enabling the cultivation of food from species and varieties adapted to their local environment and culture. Similarly, the "Festa Regional de Sementes do Sudoeste do Paraná" is conceived as part of a strategy for the conservation of genetic resources in a territorial and community basis. In this sense, the entity encourages families to keep seeds in their daily practices, dispersing creole seeds in southwestern Paraná. It is believed that their dispersion works as a strategy that aims at the conservation of genetic resources (and life richness) because, through geographical dispersion, extinction is avoided, mainly in case of adversity with some specific farmer and/or territory.

A second group of actors develops local initiatives aimed at rescuing the cultural legacy of a particular group/community or territory to enhance and visualize the agency and contribution of farmers in terms of the improvement of agrobiodiversity species. "Dia de Troca das Sementes Crioulas" and "Feira Regional de Sementes Crioulas e da Agrobiodiversidade" are good examples of this perspective. According to records, the local initiative "Dia de Troca das Sementes Crioulas" can be basically considered a strategy to promote the conservation of genetic material in situ and on farm (Oliveira et. al., 2015), but it also incorporates a concern with the production of creole corn seeds with a view to its availability to other farmers, contributing both to the reduction of the costs of production and the production of higher quality food (Cassol and Wizniewsky, 2015). The distinctive feature of this initiative refers to the articulation with academic research (Reiniger et. al., 2011), to the prominence and public recognition given to the guardians (Cassol and Wizniewsky, 2015), and works in schools and with child guardians. In comparison, "Feira Regional de Sementes Crioulas e da

Agrobiodiversidade”, we observe that the Triunfo Collective involves a large number of entities that are dispersed in a wide territory, and that these festivals incorporate, eventually, guardians from other regions.

Considering these aspects, we evaluate that these festivals constitute a "locus" where various entities and ongoing experiences in different places are in contact, sharing advances and challenges related to the rescue, improvement, reproduction, and distribution of seeds. A third group of actors would take over an alternative project of economic structuring to the ones held by large corporations. The “Festa Nacional de Sementes Crioulas”, for example. It is important to recognize the instrumental value these festivals may have.²⁹ At the same time, according to records, these festivals were organized to provide the exchange of seeds and related knowledge, being expanded given the "need to propagate the technical, economic, environmental and social viability of creole seeds" (Vogt et al., 2007). Thus, we understand that the festivals have important contributions for families, as they contribute to their well-being and commercial production, and ensure the maintenance of biodiversity. However, we understand that their contribution does not end there! We believe that these festivals, by placing their centrality in the "creole seeds" while revealing their diversity and productive potential, have important educational and motivational repercussion, which would be better understood in a study of the educational strategies of these social movements (Meek et al., 2019). By identifying themselves with critical perspectives that go beyond the change of material conditions in a short term, these actors introduce in the festivals practices that are oriented to problematize the hegemonic order, announcing the alternatives visualized, which are highly diverse. In this sense, we identify three actor’s critical perspectives in the face of the general trends observed in the field of seeds. This implies that, regardless of their emphasis, the initiatives have the potential to counteract the hegemonic order. We consider that the hegemonic order in the seed field is translated by the increasing control of seed production and distribution by large economic

²⁹ Currently, considering the level of professionalization achieved by the local initiative of creole seed production, the distribution of seeds works beyond this festival, as previously mentioned.

corporations – supported by technoscience. By anchoring itself on ideologies of progress, the hegemonic order proposes a renewed exaltation of artificialization, of "improved seeds" conceived in laboratories. About this hegemonic order, we can evaluate the radicality of the potential for the social transformation of local initiatives. In this evaluation, we realized that the transformative potential of local initiatives refers either to the (re)consecration of nature or to the recognition of the agency potential of farmers (reflected in local crops genetic improvement), and, sometimes, the visualization of the power of organization of alternative economic models, all of them pointing to the possibility of alternatives to the hegemonic order.

6. New scenarios, new festivals?

The alternative agriculture movement has a long and rich history in Brazil, that was characterized by profound embeddedness in rural territories. With this background the alternative agriculture movement can bring us interesting experiences in agroecological transition, including on seeds issues. The movement vitality reflects the actor's capacity to simultaneously advance in transformative proposals and coping with socio-economic context and political conjuncture. In this sense, new challenges are faced actually.

A recent document published by "Acción por la Biodiversidad" proposes to present the "Atlas del Agronegocio Transgénico en el Cono Sur" (Aranda, 2020). The titles of the main sections of the document state that the establishment of the transgenic agribusiness model occurs with no public debates, fraudulent authorizations, and contamination imposition; whereas the advance of the model is supported by a fraudulent science to impose transgenics and the use of pesticides brings an exponential growth to damage health and territories. Coupled with that, the amount of land concentration and original peoples and peasants being expelled increase. Moreover, they not only criminalize the movements of small farmers and indigenous peoples but also invest in the attack and criminalization of the

use of creole seeds while increasing appropriation strategies through patents and seed laws, among other acts.

We understand that this Atlas refers us to the scenario of the territories where the festivals here analyzed are included: units where family farmers dedicated to agroecological production coexist with agribusiness entrepreneurs and family farmers who have their economic basis in the conventional model, industrial agriculture. Thus, metaphorically, they tend to present themselves as "islands" or "archipelagos" in a "sea" of conventional agriculture. This metaphor is also useful to represent the role of festivals, which allows the gathering of actors who are often geographically distant from each other.

The scenarios for peasant family farming, for alternative agriculture, and seed movements are characterized as threatening, requiring a rearrangement of alliances and strategies. The observation of the historical trajectory of the alternative agriculture and seed movements, as well as their local initiatives, reveal that such rearrangement is constant. We return to this recent document, previously mentioned, to seek to identify the envisioned paths, which we find in the last two chapters from the twenty that comprise this work. These point to Agroecology and the field-city alliances in the struggle for food sovereignty, defense of territories, peasant seeds, and a dignified science. We understand that in this new context, festivals will continue to have their meaning. However, their vigor will depend on the possibility of ensuring, even in the adverse scenario that is envisaged, the vitality of peasant family farming, agroecological production, and seeds from agrobiodiversity. We have observed that these festivals tend to have different formats according to the political alliances and local initiatives with which they are linked to. Moreover, in addition to promoting the exchange of seeds, they seek to announce the vitality of nature, the value of local culture, and the capacity of farmers' agency as well as the socio-economic possibilities opened by social and political organization, but are confronted with an open agenda. In this circumstances we recognize that the complexity and dynamism of these festivals place an instigating research agenda on social scientists committed to social transformation.

