



# “We do this because the market demands it”: alternative meat production and the speciesist logic

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## Abstract

The past decades’ substantial growth in globalized meat consumption continues to shape the international political economy of food and agriculture. This *political economy of meat* composes a site of contention; in Brazil, where livestock production is particularly thriving, large agri-food corporations are being challenged by alternative food networks. This article analyzes experiential and experimental accounts of such an actor—a collectivized pork cooperative tied to Brazil’s Landless Movement—which seeks to navigate the political economy of meat. The ethnographic case study documents these livestock farmers’ ambiguity towards complying with the capitalist commodification process, required by the intensifying meat market. Moreover, undertaking an intersectional approach, the article theorizes how animal-into-food commodification in turn depends on *the speciesist logic*, a normative human/non-human divide that endorses the meat commodity. Hence the article demonstrates how alternative food networks at once navigate confines of capitalist commodification and the speciesist logic that impels the political economy of meat.

**Keywords** Livestock revolution · Alternative food networks · Political economy of meat · Brazil’s landless movement · MST · Commodification · Speciesism · Animal liberation · Political intersectionality · Intersectional resistance

## The political economy of meat

A most dynamic phenomenon has arisen in the international political economy of food and agriculture; globalized meat consumption is booming, the livestock sector is expanding. The global average of yearly consumed meat has grown substantially, from 23 kg/capita in 1961 to 43 kg/capita in 2013. ‘Emerging economies’ like China and Brazil (though not India) carry the strongest consumption increase. At the same time we see how Europe and especially the United States remain the fiercest meat consumers on the planet, while low meat consumption continues to define food habits in the world’s ‘least developed countries’ (Rae and Nayga 2010; see also; Pica-Ciamarra and Otte 2011; FAOSTAT 2018). This observable trend typifies the international political economy of food and agriculture (Fine 1994; Koç et al. 2017), an intricate nexus of global trade relations comprising a most contentious feature—conflict between corporate

and alternative arrangements for producing, distributing and consuming food (Friedmann and McNair 2008; McMichael 2008; Campbell 2009). With the globalized tendency of expanding meat consumption and production—and its entailed social conflicts—we here recognize a *political economy of meat*.

Scholarly research seems to mirror the defining, contentious feature of that political economy of meat. On the one hand, rural development scholars welcome the dramatic rise in global meat consumption as “the next food revolution” (Delgado et al. 1999). The key argument here is that livestock farming provides high net income (Kaufmann and Fitzhugh 2005; Nin et al. 2007), which means that small-scale farmers in ‘developing countries’ are now offered significant economic opportunities (Delgado et al. 2003; Hall et al. 2004). This “pathway from poverty” is particularly paved by large agri-food corporations that connect smallholders to previously unreachable global markets (Brown 2003; Waldron et al. 2003). On the other hand, critical scholars have disclosed how small-scale farmers, vertically integrated into agri-food corporations, have become alarmingly dependent (Heffernan 2004); unable to afford the required technical upgrading, livestock smallholders, marginalized

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from other marketing options, often end up severely indebted (Khan and Bidabadi 2004; Millar and Photakoun 2008; Lundström 2011). To cope with these undesired social outcomes, scholars viewing livestock production as poverty alleviation here concede to cooperative solutions, predicting that “smallholder livestock farming in developing countries will be driven by collective action” (Narrod et al. 2010).

By acknowledging resistance from agrarian social movements, the dynamic consumption of food animals, defining the political economy of meat, therefore becomes an inherently political affair (Williams 1999; Neo and Emel 2017). The critical food studies field, emblematically focused on that precise vibrancy of politicized foodways, have come to document a variety of social struggles for *food sovereignty*, organized searches for political and economic autonomy across the food chain (Patel 2010; Ayres and Bosia 2011; Riches and Silvasti 2014). This line of research has, in order to capture the agency behind these heterodox political economies, increasingly come to study how *alternative food networks* (AFN's) bridge the consumption-production divide of globalized capitalism (Renting et al. 2003; Goodman et al. 2012). The AFN conceptualization aims to transcend narrow foci on re-localized foodways (Wald and Hill 2016), mere value-adding in alternative food production (Blumberg 2018) and contextually disembodied views on ethical consumption (Grasseni 2013). Hence the notion of alternative food networks carries decisive, political implications. Reflecting the contentious dynamic of the political economy of food and agriculture, the AFN conceptualization typifies prefigurative searches for autonomy, *vis-à-vis* hegemonic foodways (Lang and Heasman 2004; McMichael 2009; Wilson 2016). Aside from their ideological fuel (Sage 2003; Forssell and Lankoski 2015), alternative food networks usually emerge to cope with harsh, economic realities (Gordon and Chatterton 2004; Grasseni 2013; Rakopoulos 2014).

Given the conflictual dynamics of globalized meat production, it becomes particularly topical to study how an agrarian social movement—an alternative food network advocating food sovereignty—navigates the contentious political economy of meat. In this article, we will begin mapping that uneven topography by specifically exploring how capitalist *commodification* of animal-derived foods intersects with the logic of *speciesism*, the normative divide between human and non-human animals that underpins meat production. As suggested in the following section, an intersectional analysis through the social movement lens—focused on the ramifications of alternative meat production—arguably captures the elusive nature of the speciesist logic. Through an empirical case study, we will then see how that peculiar silence, the invisibility of speciesism, impregnates an alternative food network that otherwise engages in intersected struggles for autonomy and equality. In this regard the concluding discussion addresses how

an advanced alternative food network—in our case Brazil's Landless Movement—relates the logic of speciesism to its applied, political intersectionality.

## Political intersectionality

This article maps the political economy of meat by analyzing speciesism's location in intersectional resistance struggles, often conceptualized as *political intersectionality*, through an empirical case study of a collectivized pig farm, linked to a most iconic agrarian social movement, one of the strongest advocates for food sovereignty: Brazil's Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST). As we will see in the empirical analysis, MST typifies an alternative food network seeking to enact political intersectionality, while at the same time navigating the political economy of meat.

The notion of political intersectionality, or intersectional resistance, stems from the feminist school that in the early 1990s began theorizing the interlocked workings of sexism and racism, under a capitalist political economy. Over the years, intersectional theory has not only been used to expose interlinked logics of domination, but also to comprehend how resistance is articulated against that multiplication of oppressions. Intersectionality scholars here distinguish between structural intersectionality, the wickerwork of interlinked power structures, and *political intersectionality* as the compound, many-faced resistance struggles against these entangled axis of power (Crenshaw 1991). The notion of political intersectionality thus aims to capture the “reshaping modes of resistance beyond allegedly universal, single-axis approaches” (Cho et al. 2013, p. 800). In this vein, social movement scholars have accordingly come to document collective action that articulate—at the intersection of resistance—a variety of socio-political struggles (Okechukwu 2014; Davis 2016; Daum 2017). Hence the notion of political intersectionality aptly applies to agrarian movements that, in their cultivation of alternative foodways, consciously entwine politico-economic struggles for autonomy and equality.

But intersectional theory also offers an analytical lens for comprehending how the innate logic of *speciesism* operates through the political economy of meat. In the research field of critical animal studies, scholars have come to include speciesism in analyzes of interlocked workings of domination under capitalism (Nibert 2002; DeMello 2012). With the notion of intersectionality, critical animal studies have documented how the speciesist operative—that of social differentiation—intersects with the logic of *racism* (Svärd 2014; Monteiro et al. 2017; Olivier and Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2017), as well as *sexism* (Adams 2010; Rothgerber 2013; Allcorn and Ogletree 2018). Guided by the intersectional approach, the human-animal nexus has been exposed as a

normalized, yet highly unequal, and exploitative, social relation (Cudworth 2014; Nocella et al. 2014; Wyckoff 2015). Accordingly, social movement scholars have documented how the Animal Liberation Movement actively seeks to link its critique of speciesism to parallel struggles against sexism, racism and capitalism (Johnston and Johnston 2017; von Essen and Allen 2017), a collective resistance that becomes notably enacted through conscious, dietary refusals to consume animal-derived food products (Hamilton 2016; DeLesio-Parson 2017; Glover 2017).

From this intersectional point of view, sexism is identified as particularly informative to the speciesist logic; human othering of non-human animals mirrors a relational setup akin to the objectifying logic of sexism (MacKinnon 2004; McWeeny 2014; Adams 2016). That objectifying, speciesist logic informs, I would argue, a most fundamental working of the political economy of meat: the transformation of cattle, pigs and chickens into food commodities (Torres 2007; Neo and Emel 2017). This process of *commodification*, the making of market commodities for value extraction, famously identified by Marx as a key function in the capitalist mode of production, is arguably a linchpin of the globalized political economy of meat. Food animals are commodified to generate profit, rather than food (Gunderson 2013), which in turn requires normalizing notions to establish non-human animals as precisely as property (Francione 2004), the most fundamental requirement for commodity exchange. Capitalist commodification of meat accordingly depends on an *anthropocentric* understanding of the human/non-human divide (Morton 2017), a psychosocial process by which we differentiate between, and then assign certain values to, the variety of non-human animals (Joy 2010; Cudworth 2011; Dowsett et al. 2018). By acknowledging how humans value, classify and conceptualize non-human flesh as edible food, a process indeed variegated and contextually embedded (Chiles and Fitzgerald 2018), we may very well diagnose speciesism—the hierarchical divide between human and non-human animals—as an *innate logic* that propels intensifying commodification of meat. The logic of speciesism arguably denotes, as John Sanbonmatsu (2011, p. 21) puts it, “a complex, dynamic, expansive system that is materially and ideologically imbricated with capitalism as such.”

At the same time, the speciesist logic seems to have this elusive character; it is rarely exposed, evaded even by social movements enacting political intersectionality. Carol Adams (2016, p. 24) has famously theorized how food animals become “an absent referent”: when speaking about meat as food, the actual animal, this complex and unique individual being, is peculiarly unrecognized. In this vein, Melanie Joy (2010, p. 30) argues that the anthropocentric gaze—viewing animal flesh as edible food—depends on a “belief system in which eating certain animals is ethical and appropriate.” Such an intricate belief system also informs, I would argue,

the commodification of meat. At the most extreme stage of this animal-into-food transformation—in the modern slaughterhouse—workers tend to nurture a social distancing to cope with violent labor practices (Smith 2002; Dillard 2008; Baran et al. 2016). Quite similarly, Rhoda Wilkie (2010) documents how livestock farmers develop emotional detachment towards their food animals, a detachment exponential to the level of involvement in the meat commodification process. Livestock farmers constantly need to negotiate this “fine perceptual line”, as Rhoda Wilkie (Wilkie 2010, p. 182) puts it, “of seeing animals as both economic commodities and sentient beings.” And it is that precise balancing act we find at MST’s collectivized pig farm in Southern Brazil.

### Confines of alternative pork production

Brazil is a key player in the international political economy of meat. Besides having the second largest cattle herd in the world, it has recently emerged as a leading national producer of poultry and now also pig meat. Furthermore, as we can see in Table 1, Brazilian meats have become high-ranked, export commodities in the World Economy.

This incredibly fast-growing meat sector has been particularly intense in Southern Brazil (Florit and Sbardelati 2016). And precisely here, in this hotbed of the political economy of meat, we also find an articulate agrarian social movement that actively seeks to navigate that economic reality. Brazil’s Landless Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra—MST*) was forged in this agrarian context nearly four decades ago. It was actually the cattle ranches of Northern Rio Grande do Sul that were first targeted by the emergent landless movement, occupied by rural workers who firmly believed they, if settled, would increase the productive output with enhanced food quality (Medeiros 2012). Forty years later we find that very same movement, now including experienced small-scale farmers, organized in producer cooperatives to advance their food sovereignty. Quite tellingly, the contemporary organizational basis for Brazil’s Landless Movement, at least in Southern Brazil, is now producer cooperatives rather than geographical MST-sites.

**Table 1** Brazilian meat production and export quantity (million tons), and world ranking, in 2013. Source: FAOSTAT (2018)

	Production		Export	
	MT	Rank	MT	Rank
Bovine	9.68	# 2	1.68	# 1
Poultry	12.49	# 3	3.98	# 2
Pig	3.12	# 6	0.61	# 9

As a key member of the global peasant movement *Via Campesina*, MST is not only a collaborate architect of the food sovereignty concept; Brazil's Landless Movement also typifies the image of a politically holistic, alternative food network. For MST participants, food sovereignty seems to align with their search for autonomy or, as a key MST coordinator puts it, the struggle of "communities of the people to construct their own destiny" (Itelvina Masioli, quoted in Wittman 2010, p. 34). This search for autonomy is, as I have argued elsewhere (Lundström 2017), quite formative for Brazil's Landless Movement. MST's search for autonomy refers not only to the state, or allied political parties, rural labor unions, and supportive factions of the Catholic Church; autonomy also signifies, especially for settled MST-participants, independence from agri-food corporations. Hence, MST-participants typically struggle for economic self-determination, to reap the fruits of their own labor, becoming their own bosses. In order to facilitate and propel mutual aid between small-scale farmers, they have set up a number of collective producer cooperatives, in which labor and revenues are equally divided among cooperative members (Fabrini 2003; Lazzaretti 2007; Thomaz 2015). As we shall see, these cooperatives are typically understood, by the members themselves, as micro-scale examples of alternative food production.

### **"But we cannot escape the workings of capitalism"**

In 2012–2013 I had the opportunity to conduct ethnographic research in Southern Brazil, attending a variety of MST-activities: everyday agricultural labor, collective meals, festivals, school lessons, youth and women conferences, settlement inaugurations, demonstrations and occupations. Along with this participant observation, I interviewed approximately 100 MST-participants, both individually and in focus group settings. My book *The Making of Resistance: Brazil's Landless Movement and Narrative Enactment* (Lundström 2017) contains a historiographic analysis extracted from these field notes, interviews, and from MST's internal newspaper between 1981 and 2013. This article, however, presents a different set of findings; it focuses on MST's experiential navigating of the political economy of meat in Southern Brazil.

Throughout my ethnographic field work, I soon found how MST-participants were referring to cooperativism as an anti-capitalist practice, consciously activated to restrain commodification of human labor. Interviewees depicted how the autonomous small-scale farmer—in control of production, manufacturing and marketing—targets the central social relation of capitalism: the exploitative wage labor. By organizing production through various forms of cooperation, MST participants described themselves, as do many small-scale farmers experimenting with cooperativism

(Schneider and Niederle 2010), as being more autonomous than rural workers and tenant farmers. At the same time, interviewed MST participants also portrayed structural, economic *confines* to the promise of cooperativism. The procedure of vertical integration, especially applicable in the capital intensive soy sector, was reflected upon with caution. MST-farmers here described, on the one hand, how collective work increased their economic autonomy, although they, on the other hand, had no real option than to approach large-scale soy corporations to establish reliable distribution channels. When I specifically asked about this precarious situation, interviewed MST-farmers replied, with notable ideological frustration, that vertical integration with soybean corporations was a mere economic necessity; it meant reliable market access. The interviewees portrayed a no-escape situation, an economic reality that eventually required submission to, as they so often came to put it, "the capitalist logic."

The very same confines—of collective attempts to elaborate alternative food production—were described by farmers trying to navigate the political economy of meat. In order to document these experiences more closely, I spent a good part of my field study at one of MST's pork producing cooperatives in Southern Brazil. This particular setting was selected due to its positive recognition within the Landless Movement; it is frequently depicted as an example of an organizational rigor that allows for both political radicalism and economic sustainability. To study how these politicized farmers navigate the political economy of meat, I recurrently visited this MST site, taking part in the daily work as a participant observer, conducting informal interviews as well as formalized, in-depth interviews with the cooperative leadership, along with, as we will see exemplified below, focus group interviews. The *focus group* method was chosen to specifically capture collective, political reflection—and its entailed silences (Wilkinson 2008). In my particular search for reflections on the speciesist logic, I combined moderated focus groups, semi-structured by a thematic interview guide (Morgan 1988; Krueger and Casey 2000), with informal group discussions that naturally came about through my temporary participation in the meat production. Through this ethnographic approach, I hence came in contact with nearly all members of the MST pork cooperative.

Fifteen years before I visited this MST-site, the farm land had been part of a huge ranch, owned by one family only. Landless rural workers, organized under the MST-banner, began occupying the ranch, claiming the land instead for plentiful families. After years of intense struggle, evictions and repercussions, state officials eventually legalized the claim of the *Sem Terra*; the land was expropriated and divided between the hundred families that now had become settled, small-scale farmers. In this process, some 30 families chose to merge their lands to facilitate cooperative

production of grains and legumes. But on their collective land the MST settlers also encountered an abandoned pig pen, along with a minor slaughterhouse. The new-founded cooperative soon decided to incorporate pork into their collective, agricultural portfolio. They began to breed and slaughter pigs, initially on a small, subsistent level, but soon succeeded to scale up the stock and process facilities.

These MST-farmers now run a collectivized pork cooperative; labor and surplus are equally divided between the cooperative members. Participants meet on a daily basis at their collective lunch, and attend weekly meetings and festivities. The cooperative members typically rotate between the various work sectors: breeding and slaughter of pigs, grain and legumes production, collective child care, kitchen activities and cooperative administration. Surplus is distributed on a monthly basis, according to labored hours in any of these sectors. The cooperative organization orbits these same work sectors; discussions and decision-making are enacted in de-centralized, work-sector settings, independently electing coordinators that, on a 2-year basis, constitute the cooperative's rotating leadership. "We are not some corporation, with bosses and all; here we all take responsibility", one of the cooperative members explains.

Production of pork meat comprises a substantial part of the MST-cooperative. Around 1000 pigs are continuously held for breeding, and some 100 pigs are daily slaughtered (including a slaughter service offered to local pig holders). The cooperative's pork meat is finally cut and sold at the local butcher's shop, a distribution channel described by cooperative members as an intentional market choice. Since the large, corporate meat processors dominate metropolitan and international markets, the MST pork cooperative prefers this alternative foodway to guarantee product quality, but also to secure their economic autonomy. "You see", one of the coordinators explains, "otherwise we would be completely dependent on the meat corporations. They alone benefit from all their rules and standards. We've not been struggling for our piece of land, and creating this cooperative, only to become dependent on the big corporations."

At the same time, this limited market access, disabling the cooperative's meat commodity to reach larger consumer groups, also restrains and thereby threatens the economic sustainability of the pork cooperative. Interviewees portray a conflictual situation in which alternative foodways operate alongside—albeit confined by—the political economy of meat. In other words, the politicized, collective and horizontally organized pork cooperative, opting for local distribution channels, clearly qualifies as an alternative food network that seeks to navigate the political economy of meat. And very much in line with the scholarly recognition that AFN's are not quite so neatly separated from—but rather asymmetrically competitive to—conventional foodways (Sonnino and Marsden 2006), these politicized smallholders of livestock

also express an ideological frustration of submitting to the very "capitalist logic" which they so characteristically struggle against. In the following interview excerpt, from a focus group interview with five cooperative members (self-identified as male and female, aged between 17 and 62), we discern that precise ambivalence:

**Marcela:** Some things we're doing within capitalism. But our work is different. It's collective, it's not me alone. You see, capitalism has always reinforced the ego, it's about me, what I want. But we have been pushing the question of organic production, instead of monocultures. We have always emphasized 'never stop at just one area of production'. Because today, if our cooperative agrees, we'll never stop at the primary material, we'll proceed with manufacturing. We would never leave production, because the primary material means resistance, it means autonomy. This is one aspect of our organization here. Another is the social, which is important. We have our own childcare, where we all work, where we all have the opportunity to work. The youth remain here on the land with us. It's not that we, the parents, capitalize while the youth is left with nothing. We are distributing the surplus among us. We have everything for our existence right here with us. But we cannot escape the workings of capitalism, because of our pork production.

**Natália:** Because the cooperative has the character of a corporation. It's different in its logic, but the production, the logic of selling, is the same as within capitalism. You cannot escape this if you want to survive. For people to survive, there is no way to escape. But our cooperative, for sure, has a distinct role in society.

**Fernanda:** It has this whole structure, a different organization, a mode of production that is already differentiated.

**Bruno:** Any piece of machinery, everything that you buy, it's all capitalism. Most of it, everything that is beautiful; it all goes to the big corporations.

**Fernanda:** And at the same time there is nothing you can do. You live in a system that is capitalistic. But you can have a different logic, another opinion. We have another way of life, but we cannot escape totally. You sell, you buy, what else can you do?

In this focus group discussion, participants collectively construe the producer cooperative as an alternative to capitalist social relations, albeit operating within its economic logic. The pork cooperative is portrayed as a prefigurative, alternative foodway, contrasted against—yet also confined by—the "workings of capitalism." On the one hand, these livestock smallholders speak of economic autonomy, how

their cooperative carves out a space of self-determination, which allows them to work collectively and share their surplus equally. On the other hand, they also find it necessary to comply with a dominant market logic: they have to produce and distribute a *commodity* that is compatible with the political economy of meat, the very economic reality these MST-farmers find themselves located in. And this exact commodification process also entails, as we shall see, additional contention. The commodification process, at the heart of the political economy of meat, compels livestock smallholders to negotiate everyday, routinized transformations from animals into food, flesh into meat, and in our case, pigs into pork.

### “Not much of a life, is it?”

MST’s collectivized pork cooperative engrosses the breeding, raising and slaughter of pigs, each production step following the general stages of modern pork production. The female pigs are first inseminated, and as they give birth they are moved to a farrowing pen to rear their piglets. When these piglets turn 2 months of age they are separated from their caregiver and placed in a separate pen, in order to enable yet another insemination procedure. Between 4 and 6 months of age, the pigs are considered to be in a ‘grow-finish’ stage, in which they are intensively fed for fattening. The MST-held pigs, like all domestic pigs across the global meat industry, are finally put to slaughter at the age of 6 or 7 months, bred and raised in complete confinement.

“Not much of a life, is it?”, one of the breeding-workers suddenly breaks in, while explaining to me the stages of pork production. Still in her youth, this cooperative member, herself born on the settlement, explains that she will soon move out, study at the university. “But I will not be a veterinary”, she exclaims, as if referring to an expectation from the cooperative, with its ever-growing need for just that type of on-site professionalism. While perceiving, on an everyday basis, the pigs’ complete life cycle, from breeding to slaughter, birth to death, she here expresses a subtle hesitation towards the pork commodification procedure. Yet the speciesist logic is not called upon to address hesitation about these confines; her critical thought lingers, and is soon lost in detailed, technical explanations about the stages of pork production.

The speciesist logic is in fact never brought into the open, exposed, let alone questioned, during my field work with this pork cooperative. And here we shall remember that Brazil’s Landless Movement typically embraces what we must recognize as political intersectionality. Over its near 40 years as an articulate, social movement, MST has been engaged in variety of social and political struggles; it has expressed solidarity with indigenous and anti-racist struggles (Nugent 2002; Lundström 2017), as well as industrial unionism (Sandoval

2007). MST has participated in the broad, alter-globalization movement (Karriem and Benjamin 2016) and more recently in urban, radical-democracy mobilizations (Vanden 2014). Furthermore, and perhaps most notably, Brazil’s Landless Movement has quite actively adopted an explicit, feminist agenda, seeking to restrain social tendencies of male domination (Silva 2004; Naase 2009). But MST’s political context also contains a fast-growing Animal Liberation Movement (Levai 2013; Barboza 2017; Freire 2017), one that has been particularly active in southern Brazil (Carbarnar de Souza 2016). However, disregarding the human-animal issue raised by this neighboring social movement, MST’s political intersectionality yet evades the intricate question of non-human exploitation. During my 6 months of field study, the human-animal question was never even remotely addressed; at collective meals and farming practices, food animals remained what Carol Adams (2016, p. 24) aptly calls “an absent referent.”

This remarkable silence—MST not speaking about a parallel and most noticeable social movement—is also found at the nation-wide level; in *Journal Sem Terra*, the movement’s internal newspaper and key vehicle to connect MST communities across Brazil (Bezerra 2011), the animal rights thematic is entirely ignored. From a computerized search in all *Jornal Sem Terra* issues published between 1981 and 2013 (a corpus comprising approximately 4.5 million words), *direito dos animais* (animal rights) is only mentioned once, while *bem-estar animal/proteção animal* (animal welfare), *libertação animal* (animal liberation), *vegetarian\** and *vegan\** are not mentioned at all.

Yet Brazil’s Landless Movement still nurtures an immense critique against the corporate, large-scale meat industry, pointed out as a key driver behind intensified land competition. As the vast pork and poultry sectors require an ever-growing amount of arable land to produce animal feeds (Dickson-Hoyle and Reenberg 2009; Davis and D’Odorico 2015), Brazil’s Landless Movement characteristically targets this precise tendency of corporate land grabbing (Lundström 2011). Yet MST’s general response, as an alternative food network, has not been to question the innate logic that drives Brazil’s land-consuming and rapidly expanding meat sector. To the contrary, as we see in the collectivized pork cooperative in Southern Brazil, settled MST-farmers instead try to find an alternative course for navigating the political economy of meat. Their approach has been to elaborate a collectivised economy, with equal surplus distribution, circulating divisions of labour, de-centralized decision making, and representation through a rotating, female-inclusive leadership. But as MST-participants submit to, as they put it, “the capitalist logic”—through their pork production—they also silently submit to, I would argue, *the speciesist logic*, the innate idea that legitimates and drives commodification of food animals.

### "We do this because the market demands it"

The speciesist logic is a delicate matter; it seems never fully accepted, but instead recurrently upheld—precisely by dodging hesitations about the violent nature of meat production. Even in direct animal presence—through the process of meat commodification—individual, non-human animals become invisible, yet peculiarly present as "an absent referent." MST's collectivized slaughterhouse in Southern Brazil typify that elusive submission to the speciesist logic.

During my field study I noticed how the slaughterhouse workers shifted between doing their routinized killings in complete silence, and joking brutally about their labor. "Wanna try the knife?", one of them asked me, chuckling; "You afraid of blood?" Another worker was clearly drunk. This particular day he was responsible for luring or forcing each pig out of the pen, into a narrow hallway leading up to a hatch, behind which the pigs were to be electrically stunned, hanged upside down, and then have their throats cut. "Yes, of course they know what's going on", he told me. "They see the other pigs disappear, one by one, and they smell the blood." And then quite swiftly, clearly troubled by my questioning, he continued his work, now with noticeable stronger affection, pushing and beating the next pig lined up for slaughter.

Inside the slaughterhouse, the floor, walls and ceiling—and the workers themselves, all dressed in white clothes, rubber boots and aprons—are painted in blood. The pigs, although partly stunned, kick and shake after having their throats cut, making the blood spurt all over. Drained on their blood, the pigs' bodies are put into a rumbling machine, filled with hot water for scalding and then dehairing the bodies before their primary cuts. I see how some of the pigs seem to be yet alive in this procedure, still kicking when placed in the dehairing machine. The workers take no notice when this happens, which is frequently; they continue their work, in silence. "We do this because the market demands it", one of the workers explains, as he notices my astonished, wide-eyed observation. Although his explanation most probably refers to the rigorous procedure undertaken to guarantee a certain product standard, which the MST-workers view as a market-dictated confinement, it also accentuates elusive submission to the speciesist logic, upheld and fortified through the intensified process of meat commodification. To survive in the political economy of meat, as a small-scale, alternative meat producer, the MST cooperative must comply with standardized market demands. And to do that, they need to submit to the speciesist logic, the human-animal divide so conspicuously manifested in the modern slaughterhouse.

Then, in an assembly line, the MST slaughterhouse workers enact a professional, routinized array of work tasks. Everyone knows exactly what to do; the scalded pigs are now de-capitated, emptied from internal organs, cut in half with

a splitting saw, and then washed and finally refrigerated. The working environment is sutured with noise, especially from the loud splitting saw, but also from live pigs that scream, throughout their very last act of defiance. At the coffee break, taken in the colorful garden located outside the slaughterhouse, the collective mood instantly changes. The conversation frequently touches upon, as so often in MST-settings, socio-political themes. How could the cooperative relieve economic poverty in their neighboring, rural surroundings? How should they advance feminist issues at the local school? The discussion is vivid, reflective and open-ended; it appears as if anyone political question could be brought to the table. Yet this exciting discussion, engaged while sipping coffee in the gazing sun—all dressed in white, blood-stained robes—enclose a most absent referent at our work break, this temporary pause in commodifying pigs into pork meat.

### Concluding remarks

While I approached Brazil's Landless Movement, with sincere respect and eagerness to learn about the most compound making of resistance, I soon came to ask myself how such a reflexive milieu could overlook a pressing issue raised by social movements in MST's immediate surroundings. How could speciesism be so profoundly ignored in MST's intersectional, political thought?

I believe the answer is partway found in recognizing speciesism's function in the political economy of meat. As we have seen in our case study from Southern Brazil, settled MST-farmers, well vested in the pork producing sector, have little choice than to submit to the "the capitalist logic", being unable to "escape the workings of capitalism." They describe blunt, economic relations that their pork cooperative simply have to cope with; they depict economic confines to alternative meat production. And what's more, these confines of "the capitalist logic" also entail, as we have seen, most embodied confines prompted by *the speciesist logic*. Because at the heart of the capitalist, political economy of meat resides the commodification process, this intricate animal-into-food-transformation, informed by the speciesist logic. Since speciesism adds another layer to the confines of the political economy of meat, alternative food networks, in our case a collectivized pork cooperative tied to Brazil's Landless Movement, inescapably need to navigate multiple confines.

In this delicate balancing act, livestock smallholders seem to evade full exposition of the speciesist logic, while at once partaking in its silent approval. The slaughterhouse workers of MST's pork cooperative nurtured an ambiguous relationship towards their animals; while executing confinement and slaughter, some workers also expressed what could be read

as hesitation, a silent doubt, about their everyday work tasks. It so appears that speciesism has this intangible character, always eluding full exposition, which makes it less visible, even for radical social movements with intersectional sensibilities. Although alternative food networks, typified by Brazil's Landless Movement, advance the meaning of political intersectionality, their navigating of the political economy of meat necessarily submits, albeit quietly, to the speciesist logic that drives capitalist commodification of food animals. On a critical note, then, one must consider the ramifications of an 'alternative' meat production that allows (non-human) labor exploitation to continue under the socialist banner (Hudson 2011). Given meat production's dependence on concentrated, "institutionalized violence" (Cudworth 2015), with documented asocial effects on communities that hold slaughterhouses (Fitzgerald et al. 2009), we clearly recognize boundaries to alternative food networks' political intersectionality, boundaries following from the amalgam confines of capitalist meat commodification and its innate, speciesist logic.

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