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GM Soy Cultivation, Socio-Environmental Struggle and the Political
Economy of Contemporary Peronist Development in Argentina

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Abstract

Argentina is a pioneer in practicing export-oriented extractivism as a model of socio-economic development. A prevalent extractive project is genetically modified (GM) soy, which was adopted under neoliberal governance in the 1990s and has had a variety of socio-environmental consequences in the country. During the progressive, Peronist, 'post-neoliberal' Kirchner administrations (2003-2015), government ties to anti-GM social movements were established, but soy cultivation continued. Since 2019, Argentina is again governed by a Peronist government, led by President Alberto Fernández. Through a Gramscian framework, this study explores the significance of current Peronism in government for the continuance of GM soy cultivation, examines responses to this model by socio-environmental movements, and challenges to advance alternatives. The empirical data was generated through semi-structured interviews and participant observation during fieldwork in Argentina between February-April 2023. Results show that contemporary Peronism in government enables the continuation of the extractivist development model and GM soy cultivation through its political contradictions, reproducing the material structure and exercising passivizing patronage politics within civil society. Socio-environmental movements reject the soy model, largely perceiving the current government as more pro-agribusiness than previous Kirchnerism. Their strategies to counter the model aim at advancing counterhegemonic perceptions in civil society through a war of position and, in some cases, practicing what can be seen as a war of movement using judicial mechanisms. Main challenges to advancing alternatives include the multifaceted power of the current development model and its reproduction through consent and coercion, financial challenges for movements, and political disagreements among these regarding relations to Peronism in government.

Key words: Argentina; genetically modified soy; GMO; extractivism; Peronism; Kirchner; Gramsci; bio-hegemony; interviews; participant observation

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1. Introduction

“The more a product is desired on the world market, the greater the misery it brings to the Latin American peoples whose sacrifice creates it.”

- Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*¹

All over Latin America, governments have frequently promoted projects of export-oriented extractivism as desirable models of socio-economic development.² With origins in the colonial period, the pattern of the region’s dependency on extraction and export of primary resources is not new.³ Today, it still characterizes the very core of the political economy of the environment in Latin America, and this practice entails controlling and dominating nature using technological innovation to create efficiency, modernization, and economic growth.⁴ One prevalent extractive project in the region is the large-scale production of soy in the form of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).⁵ In Argentina, as the first country in the region, genetically modified crops were legalized in 1996 and spread from there to neighboring countries illegally.⁶ Today, the cultivation of genetically modified soy is widespread in the southern cone of South America. The legalization of GM crops completely transformed Argentina’s rural context and the systems of farming that existed before.⁷ The soy was originally genetically modified to resist the Monsanto-produced, glyphosate-based herbicide *Roundup*, and the cultivation process itself is highly mechanized.⁸ Argentina is today the third largest exporter of soy in the world, which accounts for around a fourth of the country’s foreign trade. Nearly one hundred percent of the country’s soy crops are genetically modified.⁹ Further, the country is the world’s second largest producer of GM crops overall.¹⁰ The export of

¹ Galeano, Eduardo, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. Monthly Review Press, 1973, p. 61.

² Leguizamón, Amalia, “Environmental Injustice in Argentina: Struggles against Genetically Modified Soy”. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2016b, p. 684.

³ Leguizamón, Amalia, *Roundup Ready Nation: The Political Ecology of Genetically Modified Soy in Argentina*. PhD dissertation, Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2014b, p. 22.

⁴ Leguizamón, Amalia, “The Gendered Dimensions of Resource Extraction in Argentina’s Soy Boom”. *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 225, Vol. 46, No. 2, 2019, pp. 199-200.

⁵ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2016b, p. 684.

⁶ Lapegna, Pablo, *Soybeans and Power: Genetically Modified Crops, Environmental Politics, and Social Movements in Argentina*. Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 5.

⁷ Svampa, Maristella, “The End of Kirchnerism”. *New Left Review*, Vol. 53, 2008, p. 91.

⁸ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 29.

⁹ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2016b, p. 684.

¹⁰ Newell, Peter, “Bio-Hegemony: The Political Economy of Agricultural Biotechnology in Argentina”. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 41, 2009, p. 28.

soybeans functions as a key accumulation strategy for Argentina.¹¹ Soy is exported in different forms: beans, meal, flour, biodiesel, or oil, and much of it is used as animal feed in the livestock industry.¹² The most frequent destinations for Argentina's soy include China and India, which mainly import oil, and Europe, which imports it as flour for feed and biodiesel.¹³ However, the process of GM soy expansion has had negative structural consequences in Argentina. It has caused accumulation by dispossession in a variety of ways, from concentration of agricultural property, leasing and bank auctions of land, to, as frequently seen, violent evictions of small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples by state or private forces.¹⁴ Early after the implementation of the soy model, a mass exodus from the countryside followed.¹⁵ Further, it has contributed to widespread deforestation, soil degradation, and a massive use of herbicides that contaminate water sources and damage local people's health.¹⁶ A recurring critique of the soy model is how it creates power imbalances and only benefits elites.¹⁷

While GM soy cultivation was adopted under neoliberal governance in Argentina during the late 1990s¹⁸, much of the country's modern political history is characterized by the political movement of Peronism, named after its founder Juan Perón.¹⁹ With the administrations of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015), the dominant branch of Peronism became the center-left Kirchnerist fraction. The Kirchner governments were frequently referred to as 'post-neoliberal', embarking on a so-called 'national-popular'

¹¹ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2019, p. 200. While Leguizamón points to soy cultivation as what she calls the "golden egg" of Argentina's model of extractivism, she accurately emphasizes how different extractive activities are connected to each other as parts of one overall model: "no region in the country has escaped the treadmill of extraction: open-pit mining in the western Andes, hydraulic fracturing for shale gas and oil in southern Patagonia, and large-scale monocultures of genetically modified soy in the central Pampas and northern Chaco." See same page as reference above for this quote.

¹² Leguizamón, Amalia, "Disappearing nature? Agribusiness, biotechnology and distance in Argentine soybean production". *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2016a, p. 314.

¹³ Delvenne, Pierre, Vasen, Federico, Vara & Ana Maria, "The "soy-ization" of Argentina: The dynamics of the "globalized" privatization regime in a peripheral context". *Technology in Society*, Vol. 35, 2013, p. 155.

¹⁴ Gómez Lende, Sebastián, "Usos del territorio, acumulación por desposesión y derecho a la salud en la Argentina contemporánea: el caso de la soja transgénica". *Revista Geographia*, Vol. 19, Issue 39, 2017, p. 7, Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 22 & Leguizamón, Amalia, 2016b, p. 685.

¹⁵ Svampa, Maristella, 2008, p. 91.

¹⁶ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, pp. 38–40.

¹⁷ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2019, p. 200.

¹⁸ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 5.

¹⁹ Juan Domingo Perón was elected President of Argentina three times: from 1946 to 1952, then again from 1952 until his overthrow by the military in the so-called *Revolución Libertadora* in 1955, and finally after his return from exile in 1973 until his death in 1974.

political project, during which widespread soy cultivation also continued.²⁰ However, the Kirchners also clashed with agribusiness companies, taxed soy exports to fund social reforms, and maintained ties with social movements, including important campesino (i.e., small-scale farmer) organizations, that supported their governments.²¹ Yet, scholars have claimed that the post-neoliberal Kirchner governments deepened the neoliberal extractive model and the country's dependence on transnational agribusiness companies, while simultaneously maintaining ties with social movements that opposed GM crops.²² After a conservative, economically neoliberal presidency between 2015-2019, the center-left coalition Frente de Todos, won the 2019 election. The Justicialist Party, the main Peronist force, spearheaded the coalition, and Argentina has been governed ever since by a government led by President Alberto Fernández, with Cristina Fernández de Kirchner now as Vice President. This presidential platform has been seen as somewhat of a strategic compromise to unify Peronism and counteract its internal differences.²³ Nonetheless, after the return to post-neoliberal Peronist governance, extractivism and GM soy cultivation as an accumulation strategy remain under this government, and agribusiness expansion continues to lead to processes of dispossession in Argentina.

Against this backdrop, this thesis will explore the context surrounding Argentina's current Peronist government and its development model characterized by extractivism, particularly in relation to GM soybean cultivation, as well as contemporary responses to this by socio-environmental movements in the country. Theoretically, it is anchored in a Gramscian framework stemming from critical political economy. The empirical data consists of in-depth, qualitative, semi-structured interviews with members and affiliates of socio-environmental organizations, complemented by ethnographic participant observation, conducted during two months of fieldwork in Argentina between February and April 2023.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The purposes of this research are several. Broadly, it seeks to gain a better understanding of how global political economic processes, particularly the expansion of agribusiness, affect political and social relations in Argentina. Following this, it more specifically intends to

²⁰ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2016b, p. 684.

²¹ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, pp. 46–49.

²² Dos Santos, Fábio Luis Barbosa & Vasconcelos, Joana Salém, 2022, p. 255.

²³ Liendo, Nicolás & González, Camilo, "Argentina: de la breve experiencia de centroderecha al regreso del Peronismo". *Reflexión Política*, Vol. 22, No. 45, 2020, p. 21.

understand in what ways Argentine extractivism with GM soy cultivation at its core, and responses to it, are contemporaneously affected by Peronist governance. It answers calls in previous research that have emphasized the need for timely and updated work on the topic and highlighted the potential of lifting the agency of marginalized groups within post-neoliberal projects in Latin America.²⁴ The overall guiding research question for this thesis is the following:

- *How is Argentina's development model, with genetically modified soy cultivation at its core, enabled or obstructed by contemporary Peronism in government?*

To answer this question, the following additional research questions will be addressed:

- *How do socio-environmental movements in Argentina perceive their country's current Peronist government and its development model of extractivism and GM soy cultivation? How is this government perceived in relation to the previous Kirchner administrations?*
- *Through which tactics and strategies are responses to the GM soy model displayed?*
- *What are the main challenges for socio-environmental movements in Argentina to advance alternatives to this model?*

While GM soy cultivation is a widespread issue in South America, there are a few reasons behind the choice of Argentina as a case. In the region, Argentina was the first country to legalize GM crops, from where they originally spread, and is, as mentioned, the second biggest producer of these crops in the world.²⁵ Soy cultivation as a key accumulation strategy, is what Leguizamón calls the “golden egg” of Argentina’s integrated model of extractivism.²⁶ Further, Argentina has also been a strong proponent of GM crops on an international level. Compared to other countries in the region, the opposition to the use of this technology has also been quite limited in Argentina.²⁷ Leguizamón argues that Argentines have a particular view of nature as Argentine identity was originally formed by the concept of modernity, which contained an anti-nature, pro-technology stance, in practice meaning that there was an underlying cultural preparedness to embrace GM biotechnology in Argentina.²⁸ She claims that this is rooted in the creation of a national identity almost from scratch by the ruling *criollo* elite in the post-independence period, with significant help from a group of authors referred to as the

²⁴ See for example Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, p. 180 & Lapegna, Pablo, “The political economy of the agro-export boom under the Kirchners: Hegemony and passive revolution in Argentina”. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2017, p. 15.

²⁵ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 5 & Newell, Peter, 2009, p. 28.

²⁶ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2019, p. 200.

²⁷ Newell, Peter, 2009, p. 28.

²⁸ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, pp. 106-107.

“Generation of 1837”, who were influenced by European values, writings, and ideas. This identity contained an ambition stemming from a colonial mentality of “civilizing” and “modernizing” the country, which had consequences for the view of land and nature.²⁹ This history makes the Argentine case particularly complex and thoroughly interesting. Further, the shifts between neoliberal and post-neoliberal governance in recent years, as well as the importance and specific characteristics of Peronism as an ideology and movement and the so-called national-popular project, make the country’s context further intriguing. Due to the difficulties for many outside Argentina to understand Peronism, this research may contribute to insights into the contemporary characteristics of this political force. The topic of GM crops itself and the economic and political implications of its technological ‘package’ are also relevant and important to study and understand on a global scale. It is particularly important to reflect upon the use of resources and evaluate the sustainability of certain modes of production and divisions of labor, including their inherent power relations on national, regional, and global levels.

1.2 Background

To understand GM soy expansion in Argentina today, one must understand its structural roots and origins. Throughout history, a few agricultural technological breakthroughs have been essential to making modern society possible. Leguizamón points to three different agricultural revolutions in history. The first one, the emergence of agriculture itself, which goes back ten thousand years, revolutionized human life by enabling large-scale food production. The second was the emergence of capitalist, large-scale industrial agriculture in the mid-1800s, following the discovery of soil technology, which led to the use of fertilizers. Thirdly, in the mid-1900s, the growth of the US agroindustry entailed a mechanization of agriculture and eventually involved the use of genetically modified seeds.³⁰ These seeds were created in labs by scientists. They are given specific traits by being mixed with other organisms, such as viruses or bacteria. Most commonly, this is done to give the seeds a tolerance against herbicides or an ability to resist insects.³¹ Much of the GM soy planted is Monsanto-produced *Roundup Ready (RR)* seed, which tolerates the glyphosate-based herbicide Roundup manufactured by the corporation.³² Glyphosate, a controversial herbicide, has been linked to health effects such as cancer,

²⁹ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, pp. 108-117.

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 15-16.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 16-17.

³² Ibid, p. 17.

miscarriages, and leukemia.³³ The RR genetic modification enables farmers to spray herbicides to kill weeds without killing the soy plant. Monsanto has therefore been able to sell a whole package of mechanized agricultural practices.³⁴ In total, a few large agribusiness corporations hold most patents of the world's GM seeds, and corporations were essential in the development of this technology in the search for profits.³⁵ The process of commodifying agriculture required that corporations received help from the US government, which through foreign aid promoted the Green Revolution, a program of large-scale agricultural modernization, and put pressure within the World Trade Organization on countries in the Global South to apply these practices.³⁶ Thus, the agroindustry, which started in the US, spread across the world.³⁷

The commodification of agriculture and expansion of agribusiness coincided with other large changes on a global level. From the 1970s on, neoliberalism became a hegemonic discourse within everything from global governance organizations to media, education, and state institutions.³⁸ Neoliberalism holds a strong emphasis on free markets, free trade, entrepreneurship, and rights to private property, and maintains that promoting these things will lead to human flourishing. This means that state interventions are desired to be limited and that markets should be created in all places where they do not exist, which, if needed, should also be done by force.³⁹ David Harvey points out that neoliberal ideas and the concrete policy changes that go along with them, such as privatization, deregulation, and decreased state involvement in the economy, have flourished globally since the 1970s.⁴⁰ Like the agroindustry, the neoliberal project originated in the US. Particularly, it can be traced to a group of Chilean economists often referred to as the *Chicago Boys*, who adhered to Milton Friedman's neoliberal theories and took part in a program at the University of Chicago that was funded to counter leftism in Latin America during the Cold War.⁴¹ Harvey emphasizes that the US' way of thinking globally has long been characterized by neoliberalism, and he describes the neoliberal state as one for which the "freedoms it embodies reflect the interests of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations and financial capital".⁴² These developments were to

³³ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, pp. 3-4.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 17.

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 18-19.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 23.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 20.

³⁸ Harvey, David, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 3.

³⁹ Harvey, David, 2007, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 2-3.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 8.

⁴² Ibid, p. 7.

have large consequences for the global political economy in terms of restructuring it after ideas of free trade and economic growth as ends, which were presumed to cause social well-being as a spillover effect.⁴³ Latin America was especially affected and is today a region with a large degree of export dependence, a pattern that has its origins in the colonial period. Extracted resources from the colonies in the Global South flowed to Europe and directly fueled the Industrial Revolution. During a brief period after the Second World War, Latin American states attempted to change the global division of labor by promoting internal manufacturing and not merely being producers of raw materials.⁴⁴ However, in the 1970s, US-backed military dictatorships that came to power all over the region applied neoliberal economics and structural adjustment programs.⁴⁵ The first neoliberal state experiment was in Chile under Augusto Pinochet.⁴⁶ In Argentina's case, the junta that took power in 1976 implemented neoliberal policies. After the fall of the dictatorships in the region, this development continued through the policy reform package called the Washington Consensus.⁴⁷

Leguizamón points out how the imposition of neoliberalism led to two prevalent economic models in Latin America. The first, largely located in the northern parts of Latin America, such as Mexico and the Caribbean, focuses on low-cost labor forces assembling imported goods in factories to export to the US market. The second, of which the soy industry is a notable example, is practiced in different ways in most of South America. It entails the export of natural resources, often not processed, in a mechanized process intensive in capital but with as little labor used as possible. In this model, countries often specialize and focus on producing large amounts of a few goods, such as GM soy.⁴⁸ While neoliberal reforms started in Argentina in the 1970s, they were deepened in the 1990s during the presidency of Carlos Menem. Despite identifying as a Peronist, Menem imposed widespread neoliberal reforms.⁴⁹ Even though Peronism is often considered a somewhat diffuse populist ideology historically consisting of both left and right fractions, the movement's core emphasis has been on workers' rights, social justice, and political and economic sovereignty.⁵⁰ In this sense, Menem's government was exceptional in turning on campaign promises and imposing a new economic road, contrary to

⁴³ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, p. 24.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 24.

⁴⁶ Harvey, David, 2007, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, p. 24.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 119.

⁵⁰ TeleSUR English, "What is Peronism?". 10 November 2014. Retrieved 17 January 2023.
<https://www.telesurenglish.net/analysis/What-is-Peronism-20141111-0014.html>

Peronist core ideals. Menem's administration privatized large parts of the Argentine economy, seeking to create an export-driven growth model. During this time, GMOs were legalized in Argentina, and this biotechnology played an important part in the country's restructuring.⁵¹ While transnational corporations like Monsanto today can sell GM soy as a technological package for farmers to practice, genetically modified crops came as part of a neoliberal package as well, being directly facilitated by these policies.⁵² Menem's reforms entailed a change in state-capital relations in Argentina, and an export-orientation to create economic growth has been dominant ever since, with agribusiness corporations playing a core role.⁵³

The neoliberal reforms of the 1990s culminated in a deep economic, political, and institutional crisis in Argentina in 2001, causing historical levels of inequality, half of the population living in poverty, and an enormous external debt.⁵⁴ The crisis triggered lootings, riots, and large demonstrations in December 2001, and the President at the time, Fernando de la Rúa issued a state of siege. Two days later, de la Rúa resigned.⁵⁵ Following these events, the mobilization of social movements increased, and the country went through three Presidents over the course of about a year.⁵⁶ The situation normalized after Justicialist Party candidate Néstor Kirchner was elected President in 2003. Kirchner, a Peronist, ran a leftist campaign and maintained a discourse characterized by an opposition to neoliberalism, in cooperation with his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.⁵⁷ The Kirchners established ties with other left-wing governments in the region that emerged as part of the so-called Pink Tide at the time, and embarked on what they called a 'national-popular' project.⁵⁸ This project emphasized the responsibility of the government to achieve economic growth, redistribution of wealth, and social inclusion, which was in contrast to the neoliberal policies of the 1990s.⁵⁹ Early on, the Kirchners were supported by important social movements, and representatives of these were given government positions.⁶⁰ However, the national-popular project required funding, for which soy exports became key.⁶¹ At this time, there was a boom in global commodity prices, and Argentina's

⁵¹ Newell, Peter, 2009, pp. 33–34.

⁵² Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 28.

⁵³ Newell, Peter, 2009, p. 36.

⁵⁴ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014a, p. 155.

⁵⁵ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 45.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵⁷ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 46 & Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014a, p. 155.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014a, p. 155.

⁶⁰ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 47.

⁶¹ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014a, p. 156.

export revenue doubled, with soy being seen as a reliable source of foreign currency.⁶² Transnational corporations were also now at the forefront of soy cultivation. In 2003, agribusiness company Syngenta famously ran an advertisement in Argentina showing a map of a geographical area in the southern cone of South America, describing it as the “United Republic of Soybeans”.⁶³ Nonetheless, following the state’s revenue from soy exports, social spending increased and social programs were implemented, which had positive results in lowering poverty levels.⁶⁴

While the Kirchner administrations maintained a popular discourse and oversaw changes in the political economy of the country, they did not change the structure of soy production or the social, economic, and environmental consequences stemming from it.⁶⁵ The soy industry’s expansion caused increased violence in the countryside, where peasants, as well as anti-GM proponents, were threatened and attacked by private security forces often hired by soy cultivators.⁶⁶ There existed a dualism in how the Kirchners partly attacked private corporations discursively, meanwhile overseeing large subsidies to the private sector.⁶⁷ Yet, material clashes with agribusiness also happened. In 2008, during the first year of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s administration, a three-month strike by soy producers, known as *el conflicto del campo*, occurred after the government tried to increase export taxes on soy revenue.⁶⁸ However, the clashes did not essentially touch upon the root structural issue of land distribution. By 2011, 50 % of all the most fertile land was still controlled by 2 % of landowners, and only 3 % of this land was controlled by 57 % of all small-scale farmers.⁶⁹ Similarly, the rural policies of Perón during his first presidencies challenged the traditional oligarchy by emphasizing state control over important industries and imposing a rural minimum wage. Yet, Perón did not enact an integral agrarian reform and therefore did not break the agricultural structure in the country.⁷⁰ This resembles the dynamic relationship of the Kirchners to the agrarian sector, as no profound

⁶² Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014a, p. 156.

⁶³ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014a, p. 155.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 155.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 154.

⁶⁷ Svampa, Maristella, 2008, p. 91.

⁶⁸ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014a, p. 157.

⁶⁹ Dos Santos, Fábio Luis Barbosa & Vasconcelos, Joana Salém, “The Glyphosate Consensus: Rural Poverty Management and Agribusiness in South America During the Pink Tide”, in Vommaro, Pablo & Baisotti, Pablo (ed.), *Persistence and Emergencies of Inequalities in Latin America: A Multidimensional Approach*. Springer International Publishing, 2022, p. 254.

⁷⁰ Galeano, Eduardo, 1973, pp. 129-130, Lapegna, Pablo, 2017, p. 4.

agrarian reform was imposed during the Kirchner era. Instead, the national-popular project was sustained largely by revenue coming from soy exports.⁷¹

Right-wing candidate Mauricio Macri was elected President in 2015. Macri imposed neoliberal policies and wanted to create incentives for soy production. Within his campaign promises was a yearly decrease in taxation of 5 % on exports, which during the Kirchner era was between 30 to 35 %.⁷² To favor the exporting sector, which was close to his government, Macri also eliminated taxes on meat and wheat exports.⁷³ However, the Argentine economy grew into increasingly bad shape during these years, and Macri eventually turned to the IMF for a bailout in 2018.⁷⁴ The 57 billion dollar loan that Macri's government took was the biggest one in IMF history.⁷⁵ Conditions of the loan included the imposition of austerity measures in Argentina, leading to cuts in public spending, restrictions on exchange rates, and a reintroduction of taxes on exports. By 2019, the poverty rate had almost reached 35 %, inflation was 50 % annually, and unemployment was 10 %.⁷⁶

In 2019, the Frente de Todos coalition, fronted by the Justicialist Party, won the national election. Since then, there has again been a Peronist, progressive government in power in Argentina, headed by President Alberto Fernández and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as Vice President. This presidential platform has been interpreted as a compromise to counteract internal differences and unify the Peronist movement.⁷⁷ Fernández, formerly head of the cabinet of ministers under previous Kirchner administrations, is known to be moderate and somewhat of a political chameleon. He was often noted as important in slowing down some of the more radical or polarizing policies of the Kirchners.⁷⁸ Fernández was, for example, critical of the Kirchner administration's response to the 2008 strike against soy taxation.⁷⁹ The current Fernández-Fernández de Kirchner government has partly returned to similar international relations as previous Kirchner administrations, forging ties with left-leaning governments in

⁷¹ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014a, p. 157.

⁷² Leguizamón, Amalia, 2019, p. 203.

⁷³ Liendo, Nicolás & González, Camilo, 2020, p. 19.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 20.

⁷⁵ The Guardian, "Argentina gets biggest loan in IMF's history at \$57bn", 27 September 2018, Retrieved 17 February 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/26/argentina-imf-biggest-loan>

⁷⁶ Liendo, Nicolás & González, Camilo, 2020, p. 20.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 21.

⁷⁸ BBC News, "Alberto Fernández: Argentina's strategist turned President". 28 October 2019. Retrieved 24 January 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-50145935>

⁷⁹ Liendo, Nicolás & González, Camilo, 2020, p. 21.

Latin America that have emerged again in recent years. In terms of the relationship to the soy sector, some contradictions have been observed. In 2020, the government made headlines by attempting to nationalize the large soybean corporation Vicentín but failed after meeting opposition from agribusiness.⁸⁰ The nationalization was motivated by Fernández as a way of promoting food sovereignty, a concept developed by the global small-scale farmer network La Vía Campesina.⁸¹ On January 3rd, 2023, however, Argentine state media announced that Antonio Aracre, former longtime CEO of agribusiness company Syngenta, was appointed chief presidential advisor to Fernández.⁸² This appointment, in relation to the previous rhetoric regarding Vicentín, hinted at a duality in the current government's relationship to agribusiness. A public letter was written in protest by several of the most prevalent voices within Argentina's environmental academic and civil society spheres.⁸³

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Genetically Modified Soy Production in Argentina

The cultivation of genetically modified soy in Argentina has been thoroughly studied by a variety of scholars, often relying on fieldwork methodology and critical theoretical perspectives for their research. Two prevalent and recurring authors who have conducted exceptional work on the topic are sociologists Pablo Lapegna and Amalia Leguizamón. Lapegna's book *Soybeans and Power: Genetically Modified Crops, Environmental Politics, and Social Movements in Argentina* from 2016 is widely informative and of much inspiration for this thesis. Throughout the book, Lapegna thoroughly examines the relationships between the state, social movements, and politics regarding agrarian change and conflict in the country.⁸⁴ Further, in his 2017 article "The political economy of the agro-export boom under the Kirchners: Hegemony and passive

⁸⁰ Reuters, "Argentina could revive takeover plan for soymeal giant Vicentín". 19 June 2022. Retrieved 17 January 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/article/argentina-grains-vicentin-idUSKBN2O00B3>

⁸¹ Mosca, Valeria Ana, "Alberto y los campos". *Le Monde Diplomatique edición Cono Sur*, Vol. 8, 2020, p. 1. Retrieved 28 February 2023. <https://www.eldiplo.org/notas-web/alberto-y-los-campos/>

⁸² Buenos Aires Herald, "Former Syngenta CEO appointed chief presidential advisor". 4 January 2023. Retrieved 18 January 2023. <https://buenosairesherald.com/business/former-syngenta-ceo-appointed-as-chief-presidential-advisor>

⁸³ Asociación Argentina de Abogados/as Ambientalistas, "Carta pública en rechazo a la designación de Antonio Aracre, ex Ceo de Syngenta, como Jefe de Asesores del Presidente de la Nación". Retrieved 3 March 2023. <https://aadeaa.org/rechazo-a-la-designacion-de-antonio-aracre/>

⁸⁴ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 51.

revolution in Argentina” he applies a Gramscian perspective and argues that Argentina went through a so-called *passive revolution* during the first decade of the Kirchner era.⁸⁵

Amalia Leguizamón’s brilliant doctoral dissertation, *Roundup Ready Nation: The Political Ecology of Genetically Modified Soy in Argentina*, aimed to answer questions regarding why the change to export-oriented GM cultivation happened, exploring the context of actors, consequences, support, and resistance in relation to this process.⁸⁶ In her 2020 book, *Seeds of Power: Environmental Injustice and Genetically Modified Soy in Argentina*, she continues the thorough examination of the country’s agricultural transformation. Doing this, she emphasizes how one must understand Argentina’s culture as well as its political economy, the latter essentially characterized by its history of colonial dependency and neoliberal restructuring, to grasp this process.⁸⁷

Further, Leguizamón has written several articles about the expansion of soy production in Argentina. In “Environmental Injustice in Argentina: Struggles against Genetically Modified Soy” she explores the consequences of GM soy cultivation and existing resistance to it, concluding that the common celebration of the soy boom as a story of success has a clear dark side of unequal distribution and affects local populations negatively in a variety of ways.⁸⁸ Similarly, in “Modifying Argentina: GM soy and socio-environmental change”, Leguizamón challenges the narrative of the soy boom as a success, and points to the conflict between this notion and the socio-environmental unsustainability that it contains. She argues that this development strategy was unsustainable in its continuation during the Kirchner governments.⁸⁹ Her article “Disappearing nature? Agribusiness, biotechnology and distance in Argentine soybean production” examines the commodification of food and the drivers within the value chain of soy production in Argentina, reflecting upon socio-environmental contradictions stemming from these processes.⁹⁰ Further, in “The Gendered Dimensions of Resource Extractivism in Argentina’s Soy Boom”, Leguizamón highlights the role of gender as a factor in explaining the unequal distribution of different consequences stemming from resource

⁸⁵ Lapegna, Pablo, 2017, p. 15.

⁸⁶ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, pp. 5-6.

⁸⁷ Leguizamón, Amalia, *Seeds of Power: Environmental Injustice and Genetically Modified Soybeans in Argentina*. Duke University Press, 2020, p. 3.

⁸⁸ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2016b, p. 690.

⁸⁹ Leguizamón, Amalia, “Modifying Argentina: GM soy and socio-environmental change”. *Geoforum*, Vol. 53, 2014a, p. 149.

⁹⁰ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2016a, p. 313.

extraction in general and GM soy in particular.⁹¹ Due to the breadth of Leguizamón's research on the topic, her valuable work serves as direct inspiration to build upon.

In his influential 2009 article "Bio-Hegemony: The Political Economy of Agricultural Biotechnology in Argentina", Peter Newell analyzes connections between the state and capital in Argentina in relation to the use of agricultural biotechnology in the country. Interesting and relevant for this thesis is how Newell applies a Gramscian perspective of hegemony to the political economy of the environment and demonstrates how, in the Argentine case, this strategy of biotechnological advancement has been established and reproduced by different means of material, institutional, and discursive character.⁹² The article "The "soy-ization" of Argentina: The dynamics of the "globalized" privatization regime in a peripheral context" by Pierre Delvenne, Federico Vasen and Ana Maria Vara explores what the authors call the privatization regime of neoliberal globalization, in relation to soy expansion in Argentina. The scholars highlight groups participating in this regime and point to similarities and contradictions in their perceptions of development. Applying a world system lens to Argentina as a semi-peripheral country, they conclude that this position entails a certain vulnerability, and that the regime of neoliberal privatization will expand differently in the Global South than it did in the North.⁹³

Sebastián Gómez Lende's "Usos del territorio, acumulación por desposesión y derecho a la salud en la Argentina contemporánea: el caso de la soja transgénica" applies David Harvey's theory of accumulation by dispossession to the case of GM soy, focusing specifically on how this process has consequences for public health and therefore threatens the reproduction of human life.⁹⁴ Against the backdrop of the expansion of GM soy and industrial agriculture in the Pampas region at the time, the 2011 article "Desarrollo, naturaleza y discursos dominantes: la prensa ante las transformaciones recientes de la agricultura industrial" by Verónica Hendel explores which discourses were dominant regarding perceptions of nature following this process.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2019, p. 200.

⁹² Newell, Peter, 2009, pp. 27-29.

⁹³ Delvenne, Pierre, Vasen, Federico & Vara, Ana Maria, "The "soy-ization" of Argentina: The dynamics of the "globalized" privatization regime in a peripheral context". *Technology in Society*, Vol. 35, 2013, pp. 153-154.

⁹⁴ Gómez Lende, Sebastián, 2017, pp. 3-4.

⁹⁵ Hendel, Verónica, "Desarrollo, naturaleza y discursos dominantes: la prensa ante las transformaciones recientes de la agricultura industrial". *Signo y Pensamiento*, Vol. 30, Issue 58, 2011, p. 94.

1.3.2 The Pink Tide and Neo-Extractivism

A wide amount of research has been conducted on the so-called Pink Tide, the political left turn in Latin America in the early 2000s, of which the Kirchner administrations in Argentina were part. This trend caused a shift in regional resource governance, yet the characteristics of the different governments in question have been contested. Since a few years ago, the region has again seen a similar development, with left-leaning governments coming back into power. The current Fernández government in Argentina is one example of this, and therefore, understanding the original Pink Tide is of clear relevance.

Argentine sociologist Maristella Svampa is a leading scholar on regional environmental issues, including the neo-extractivism of progressive governments. She has produced a variety of works on surrounding topics, one example being her 2019 book *Las fronteras del neoextractivismo en América Latina: Conflictos socioambientales, giro ecoterritorial y nuevas dependencias*, which thoroughly examines the characteristics and contexts of extractive practices under progressive rule in Latin America.⁹⁶ The 2020 book by Marina Gold and Alessandro Zagato *After the Pink Tide: Corporate State Formation and New Egalitarianisms in Latin America* gives an overview of processes in different cases all over the region after the original Pink Tide and explores the concepts of egalitarianism and the corporate state. In the introduction, the authors emphasize how a common denominator of Pink Tide governments included opposition to neoliberalism, a shared ambition of increased social spending and distributive policies, and control over strategic extractive industries. One of the biggest critiques against governments of this time, and broadly applicable to the case of Argentina, is how socio-ecological issues following extractivism were downplayed and subordinated.⁹⁷

On this similar topic, the book chapter “The Glyphosate Consensus: Rural Poverty Management and Agribusiness in South America During the Pink Tide” by Fábio Luis Barbosa dos Santos and Joana Salém Vasconcelos critically examines how Pink Tide governments maintained the pattern of resource extraction and export dependency originating from the colonial era. The authors point out how agribusiness companies expanded their activity in the region and that glyphosate was distributed on a wide scale during this period.⁹⁸ Regarding Argentina

⁹⁶ Svampa, Maristella, *Las fronteras del neoextractivismo en América Latina: Conflictos socioambientales, giro ecoterritorial y nuevas dependencias*. Bielefeld University Press, 2019.

⁹⁷ Gold, Marina & Zagato, Alessandro, *After the Pink Tide: Corporate State Formation and New Egalitarianisms in Latin America*. Berghahn Books, 2020, pp. 2-4.

⁹⁸ Dos Santos, Fábio Luis Barbosa & Vasconcelos, Joana Salém, 2022, pp. 247-248.

specifically, they argue that it is possible to claim that the Kirchner governments essentially deepened the neoliberal model of resource extraction and dependence on agribusiness.⁹⁹ “Broadening embedded autonomy and Latin America’s Pink Tide: towards the neo-developmental state” by Patrick Clark and Antulio Rosales applies a comparative approach to the Pink Tide governments of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, in relation to the so-called *resource curse*, i.e., primary resource dependency, and explores whether these managed to fulfill their political objectives in terms of development.¹⁰⁰ Further, in the article “Neoliberalismo Durável: o Consenso de Washington na Onda Rosa Latino-Americana” Brazilian scholar Augusto Neftali Corte de Oliveira conducts an analysis of the presence of neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus in 94 political programs of 47 different presidential elections in 13 Latin American countries during the Pink Tide. He concludes that while neoliberalism indeed lost space and influence during this period, parts of its ideology did remain.¹⁰¹

Tom Chodor’s book *Neoliberal Hegemony and the Pink Tide in Latin America: Breaking up with TINA?* investigates different cases of the Pink Tide, especially Venezuela and Brazil, from a perspective inspired by Antonio Gramsci. Chodor quotes Stuart Hall’s famous saying and claims that the book seeks to “think in a Gramscian way”, rather than just applying Gramscian concepts.¹⁰² Similarly, focusing on the social movements of Peronism in Argentina and Chavismo in Venezuela during the Pink Tide, Manuel Larrabure examines in “Post-capitalist Development in Latin America’s Left Turn: Beyond Peronism and the Magical State” through a Marxian perspective and case study approach how these participatory movements show the potential of a post-capitalist future in the region.¹⁰³

1.3.3 Peronism

Due to the long history of Peronism in Argentina, scholarly study of it has spread over its different epochs. This includes the original presidential terms of Juan Perón as well as the Peronism of his successors, such as Menem, the Kirchners, and the current Fernández

⁹⁹ Dos Santos, Fábio Luis Barbosa & Vasconcelos, Joana Salém, 2022, p. 255.

¹⁰⁰ Clark, Patrick & Rosales, Antulio, “Broadening embedded autonomy and Latin America’s Pink Tide: towards the neo-developmental state”. *Globalizations*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2023, p. 20.

¹⁰¹ Corte de Oliveira, Augusto Neftali, “Neoliberalismo Durável: o Consenso de Washington na Onda Rosa Latino-Americana”. *Opinião Pública*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2020, p. 186.

¹⁰² Chodor, Tom, *Neoliberal Hegemony and the Pink Tide in Latin America: Breaking up with TINA?* Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 3-4.

¹⁰³ Larrabure, Manuel, “Post-capitalist Development in Latin America’s Left Turn: Beyond Peronism and the Magical State”. *New Political Economy*, Vol. 29, No. 5, 2019, p. 587.

government. A case of the latter is “Argentina: de la breve experiencia de centroderecha al regreso del Peronismo” by Nicolás Liendo and Camilo González, which analyzes why Peronism managed to win the 2019 election. The authors claim that the economic policies and results during the last year of Mauricio Macri’s government enabled oppositional sectors, including both Kirchnerist and non-Kirchnerist factions, to unite in an electoral coalition. Published in 2020, the article states that the challenge for the current government is to enable the country to recover economically.¹⁰⁴

Maristella Svampa’s “The End of Kirchnerism” from 2008 analyzes the politics and actions of early Kirchnerism in power and the characteristics and contradictions of its ideology itself.¹⁰⁵ Federico Zapata’s “Peronismo y campo: diálogo imposible? Un abordaje desde la comunicación” points out how the relationship between the agricultural sector and Peronism in power has been filled with tensions, but that while the main line of conflict has been economic, this may be overcome by re-evaluating the importance of political discourse and communication.¹⁰⁶ The 2022 article “Challenging the Argentine Melting Pot: Peronism, Hispanidad and Cultural Diversity” by Raanan Rein explores the cultural politics of the first Peronism. Rein describes how Perón in his early days used the concept of *Hispanidad* - closely connected to the National Catholicism of Franco’s Spain - to forge Argentine identity. However, it is emphasized that Perón quickly abandoned this to instead embrace a different cultural strategy of diverse inclusion of ethnic groups in Argentina, which challenged structures of privilege in the country.¹⁰⁷

Scholarship on Peronism has also taken the character of comparative studies. For example, Ricardo Sidicaro’s book *Los tres peronismos: estado y poder económico* applies a Weberian perspective on the different presidential periods of Peronist rule. The book comparatively examines how the original government of Perón (1946-1955), the post-exile government of Perón and later his third wife Isabel Perón (1973-1976), and the government of Carlos Menem (1989-1999) related to key economic and political actors in Argentina.¹⁰⁸ In 1973, when Perón was again in power after returning from exile, political scientist Eldon Kenworthy published

¹⁰⁴ Liendo, Nicolás & González, Camilo, 2020, p. 16.

¹⁰⁵ Svampa, Maristella, 2008, p. 80.

¹⁰⁶ Zapata, Federico, “Peronismo y campo: diálogo imposible? Un abordaje desde la comunicación.” *Austral Comunicación*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2020, pp. 429-430.

¹⁰⁷ Rein, Raanan, “Challenging the Argentine Melting Pot: Peronism, Hispanidad and Cultural Diversity”. *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 2020, pp. 691-693.

¹⁰⁸ Sidicaro, Ricardo, *Los tres peronismos: estado y poder económico*. 2nd Edition, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2010, p. 11-14.

the article “The Function of the Little-Known Case in Theory Formation or What Peronism Wasn’t”. In the article, Kenworthy claims that there is often confusion in the US about what Peronism is, and throughout the article, he critically examines different authors’ views of Peronism as a form of fascism, as well as its character as a working-class movement.¹⁰⁹ Caitlin Andrews-Lee’s 2021 book *Charismatic Movements: Argentine Peronism and Venezuelan Chavismo* compares the Peronist movement with the Chavismo movement founded by Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. The book explores the emergence and resilience of these movements in terms of being ‘charismatic’, whose primary characteristics are an institutional weakness and a close connection to a personalized figure.¹¹⁰ The book *Transforming Labor-Based Parties in Latin America: Argentine Peronism in Comparative Perspective* by Steven Levitsky explores how labor-based parties in Latin America manage to adapt to new socio-economic contexts and challenges, focusing on Peronism in Argentina.¹¹¹ Similarly to Andrews-Lee, Levitsky points out that the Justicialist Party is mass-based and weak in terms of institutionalization. This enabled the adaptation to the rapid neoliberal reforms imposed by Menem between 1990-1995, which at the time dismantled the original, labor-based economic model established under Perón.¹¹² Levitsky similarly describes this development in his article “From Labor Politics to Machine Politics: The Transformation of Party-Union Linkages in Argentine Peronism, 1983-1999”.¹¹³

This thesis is situated in the general context of previous research in several ways. Firstly, regarding GM soy expansion, it follows the call for timely research on this continuously relevant topic.¹¹⁴ Doing so, it specifically focuses on the period since the 2019 election in Argentina, whereas much of the prevalent previous research has been conducted during or has focused on the period of Kirchnerism. In relation to this scholarship, this study seeks to facilitate an understanding of the current government’s characteristics also in relation to previous Kirchner administrations. This also applies in relation to the theme of the Pink Tide and neo-extractivist resource governance in general, in terms of a new political trend of left-leaning

¹⁰⁹ Kenworthy, Eldon, “The Function of the Little-Known Case in Theory Formation or What Peronism Wasn’t”. *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1973, pp. 17-45.

¹¹⁰ Andrews-Lee, Caitlin, *Charismatic Movements: Argentine Peronism and Venezuelan Chavismo*. Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 4-6.

¹¹¹ Levitsky, Steven, *Transforming Labor-Based Parties in Latin America: Argentine Peronism in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, 2003b, p. 3.

¹¹² Levitsky, Steven 2003b, p. 3.

¹¹³ Levitsky, Steven, “From Labor Politics to Machine Politics: The Transformation of Party-Union Linkages in Argentine Peronism, 1983-1999”. *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 2003a, pp. 3-36.

¹¹⁴ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, p. 180.

governments regaining power in the region. Further, it explores not only the relations between Peronism, the current government, and social movements, but also seeks to point to some of the challenges and conflicts between different movements in advancing alternatives to the political economy of resource extractivism in Argentina.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this section, the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the analysis will be presented. The framework is anchored in critical political economy and the thinking of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Particularly, his concepts of *civil and political society*, *war of movement*, and *war of position* are influential in the critical examination of relations between the state and non-state actors. Further, the connected Gramscian concept of *common sense* will also be applied, and the concept of *bio-hegemony* serves as a more general theoretical understanding of the Argentine context.

2.1 Gramscian Conceptual Framework: Civil and Political Society, War of Movement, War of Position and Common Sense

Antonio Gramsci is widely known for his theory of cultural hegemony, through which he emphasized how capitalism reproduces its hegemonic power through a combination of coercion and consent.¹¹⁵ Consent is maintained through the reproduction of bourgeois ideas, norms, and values. Gramsci is often interpreted as having upheld the Marxist idea that the economic base in certain ways influences the social and cultural spheres of society.¹¹⁶ However, he also rejected pure economic determinism and claimed that the base must not necessarily shape the superstructure, and instead put emphasis on what he called ‘relations of force’, the material, institutional, and discursive, that are mutually upheld and analyzed on the levels of the state,

¹¹⁵ Cox, Robert W., “Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method”. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1983, p. 164.

¹¹⁶ Femia, Joseph V., *Gramsci’s Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process*. Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 218.

civil society, as well as the global order.¹¹⁷ The bourgeois state is also seen as an arena of conflict within different fractions of the bourgeoisie.¹¹⁸

Related to this, Gramsci made a distinction between two levels of society's superstructure: 1) *political society*, which includes the state and government, the judicial system, and repressive organizations such as the police and the military, which practice direct coercion; and 2) *civil society*, where consent is reproduced, which, for example, includes political parties, newspapers and media, trade unions, church organizations, and NGOs.¹¹⁹ Gramsci claimed that political and civil society mutually reinforce each other, which is to the benefit of certain institutions and groups in society.¹²⁰ Political society is made up of the institutional power of a dominant class based upon socio-economic interests, unified within the state. If a developed civil society of private actors emerges, it makes it harder for the state to control it. Therefore, it is necessary for political society to intervene in civil society, to prevent conflicts that may disrupt the power of the ruling class and thus maintain and reproduce hegemony. This is the political significance of civil society, to prevent disruption to established class relations.¹²¹

Gramsci's conceptual framework attempts to expose the aspects of power stemming from political society that are active in civil society. The point is to create a revolutionary strategy, a so-called *war of position*.¹²² This refers to ideological and political work to counter hegemony within civil society.¹²³ To Gramsci, the most important revolutionary activity was creating an alternative state of mind through education and intellectual development on a wide scale and working within and expanding the spheres that the state could not reach. This entails a sort of cultural preparedness, which serves to counteract cultural hegemony.¹²⁴ The revolutionary party had to assume a leading role within civil society to create a consciousness within what he referred to as the subaltern classes. Without this, no seizure of the state would be possible.¹²⁵

¹¹⁷ Andrée, Peter, "Civil society and the political economy of GMO failures in Canada: A neo-Gramscian Analysis". *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2011, p. 175.

¹¹⁸ Forgacs, David (ed.), *The Antonio Gramsci reader: selected writings, 1916-1935*. New York University Press, 2000, p. 31.

¹¹⁹ Gramsci, Antonio, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. International Publishers, 1971, p. 12, Forgacs, David, 2000, p. 306 & 420, Morera, Esteve, "Gramsci and Democracy". *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1990, p. 28.

¹²⁰ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 12, Buttigieg, Joseph, "Gramsci on Civil Society". *boundary 2*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1995, pp. 6-7.

¹²¹ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 28.

¹²² Buttigieg, Joseph, 1995, p. 7.

¹²³ Forgacs, David (ed.), 2000, pp. 430-431.

¹²⁴ Buttigieg, Joseph, 1995, p. 14.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 19.

Related to the distinction between civil and political society, *war of movement* (also called war of maneuver) refers to a direct attack on the state within political society.¹²⁶ Depending on the characteristics and context in question, Gramsci saw different value in the use of different strategies. The circumstances were key to which strategies would be used.¹²⁷ He illustrated this by pointing to the differences between Tzarist Russia and Western Europe. Russia had a more coercive state apparatus, which could be seized by a revolutionary avantgarde as in the Russian Revolution, but it had a largely non-existent civil society.¹²⁸ In Western Europe, however, there were generally more developed relations between the state and civil society, meaning that the hegemony of the ruling class was displayed in a wider variety of ways. In that context, to enable a war of movement, the war of position within civil society first had to be victorious.¹²⁹ However, differences could also be observed within the Western European context. Gramsci saw during his time that in Britain there was a larger space for civil society beyond the state yet far less potential for socialist revolution than in his own country of Italy, where there was a more authoritarian government, an intolerant ruling class, and less space outside the sphere of the state. In the case of the former, the war of position would be more emphasized; in the latter, the war of movement was potentially possible.¹³⁰

A related Gramscian concept is that of *common sense*, which can also be traced to Gramsci's thinking on hegemony. It refers to contradictory conceptions of the world that exist within mass populations that are inherently seen as normal and natural and therefore accepted as impossible to change.¹³¹ This means that common sense is accumulated knowledge that is taken for granted, something that exists in all communities and, as well expressed by scholar Kate Crehan, "provides a heterogeneous bundle of assumed certainties that structure the basic landscapes within which individuals are socialized and chart their individual life courses".¹³² To Gramsci, common sense is not something static but rather in constant transformation, informed by scientific and philosophical ideas at a given time that find their way into popular conceptions, and therefore ordinary life. He claimed that common sense "creates the folklore of the future".¹³³

¹²⁶ Forgacs, David, 2000, pp. 430-431.

¹²⁷ Cox, Robert W., 1983, p. 164.

¹²⁸ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 328, Cox, Robert W., 1983, pp. 164-165.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Buttigieg, Joseph, 1995, p. 15.

¹³¹ Forgacs, David, 2000, p. 421.

¹³² Crehan, Kate, *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and its Narratives*. Duke University Press, 2016, p. 43.

¹³³ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 326.

2.2 Bio-Hegemony

Building directly upon Gramsci's understanding of cultural hegemony, development scholar Peter Newell coined the concept of *bio-hegemony* in relation to the use of agricultural biotechnology in Argentina. While Neo-Gramscian theoretical lenses are applied to analyze power relations within global politics and different national contexts, Newell applies one to the political economy of the environment.¹³⁴ Bio-hegemony, as used by Newell, refers in the case of Argentina to how the sector that promotes and produces agricultural biotechnology holds large access to bodies of decision-making and the media, and contributes heavily to Argentina's economy, whose value is largely uncontested by the powers that be.¹³⁵ The support for the use of agricultural biotechnology has thus, as Newell puts it, been "secured by material, institutional and discursive means".¹³⁶ This can be translated to mean that the extractive model of production with this agricultural biotechnology at its core maintains a dominant and largely taken-for-granted status in the country. This theoretical background understanding has been kept in mind during the collection of data. It is here considered valuable as a theoretical starting point and a contextually applied complement to the broader Gramscian framework.

For the overall theoretical framework, these concepts will be applied throughout the analysis. Some concepts will be used more than others in certain parts depending on their relevance to the data, but generally, the connection between them will contribute to a unified analytical frame. This will be done to understand relations between the state, capital, and civil society, and thus also allow a categorization of the strategies and characteristics of these actors in relation to Argentina's political economy of extractivism.

3. Methodology

In this section, the methodology and methods of the thesis will be presented. Firstly, there is a distinction to be made regarding the differences between methodology and methods. Methodology is the view of what is the best way for research to be approached and how it should proceed, while methods are the specific ways, techniques, and tools one uses to collect evidence for the research. A methodology enables certain different types of methods to be

¹³⁴ Newell, Peter, 2009, pp. 28-29.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 56.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 28.

used.¹³⁷ This study is based on fieldwork methodology, and the method itself consists of in depth, qualitative, semi-structured interviews in combination with ethnographic participant observation. The method of semi-structured interviewing includes a somewhat informal style and is characterized by flexibility. It starts off with certain fixed topics or questions, but is flexible to unexpected themes rather than just having a ‘question and answer’-format.¹³⁸ Interaction with people is a meaningful way to generate data, and the method corresponds to ontological and epistemological stances that people’s experiences, perspectives, and views – in this case, especially of material conditions and their consequences – are relevant and important parts of social reality.¹³⁹ The method also enables the possibility to lift the voices of marginalized, less-heard groups.¹⁴⁰ This is deemed relevant in relation to the topic of this research, as GM soy expansion has a wide variety of socio-environmental consequences.¹⁴¹

To access participants, the process started with identifying organizations of interest, mainly in Buenos Aires Province. These were reached out to through social media. Some participants were also accessed through personal contacts. Further, a so-called snowballing strategy was used, meaning that one starts with contacts with much knowledge who can help lead to further participants of interest.¹⁴² These types of key informants are often referred to as gatekeepers, who provide access to certain spaces.¹⁴³ Kept in mind during the process was the issue of so-called gatekeeper bias, which means that the gatekeepers also have a certain amount of control regarding what contacts are enabled and what doors are opened.¹⁴⁴ The sample was decided to broadly include individuals who are or have been affiliated with, or in one way or another, participated in the social or political work of organizations concerned with issues stemming from rural or environmental processes that are generally multifaceted in character.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁷ Darian-Smith, Eve & McCarthy, Philip C., *The Global Turn: Theories, Research Designs and Methods for Global Studies*. University of California Press, 2017, p. 130.

¹³⁸ Mason, Jennifer, *Qualitative Researching* (3rd ed.), SAGE Publications, 2018, p. 62.

¹³⁹ Mason, Jennifer, 2018, pp. 63-64.

¹⁴⁰ Kvale, Steinar, “Dominance Through Interviews and Dialogue”, *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2006, p. 481.

¹⁴¹ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, p. 180, Svampa, Maristella, 2008, p. 91.

¹⁴² Mason, Jennifer, 2018, p. 142.

¹⁴³ Eklund, Lisa, “Cadres as Gatekeepers: The Art of Opening the Right Doors?”, in Szarycz, Gregory S., *Research Realities in the Social Sciences: Negotiating Fieldwork Dilemmas*. Cambria Press, 2010, p. 129.

¹⁴⁴ Eklund, Lisa, 2010, pp. 129-130.

¹⁴⁵ Argentine scholar Marina Wertheimer notes that “socio-environmentalism starts from a critique of the economic model that generates inequalities in terms of exposure to risks, costs and benefits of large activities with territorial impact” (translated from Spanish). See Wertheimer, Marina, “Renovación, extractivismo urbano y conflicto ambiental en la costa norte de Buenos Aires”. *Cadernos Metrópole*, Vol. 23, No. 50, 2020, p. 82.

While Argentina has a wide range of social movements, of which many could be classified as socio-environmental in different ways, movements that primarily work with rural issues were prioritized. The sample was decided by scanning the field and evaluating what was possible during the given period. A total of six individual interviews and two group interviews were conducted. Ideally, the number of interviews would be higher and include a wider scope of informants. However, the material collected was nonetheless rich and was deemed sufficient under the circumstances in the field. Most interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, with a few exceptions when they were slightly shorter.

Interviewees whose comments are included in the study belong to or have actively participated in the work of a range of organizations, among which were the Movimiento Nacional Campesino e Indígena – Somos Tierra (MNCI-ST), Grupo de Reflexión Rural, Asamblea en Defensa de la Vida Rural, Paren de Fumigar Pergamino, and Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata. While these organizations can be seen as connected through the themes that they work with, they also hold somewhat different characteristics in structure, context, affiliations, and approaches. This mix was seen as relevant to shine a light on differences, similarities, and potential lines of conflict within the issues in question while maintaining a relatively narrow thematic frame of sample. The organizations that were contacted to participate were chosen both through previous knowledge of the context and, as mentioned, by identifying and researching interesting actors after having arrived in Buenos Aires for the fieldwork period. At this stage, previous research was also an inspiration for how to put together the sample. Throughout the whole process, there has been an awareness of the fact that many more organizations could have been included, but within the frame of the thesis and for what was possible during the limitations of the fieldwork period, the scope was decided to be sufficient.

The interviews were conducted in Argentina between late February and late April 2023, more specifically in the city of Buenos Aires and in Pergamino and Mar del Plata in Buenos Aires Province. In a few cases, a virtual format for interviews was suggested by participants for practical reasons. This enabled a somewhat wider geographical scope, as one informant, for example, was in Santiago del Estero in the north of the country. However, while this sample at first glance may seem somewhat lacking in its geographical delimitation, the few participants who, at the time of the interviews, were not located in Buenos Aires, had all lived and worked in the city or province at some point in the recent past. Being key informants suggested for interviews by their own organizations, they were deemed knowledgeable about relevant topics on a national level. Overall, Buenos Aires Province was chosen as the main geographical focus

for the interviews due to it being the country's biggest province and prevalent in GM soy production within the *Pampas* region, where most of this production is located.¹⁴⁶ Pergamino, for example, has been called one of the capitals of agrochemical use in the province.¹⁴⁷ The area around Mar del Plata has, as claimed by one of the study's participants, "among the best land in Argentina", and is the "second biggest horticultural location" and therefore where agrochemicals are widely used, leading to it being among the most contaminated places in the country.¹⁴⁸

All interviews were conducted fully in Spanish, meaning participants spoke their first language. The interviews were transcribed manually and afterwards coded into themes in relation to their relevance to the research questions. The relevant parts of the interviews were picked out from the data and directly translated into English. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the questions asked varied. Participants were initially asked to tell a little about themselves. Then, they were asked about their general views on extractivism, GM soy cultivation, the nature of Argentine political economy, Peronism, the current government, and the activity of the organizations in which they were involved. During the process of the interviews, these themes often became quite naturally connected through free-flowing conversations, limiting the importance of the original interview guide.

While the interviews provide the core of the collected data, they are complemented by a certain degree of participant observation. Participant observation is a common ethnographic approach. It emphasizes the researcher's 'first-hand experience' and is, as is the case here, often combined with other fieldwork methods, such as interviews.¹⁴⁹ This observation was mainly conducted at an *asamblea*, an open meeting in which neighbors, members of social movements, and anyone else interested meet to discuss issues in an organized, but horizontal manner. The *asamblea* took place on the 30th of March at the Foro Social in Chapadmalal, south of Mar del Plata in Buenos Aires Province, and lasted around 4 hours. The topic for the *asamblea* was a dispute over an agroecology project in the area. Notes were taken during observation to enable the recall of events as experienced.

¹⁴⁶ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, pp. 7-8.

¹⁴⁷ Foglia, Valeria, "¿Lavate las manos con glifosato? Familias de Pergamino usan agua con agrotóxicos porque intendente macrista incumple fallo". *La Izquierda Diario*, 16 November 2020. Retrieved 4 April 2023. <https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Familias-de-Pergamino-usan-agua-con-agrotoxicos-porque-intendente-macrista-incumple-fallo>

¹⁴⁸ Group Interview 1. Member of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

¹⁴⁹ Mason, Jennifer, 2018, p. 55.

The collected data will be subject to a thematic analysis, divided into three overall themes that correspond to the guiding research questions. Within the analysis section, excerpts with direct quotes from interview transcripts will be provided. This is also the case for the participant observation, which will include a recall of relevant events that were experienced. This structure is meant to establish a reasonable balance between the empirical data and the theoretical framework, partly letting the data speak for itself while simultaneously providing an independent, theoretically grounded analysis of it.

3.1 Ethical Considerations

In the study, individual participants are anonymized, while their organizations are not. It is seen as relevant to explain what types of organizations have taken part in the research, and these organizations are also public and generally seek to reach out to the widest degree possible. The identities of specific participating individuals are considered less important, even though some are already somewhat public figures regarding their activism and personally have not placed any particular importance on their anonymization. Nonetheless, anonymization is imposed for consistency and for the safety of the participants since the topic itself is clearly complex and sensitive in certain contexts, something that is clearly noticeable in the field. Further, some of these individuals can be and have been targeted for persecution or harassment by actors affiliated with agribusiness that are involved in GM soy cultivation. For these reasons, interviews were conducted in the locations of preference of the participants, either in confined or public spaces. Participants were asked and informed about these ethical aspects before the interviews started, and they were told that they would be allowed to withdraw their participation at any stage of the process.¹⁵⁰ Since the greatest amount of transparency possible was desired, the project was described to participants before the interviews began, and afterwards, time was left for questions. Interview transcripts were provided immediately after finished transcription to all participants who requested them.

Since semi-structured interviews may raise the voices of marginalized groups¹⁵¹, participants generally expressed gratitude for being included and allowed to express themselves freely, which of course facilitated the interview processes. Some also specifically expressed appreciation for acknowledging and lifting these issues in a European academic context in which they are less known. However, related to this, kept in mind and reflected upon was the

¹⁵⁰ Mason, Jennifer, 2018, p. 81.

¹⁵¹ Kvale, Steinar, 2006, p. 481.

famous critique by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak about how subaltern populations in the Global South are only able to speak through the voice of Westerners.¹⁵² As a European researcher conducting fieldwork in the Global South, this required a constant postcolonial awareness and self-examination of behavior and interaction, as well as approach to the use of the data and the research overall.

4. Analysis

4.1 The Argentine Development Model, Peronism, and the Current Government

A common denominator between the responses of the organizations interviewed is a strong rejection of the extractivist model of development and the cultivation of GM soy in Argentina, with mostly similar but some minor differences in the relationships to and views on Peronism and the current government. The material roots of the contemporary model of development are recurrently traced to three different categorized epochs in history: the colonial era and following conquests, the military dictatorship of the 1970s, and the period from Carlos Menem's administration up until today. Firstly, there are perceived direct links to colonialism and the period shortly after:

There were two large expeditions: first colonialism and the Spaniards, but then also (...) with the President, Roca, who still has monuments, streets named after him, did the call of Campaign of the Desert, which was not a desert since the indigenous lived there (...) he almost exterminated the indigenous and took the land, which was split up between rich people, who were capitalists that financed his campaign (...) all the riches at this time, soy was not yet there, but there was wood, wool, labor, leather, and the land. And the remaining indigenous people were expelled to the mountain range, which were infertile lands (...) the horses for the campaign were given by Sociedad Rural, the oligarch elite, which had silver capital and gave all the necessary horses and money. Afterwards, they handed out the land to the Sociedad Rural which are still the owners today.¹⁵³

Sociedad Rural is still today one of the interest organizations that represent large-scale agriculture, an important part of the ruling class in Argentina. It represents the agribusiness sector, which today works to reproduce what Newell calls the bio-hegemony in Argentina.¹⁵⁴ These are essentially the roots of Argentina's material structure, one of three relations of

¹⁵² See Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Nelson, C. & Grossberg, L. (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988, pp. 66–111.

¹⁵³ Group Interview 2. Members of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

¹⁵⁴ Newell, Peter, 2009, p. 35.

force.¹⁵⁵ Further, the historical importance of the last military dictatorship, and later the Menem era for advancing the material structure is also recurrently emphasized to understand the contemporary political economy of Argentina:

In the 70s a few experiments in production appeared, but in the 90s the production of transgenic soy entered, and later also of corn and wheat, in a very important way during the Menem government (...) Menem assumes the presidency in our country in 1989, and during this presidency occurs, what we call the continuation of the economic policy of the military dictatorship of the 70s.¹⁵⁶

The last military dictatorship (1976-1983) imposed reforms of privatization during a time of widespread repression and violence. By applying a reign of state terrorism against all opposition, political society counteracted the development of civil society, and, as the state does, forced the mass population into conforming with the economic structure.¹⁵⁷ The coercion of the state apparatus was thus stronger during this time, like how Gramsci perceived the conditions of civil society in Tzarist Russia, in comparison to those of Western Europe.¹⁵⁸ This also explains the prevalence of political-military guerilla organizations in Argentina at this time, whose strategies largely included war of movement and armed struggle, which Gramsci would call underground warfare.¹⁵⁹ After return to liberal democracy, civil society could develop. However, the entrance of transgenic crops is described as pursuing the same objectives as during earlier epochs:

There was a definitive change in the productive matrix around 1995 with transgenic soy, the RR, Roundup. But from 95 and onwards, we today have 65 approved transgenic products (...) what we bring to export is soy, corn, and sorghum (...) the most enormous contradiction is the approbation of transgenic wheat. Argentina is a country that made itself famous for the quality of its wheat, and during the wars in Europe, Argentina sent boats with flour (...) what happens with the transgenesis is that is that it redirects the country's commercial orientation towards the external market, to what we call "commodities", and not the internal market. The productive matrix is exclusively dedicated to the external market (...) which makes us a colony again (...) the first of the stories is that Argentina needs to feed the world and that's why we have this model (...) Argentina doesn't export food, only forage, and all the minerals of its land. It has destroyed its land for twenty years, deserted it and imposed a rural expulsion.¹⁶⁰

The story of Argentina as the "world's barn" is an example of folklore, which Gramsci claimed was created by common sense.¹⁶¹ This perception lives on despite the GM soy model having changed the productive matrix. Political society, meaning the state and its coercive institutions,

¹⁵⁵ André, Peter, 2011, p. 175.

¹⁵⁶ Individual interview 1. Member of Movimiento Nacional Campesino e Indígena Somos Tierra.

¹⁵⁷ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 56.

¹⁵⁸ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 238, Cox, Robert W., 1983, pp. 164-165.

¹⁵⁹ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, pp. 229-230.

¹⁶⁰ Individual interview 2. Member of Grupo de Reflexión Rural and Asamblea en Defensa de la Vida Rural.

¹⁶¹ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 326.

is characterized by upholding the socio-economic interests of the ruling class.¹⁶² Through this mechanism, the material structure of the development model has been institutionalized and reproduced. A cited example of this institutionalization is through IIRSA, the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America, which maintains the same objectives as in the mentioned historical epochs but in a contemporary setting:

IIRSA was approved in 2000 and consists of a strategic plan of distinct parts of Latin America (...) it consists of investing a lot of money to facilitate all that has to do with the discovery of riches in the region (...) all these large infrastructure works are paid for by the people, the governments, so the large corporations can connect, have roads, energy (...) the governments say that it is for progress and all (...) but it is all for the corporations that continue with the extractivism, so that they get to the ports (...) it is not coincidental. It is planification. All towards the ports, where all the riches leave (...) in the beginning of the 1500s and 1600s, with the colonization they first dragged out everything above ground, and now they started to drag out everything under ground. In the second part, all that is oil, lithium, minerals, they are taking out everything that is left of the riches, but now under ground.¹⁶³

A form of looting, like that of colonialism, is described. Members of other social movements share this view of objecting to the contradictions within the extractivist development model and GM soy cultivation. This is shared by members of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino, living in the heart of agribusiness activity in Argentina, who firmly claim:

In Argentina, with the level of poverty and malnutrition, and deaths from malnutrition and food inequality, the soy goes to China's pigs, while the people think it is for the hungry kids (...) the political powers are the real killers. Because in what they are doing, there is a really big human sacrifice. A really big sacrifice of the people's health. It is rebutting everything. This is called being an assassin. It is a killer model.¹⁶⁴

While its material contradictions are noted, the emphasis is also on the health consequences of the model, a stance which is clearly backed up by other comrades of the organization:

We believe that this model is a model that makes people sick, which is not productive like they claim it to be. It contaminates and kills.¹⁶⁵

Supporters of agricultural biotechnology often emphasize the scientific "modernization" of agriculture and the productivity that comes with it as one their main arguments.¹⁶⁶ This is a way that its hegemony is reproduced discursively. However, it is evidently only productive for the owners of capital and not the overall population, which not only has to live with the health and environmental hazards but also the socio-economic consequences:

¹⁶² Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 28.

¹⁶³ Group Interview 2. Members of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

¹⁶⁴ Individual interview 3. Member of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino.

¹⁶⁵ Individual interview 5. Member of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino.

¹⁶⁶ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, p. 28.

With soy, in its large scale, the more quantity, the more it is concentrated and provides fewer sources of work (...) the matrix of the soy is the same matrix of the mining, the fracking and also of urban real estate business, which is called urban extractivism.

(...)

We were never sovereign at all, we always depended on capital and investment from other places.

Always a dependency but no one proposes that we should stop depending and instead do things ourselves (...) because we have all the resources (...) we have all forms of extractivism! And how can it be that we have 40 % poverty? It's something unintelligible (...) a lot of fertile land with few habitants, and lots of poverty. One can't understand.¹⁶⁷

Essentially, upholding the model of extractivism and GM soy production is among the interests of the Argentine ruling class, and thus, it works through the state within political society to reproduce these.¹⁶⁸ The reproduction of the material structure has historically taken different shapes, upheld by both coercion and consent. Under the military dictatorship, coercion was expressed through widespread state terrorism. Today, coercion remains in a less widespread, but still systematic, form of dispossession driven by political society, such as forced evictions.¹⁶⁹ The consent, however, is now reproduced through the bio-hegemony that, as emphasized by Newell, has been secured by mutual material, institutional and discursive means.¹⁷⁰ In this process, it is something that has become embedded in the common sense of a large part of the population, essentially seen as something normal and not possible to change.¹⁷¹ It relates to how Leguizamón emphasizes the cultural preparedness of Argentines to adopt agricultural biotechnology, as a certain view of nature has been reproduced and integrated into Argentine identity.¹⁷² In large, views of socio-environmental movements of the political economic character of the hegemonic model can be summed up as put by a member of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata, paraphrasing Eduardo Galeano:

These are the open veins of Latin America. The open veins remain open.¹⁷³

As mentioned, in the 1990s, the matrix of agricultural production deepened into a model that echoed the export-dependence of colonialism, a pattern that remains today.¹⁷⁴ However, despite this structure remaining, in the times of Kirchnerism (2003-2015) some movements did

¹⁶⁷ Group Interview 1. Members of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

¹⁶⁸ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 28.

¹⁶⁹ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 22 & Leguizamón, Amalia, 2016b, p. 685.

¹⁷⁰ Newell, Peter, 2009, p. 28.

¹⁷¹ Forgacs, David, 2000, p. 421.

¹⁷² Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, pp. 106-107.

¹⁷³ Group Interview 2. Member of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

¹⁷⁴ Leguizamón, Amalia, 2014b, pp. 177.

experience important progress in social policies after a decade of pure and widespread neoliberalism:

Kirchnerism, in our point of view went back to thinking about the regulatory state, and the politics, as well as the politics outside of the state. The state regulates to transform society in a collective manner, of collective dreams, and Kirchnerism achieved a lot of rights – human, collective – for many of us, including the Law of Family Agriculture. It is the law of historical reparation of the campesino-indigenous family agriculture which we achieved during the last government of Cristina in December 2014, which was historically symbolic for us.¹⁷⁵

The emphasis on politics outside of the state during Kirchnerism is important here, echoing how Gramsci claimed that political activity is not restricted to the state sphere.¹⁷⁶ It hints at political society taking a step forward into civil society. In terms of advances, there is a sense of disappointment regarding the current government of Alberto Fernández:

We really had a lot of expectations regarding the government of Alberto (Fernández), a lot of movements had, and that we had to vote for this option against the advance of Macrismo that is all about individual entrepreneurship (...) Alberto assumed and launched a few universal policies (...) but in reality, our sector of campesino-indigenous family agriculture has not been very approached. Alberto spoke with us twice, about generating a federalism with more work in our territories (...) but in practice, public policy for our sector has been scarce.¹⁷⁷

These few approaches that were made can be interpreted as an attempt by political society to control parts of civil society, which essentially prevents disruption to the interests of the dominant class.¹⁷⁸ The class, in Argentina's case, is made up of several powerful actors. It undoubtedly includes the alliance pointed out by Newell as responsible for reproducing bio-hegemony: powerful agribusiness actors, national export-oriented corporations, multinationals and banks, as well as key sectors of the state that support this model.¹⁷⁹ The state is used to conform civil society into the economic structure, but to do so, its representatives of this class are required to be in control of it.¹⁸⁰ As extractivism continues to be prioritized by this government, parts of Peronism are evidently included within supportive sectors of the material structure. This could be part of the dynamics between different interests of the ruling class that, according to Gramsci, emerge within the arena of the bourgeois state.¹⁸¹ However, the duality of the acts of the Peronist government can also be seen as coming from how the state, representing the ruling class, needs to meet any claims from civil society without referring to

¹⁷⁵ Individual interview 1. Member of Movimiento Nacional Campesino e Indígena Somos Tierra.

¹⁷⁶ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 29.

¹⁷⁷ Individual interview 1. Member of Movimiento Nacional Campesino e Indígena Somos Tierra.

¹⁷⁸ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 28.

¹⁷⁹ Newell, Peter, 2009, p. 35.

¹⁸⁰ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 208.

¹⁸¹ Forgacs, David, 2000, p. 31.

solutions that threaten the foundational roots of this dominant class.¹⁸² In practice, this essentially means that any proposals perceived as radical, for example, an agrarian reform, will be passivized. This double standard has been pointed out by scholars such as Pablo Lapegna, who claimed that Argentina went through a so-called passive revolution under Kirchnerism.¹⁸³ It evidently remains today but now with a further deterioration in the government's interest in alternatives to the dominant model:

With the government of Alberto, it's without a doubt an enormous difference. Enormous. Really big.

What is also true for us is that in this reality we do not stop supporting a government that better contains our aspirations, of course, because we have nothing to gain from neither Macrismo or the proposal of Milei. We do understand this and that we are claiming the need for specific active policies for the sector: finances, access to land, the commons, and a stop of evictions of campesino and indigenous villages in the whole country. We need active policies that they are not giving us. What they are giving us comes as part of the strategy of this government (...) it comes with a continuation of the export forment of transgenic commodities.¹⁸⁴

Despite acting contrary to the goals of social movements, support for the government is not withdrawn from some. It can further be seen as another example of a strategy from the government's side that enables political society to interfere in civil society, preventing disruption.¹⁸⁵ The current government, by being framed as the "less bad" of the established political options, can in this case be seen as counteracting concrete alternatives to the hegemonic model of development. In practice, it conforms civil society to the material structure.¹⁸⁶ With these relations, the repressive parts of the state are downplayed, and the hegemonic consensual function of the state grows. Again, the dualities that were upheld during the Kirchner years are more apparent under the current government. The disappointment is shared with members of other social movements:

There exists a National Institute of Agroecology (...) promotion of agroecology surged from socio-environmental claims, the environmental activists (...) but what happened was that a Secretariat was created, and when one presents projects to this Secretariat, the same government doesn't finance the projects. It is to say, they were there for the photo and the applause, which gives a certain image to the people who see this, but they don't materialize the objectives. It is a smoke screen.¹⁸⁷

The government is perceived as saying one thing but doing another, which further aligns with the double standards previously mentioned. State interference in civil society is also partly exemplified by the situation regarding the Institute of Agroecology:

¹⁸² Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 28.

¹⁸³ Lapegna, Pablo, 2017, p. 15.

¹⁸⁴ Individual interview 1. Member of Movimiento Nacional Campesino e Indígena Somos Tierra.

¹⁸⁵ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 28.

¹⁸⁶ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 208.

¹⁸⁷ Individual interview 3. Member of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino.

Now, unfortunately the Institute, which was previously a Secretariat, is run by people of Movimiento Evita who generate more politics for their own organization than for our sector.¹⁸⁸

Movimiento Evita, a grassroots Peronist social movement supporting the national government, is favored due to its ties to the administration. This can be seen as an example of patronage politics, which has been studied and described by Pablo Lapegna.¹⁸⁹ Pursuing agroecology projects could potentially challenge the dominant model of development, however, if these are not sufficiently materialized, they do not threaten the material structure. The government's ties to loyal social movements can be seen as penetrating parts of civil society to mutually reinforce each other and benefit specific groups or institutions.¹⁹⁰ It echoes how one of the main characteristics of a hegemonic class is the ability to gain allies within civil society without genuinely threatening the power of the ruling class.¹⁹¹ While some movements maintain these ties, others hold more critical views, claiming that since the entrance of GMOs in Argentina, the material structure has defined all governments:

Since 1990, when neoliberalism was installed, all the governments have been neoliberal (...) there were better economic times during the first Kirchnerism, but that was because the price of soy was at 600 dollars per ton.¹⁹²

As established, the ruling class will act through the state, in political society, to maintain its interests.¹⁹³ It means enabling the continuation of the material structure. For example, an affiliate of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino, who had both personally become ill and had seen family members and friends suffer and die from cancer caused by fumigations of GM crops, expressed the political response to consequences of the soy model like this:

It continues the same, with the same lack of interest. They don't care. Because the countryside in Argentina – not just in Pergamino, even though we are in the center of it – moves a lot of money. A lot. It is not politically or economically convenient to obligate the landowners to behave well.¹⁹⁴

The political sector is further perceived as not having any genuine interest in pursuing alternatives to the current model of extractivism or stopping its consequences, exemplifying the model's institutional hegemony. It explains, for example, why the Fernández government does

¹⁸⁸ Individual interview 1. Member of Movimiento Nacional Campesino e Indígena Somos Tierra.

¹⁸⁹ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 169.

¹⁹⁰ Buttigieg, Joseph, pp. 6-7.

¹⁹¹ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 28.

¹⁹² Individual interview 2. Member of Grupo de Reflexión Rural and Asamblea en Defensa de la Vida Rural.

¹⁹³ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 28.

¹⁹⁴ Individual interview 4. Member/Affiliate of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino.

not materialize projects in the Institute of Agroecology. The ups and downs of progressive rule are summarized by a member of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata:

The progressive governments – Peronism and that, are the less bad alternative. But they don't change anything, they just put more attention to subsidies and culture. But they don't really change anything, the poverty and the structures continue. The economic powers keep planting soy. It will not change. Of course, it is less bad, but it will not generate any big change for the better (...) I think that from the Perón of 1955 until now, of what was a government, Nestor was the best. Or the less bad. I did not vote for him (...) but if you compare to the others, he was the less bad (...) however, the best thing that progressivism has, meaning Kirchner, Cristina, Perón, is not only their governments but the institutions and the intermediate persons. During Nestor's government there was a good educational planning, which in theory could be implemented but there were many teachers that came from a different way of thinking (...) progressive governments are the ones that stack the cultural and social very well, but the political and economic structures continue as known.¹⁹⁵

This reflection of the cultural and social policies of progressive governments in Latin America corresponds with how, according to Gramsci, an important task of every state is to “raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes”.¹⁹⁶ Politically, current President Alberto Fernández is characterized as follows:

Alberto is from the right-wing of Peronism. Peronism is so wide! It has right-wing, center and left-wing. There are people within Peronism who really put work in, but on the other side there is the right, who are the friends of the concentrated groups, of Clarín, the most powerful media source in Argentina (...) when Cristina chose Alberto, at this time it was a very good squad to defeat Macri (...) but Alberto had fought with Cristina about the topic of the countryside, when Cristina wanted to put more taxes, and the right-wing and Alberto left because they did not agree with her, they agreed with the countryside. Alberto is a friend of Clarín. Alberto is an indifferent (...) he's a person who thinks like the right (...) Menem betrayed, not Alberto. They knew all along what he was.¹⁹⁷

Fernández is explicitly presented as allied with the powerful elites in Argentina. It aligns with the idea of how the ruling class works through the state to uphold its interests.¹⁹⁸ Clarín largely responds to the interests of agribusiness actors¹⁹⁹, and such newspapers operate within civil society.²⁰⁰ Thus, it is an important ally to discursively reproduce the hegemony of the ruling class. The width of Peronism brings, as it has throughout history, contradictions within its own movement as well as in the current government. Overall, the government is perceived by these socio-environmental movements as less progressive than the original Kirchnerism, serving rural elites, and reproducing the material base through the continuance of extractivism and the GM

¹⁹⁵ Group Interview 1. Member of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

¹⁹⁶ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 258.

¹⁹⁷ Group Interview 1. Members of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

¹⁹⁸ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 28.

¹⁹⁹ Newell, Peter, 2009, p. 55.

²⁰⁰ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 28.

soy model. In some cases, socio-environmental movements maintain loose government ties, but with a critique of the lack of approaches towards the popular productive sector, as well as its certain patronage politics towards Peronist-oriented organizations.

4.2 Strategies and Methods of Resistance

Socio-environmental movements in Argentina rely on a wide variety of methods and strategies to respond to the GM soy model. A large part of the work is conducted through struggle within civil society, a strategy that was chosen due to the soy model's hegemonic position and relations between political and civil society. According to a member of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino:

We think it is a good idea to be able to use the biggest amount of ways possible to communicate, like for example organize informative workshops, festivals, works of theatre, show films, because, well, there has been so much different audiences, and we think that the best way is to be able to hook them onto attractive things (...) and this necessity is also, as we saw later, because the media here in Pergamino, the traditional media that has the most circulation, are functionaries to agribusiness. It was like we felt that we have the responsibility and obligation to be able to tell neighbors that we know what is happening to them, which in other media sources is not spoken of.²⁰¹

Further, since the return of liberal democracy in Argentina, the context for civil society somewhat resembles how Gramsci described the situation in Western Europe during his time. Today, there is a proper relationship between the state and civil society.²⁰² The media remains a dominant force in reproducing material and institutionalized hegemony discursively. However, following the 2001 political and economic crisis in Argentina, alternative ways of political participation emerged, where social movements without connections to political parties organized through *asambleas*. This legacy is upheld today, by organizing in a horizontal manner, without formal leading figures:

Starting from 2001, with the citizen meetings we started taking politics in our own hands. Micropolitics. With themes like that and creating real, democracy in a space, which means that we sit down, talk, and listen in a horizontal way (...) we have done festivals, and we keep organizing the festival of the Seed (...) and we also go to schools to speak and give workshops, by invitation from universities and different political spaces, to talk about the themes. Meaning the interrelation with other *asambleas* as well. Territorial. We meet with people from fumigated towns in other provinces (...) and we articulate all this with other organizations, including with the theme of oil extractivism as well.²⁰³

These strategies entail a war of position by working in a counter-hegemonic fashion in civil society, outside of the state apparatus.²⁰⁴ The horizontal nature of organization is a rejection of

²⁰¹ Individual interview 5. Member of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino.

²⁰² Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 238.

²⁰³ Group Interview 1. Members of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

²⁰⁴ Forgacs, David, 2000, pp. 430–431.

political society's hegemonic imposition and with it, the material structure. According to Gramsci's reflections, a seizure of governmental power is not possible without establishing hegemony within civil society. Therefore, a social group and their perceptions must exercise leadership within this sector before a war of movement is possible.²⁰⁵ Essentially, it is about battling ideas that are rooted in the common sense of the masses. In this case, it means a normalized view of the soy model, that is seen as a certainty in which people are socialized.²⁰⁶ While the work of countering of hegemony in civil society takes form in the spreading of ideas and knowledge that differ from the dominant model, it also takes shape in more practical ways. For example, a member of the MNCI Somos Tierra, living in Buenos Aires, explains:

We do a whole lot of things. MNCI Somos Tierra, we consist of various strong organizations that are in the provinces. We are in Misiones, San Luis, San Juan, Neuquén, Mendoza, Rio Negro, Jujuy and in Córdoba. And all our organizations in the provinces are strong, large and have an important history as a movement (...) in the organization in which I have been a member, for nine years, is the Red Puna in Quebrada, in Jujuy. It is an organization that was created in 1995, precisely with the idea of facing, countering this situation of no longer being able to be better integrated into the production chains of food marketing, and part of it was created to be able to support the individual producer and to collectively market the products that we have been producing.²⁰⁷

The interviewee in question also cited work at the Central Market in Buenos Aires, where the organization operates to create commercial links for the agroecological products of small-scale farmers. These practices show concrete, lived alternatives to the hegemonic mode of production. It further practically supports groups that have been marginalized by the current model, which broke the food production chains when GM soy entered Argentina in the mid-1990s. This work is also done together with institutions such as universities:

In general, in all provincial movements, which is also done with technicians from the universities, comrades who are also joining the movement to contribute so that peasant and indigenous systems increasingly have a greater preponderance in the production and commercialization of food.²⁰⁸

Practicing different alternatives to the dominant model furthers a counter-hegemonic struggle, illustrating the possibility of different systems of production. It echoes how Gramsci viewed the starting point of political participation as needing to actively counter the consensus that exists in civil society with something that is instead progressive and critical.²⁰⁹ In this case, the practice can be seen as a form of resistance itself. While it offers an alternative to the material base, in its current stage, it is rather part of the work within civil society. It is not done merely

²⁰⁵ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 207.

²⁰⁶ Crehan, Kate, 2016, p. 43.

²⁰⁷ Individual interview 1. Member of Movimiento Nacional Campesino e Indígena Somos Tierra.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 29.

to advance economic interests, but is also rooted in an ideological commitment that intertwines the theoretical and practical:

We have also been working on this in the spaces for political formation, and in general the defense of the territories for food sovereignty.²¹⁰

Thus, strategies include practical advances in working with issues relevant to peasant and indigenous production systems while at the same time practicing political formation, in which the concept of food sovereignty is at the core. Food sovereignty opposes neoliberalism and calls for a change of the large-scale, mechanized model of production that is currently hegemonic in Argentina.²¹¹ Food sovereignty as an alternative is also cited by other movements, whose general stance is summed up as:

We know that other modes of production that are compatible with life and health exist (...) Food sovereignty is our resource.²¹²

Most of the strategies of socio-environmental movements are thus part of a larger, long-term war of position within Argentine civil society. However, in some cases, the struggle against the consequences of the soy model has been brought into the spheres of political society, making use of judicial mechanisms. In Pergamino, this has been a specifically important strategy:

We also do judicial complaints. The resistance started from making these denouncements. We started doing these in the Federal Justice because the Provincial Justice never moved anything.²¹³

Recently, the Supreme Court ruled against the Municipality of Pergamino and decided that it is prohibited to fumigate – a key characteristic of GM crops – within 1095 meters from the urban limit in a terrestrial manner or 3000 meters in aerial.²¹⁴ While this was indeed a victory and its symbolic significance should not be downplayed, it merely treats the consequences of the hegemonic model of production and not the model itself. This is something that was

²¹⁰ Individual interview 1. Member of Movimiento Nacional Campesino e Indígena Somos Tierra.

²¹¹ La Vía Campesina, which formulated the concept of food sovereignty, explains that it “recognizes people and local communities as the principal actors in the fight against poverty and hunger. It calls for strong local communities and defends their right to produce and consume before trading the surplus. It demands autonomy and objective conditions to use local resources, calls for agrarian reform and collective ownership of territories. It defends the rights of peasant communities to use, save, exchange seeds. It stands for the rights of people to eat healthy, nutritious food. It encourages agroecological production cycles, respecting climatic and cultural diversities in every community.” La Vía Campesina, “Food Sovereignty: a Manifesto for the Future of Our Planet”. 13 October 2021. Retrieved 19 May 2023. <https://viacampesina.org/en/food-sovereignty-a-manifesto-for-the-future-of-our-planet-la-via-campesina/>

²¹² Individual interview 3. Member of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Infocielo, “Pergamino: Triunfo ambiental y revés para el Municipio por las fumigaciones”. 16 March 2023. Retrieved 22 May 2023. <https://infocielo.com/fumigacion/pergamino-triunfo-ambiental-y-reves-el-municipio-las-fumigaciones-n758389>

acknowledged by members of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino, who emphasized issues with enforcing the laws that are in place as well as how distances for fumigations have limited effect, as herbicides are spread with the wind. To Gramsci, the judiciary is one of the state organs where political hegemony is reproduced, but where this apparatus is more sensitive, and therefore, lapses within it can influence the public's impressions.²¹⁵ However, from the side of the Court, the measure does not essentially threaten the interests of the dominant class but could also rather serve to minimize further disruption.²¹⁶ Generally, the movements in question acknowledge the limited effect of strategies making use of judicial institutions but employ them anyway. In Mar del Plata, a similar strategy has been used, but with limited success:

We went to the Supreme Court (...) we also went to the prosecutor's office (...) not only us, but with neighbors and other organizations, presenting 150,000 complaints that measures (against fumigations) are not fulfilled, and nothing happened at all. Neither in the judicial nor the political did the parameter move.²¹⁷

Acting within the spheres of political society, these methods resemble a sort of war of movement, even though Gramsci rather exemplified this with actions such as strikes.²¹⁸ However, the limited success of this strategy can be traced back to the characteristics of political society, and how the hegemony of the current model first needs to be countered within civil society before any profound change can happen towards the state.²¹⁹ However, as Gramsci saw it, political activity may also be determined by different interpretations of the law and conflict between fractions of the bourgeoisie.²²⁰ This may still enable some limited steps and advances using judicial institutions, such as in Pergamino. Overall, a lot of strategic emphasis is put on spreading information, knowledge, and political formation to create a critical consciousness for change. While the victories are quite small and the difficulties many, advances are perceived to have been made:

We get together and do little, but there are many small groups, and it seems to me that we have moved the spark plug a bit. Because 10-15 years ago there was not so much talk about the model of agrochemicals. Then one began to talk about the model, which began to harm it, but one did not speak of agroecology. Now, one does talk about agroecology. And there are some laws, so we have made progress, but the model and system are very powerful.²²¹

²¹⁵ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 246.

²¹⁶ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 28.

²¹⁷ Group Interview 1. Members of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

²¹⁸ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 229.

²¹⁹ Ibid, p. 207.

²²⁰ Forgacs, David, 2000, p. 31.

²²¹ Group Interview 1. Member of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

In different ways, these movements represent a counter-hegemonic resistance against the dominant soy model. The struggle mainly takes place in civil society through a long-term war of position, but with some cases of what resembles a war of movement. The choices of strategies are logical consequences of the existing relations between political and civil society in Argentina.

4.3 Challenges for Advancing Alternatives

In the struggle to bring forward alternatives to the dominant model, socio-environmental movements face several, multifaceted challenges. The first and most obvious is the material, institutional, and discursive power of the agribusiness and biotechnology sector – essentially the reproduction of bio-hegemony that has been established, as emphasized by Newell.²²² Peronism or not, the economic and political powers are described as basically one and the same:

It is the economic interest that moves them. It is always the same, the economic interest before people's health. It is always the same answer. The economic interest, the greed that is generated (...) but I'm sorry that we already know that those who live from those sectors, political campaigns are banked by those sectors.²²³

It relates directly to how the ruling class uses the state to advance its interests.²²⁴ Further, the concentration of the media sources, which are aligned with the agribusiness actors, is crucial in maintaining the hegemony within civil society:

The media are in the hands of the rich to 99 percent. You see channel, channel, channel, newspaper, newspaper, newspaper, and it's the same. They get into people's heads. You go to the clinic and there is a television. The channels of the right-wing. Everywhere. And that goes in.²²⁵

This directly echoes how Newell emphasizes the multi-faceted character of the bio-hegemony in Argentina.²²⁶ The economic power of the soy sector and its influence in political society, and with it, within fractions of Peronism, have essentially established a position that is intersecting with and being mutually upheld by cultural and discursive factors. This creates a general view of what is normal:

The countryside buys what the market sells. Here the patent is held by Monsanto, one has no choice but to buy from Monsanto. For the countryside to produce, the only way they have is to buy the Monsanto seed, and on top of that they buy the productive package, with the pesticides. It's a trap. They leave you no choice.

²²² Newell, Peter, 2009, p. 28.

²²³ Individual interview 3. Member of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino.

²²⁴ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 28.

²²⁵ Group Interview 1. Member of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

²²⁶ Newell, Peter, 2009, p. 57.

(...) it's impressive how prepared the system is. Like strategically, each little step they take, each thing they do, is armed in such a way that it always ends up benefiting them. And how people's minds are colonized (...) For example here, there are marathon races to raise funds for an ecological center or something like that. But people run wearing shirts with the Monsanto logo! (...) If it's Bayer, it's poison (...) They make you sick, but then create the medication for you to consume.²²⁷

Further, connected to the concentration of the media, the limited access to different types of information is cited as a crucial difficulty in countering the current model:

Part of common sense is that people base it on experience, the information that comes to you. So, if that happens to you all the time, you are going to reason based on what is something real, as something unique (...) That's the complexity of it all.²²⁸

Agrarian extractivism, and the stories of efficiency, modernization, and progress that are used by its proponents, now form part of common sense in how it has become a normalized way of practicing agriculture. These become the assumed certainties into which people will be socialized to live their lives.²²⁹ According to Gramsci, common sense is “crudely neophobe and conservative”.²³⁰ Thus, overcoming these normalized and supposedly immutable truths is a grand challenge for counterhegemonic social movements and makes it more difficult to get people to get involved. Further, in different places, political society has different ways to actively counter eventual protest:

Sometimes they try to shut you up, they try to shut you up with money. But one thing that I always say to politicians, with all the money in the world I do not solve the lives of my people.²³¹

The hegemonic position of the model has a passive effect. At the same time, political society needs to coerce the mass population into conforming to the material structure at the given moment:²³²

All the question of resistance. It is not the resistance, it's the struggle. Resistance is a passive mode, anyone resists. But here, few struggle. The people who dared to denounce, these are the people who struggle (...) the ones who know that after the denunciation a threat, a shot, anything could come.²³³

If one does raise one's voice and confront the hegemonic model, there is a risk of being targeted by actors connected to the interests of agribusiness, especially in smaller, rural towns. There is a clear connection between consent and coercion in the model's reproduction, on the one hand

²²⁷ Individual interview 3. Member of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Crehan, Kate, 2016, p. 43.

²³⁰ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 423, Crehan, Kate, 2016, p. 48.

²³¹ Individual interview 4. Member/Affiliate of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino.

²³² Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 56.

²³³ Individual interview 3. Member of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino.

creating a common sense that has established it as something normalized, but on the other, using coercion towards those who challenge it:

Very ugly things happened to me, they threatened my family, they entered my mother's house, they attacked my father on the road, they shot at my house twice, they killed my dog. I mean, they did things at the door of my house. It is all difficult because of all this because it is generated by everything. There's a lot of hate from the people who are into this.²³⁴

This coercion, as previously established, is not only conducted towards individuals but part of a larger structural process of dispossession.²³⁵ Besides these aspects, another main challenge for bringing forward alternatives to the dominating model of production is, as previously briefly touched upon, the lack of resources and financing for projects:

What is done is self-managed. Everything we do comes from our strength, it is part of what we invest from below, apart from this, no. So, it gets difficult there. It gets quite complicated, but we will continue.²³⁶

This also connects back to the relationship between Peronism and popular sectors, and the different characteristics of this government compared to the years of Kirchnerism:

During Kirchnerism, some other financing projects for productive projects had already come out, which of course we went up to take advantage of (...) (now) we have done everything through the communities, through the individual partners of the productive projects, setting monthly quotas.²³⁷

This aspect is also part of a larger challenge and directly connects to a line of conflict between socio-environmental movements, defined by their stances towards Peronism in power, or Kirchnerism in particular. An ongoing case that points to this is the project of agroecology in Chapadmalal, south of Mar del Plata. Chapadmalal, located on the coast, is home to a tourist complex, built during the Perón era. Next to it was land owned by the national government to be used to grow food for the tourist facilities. Five years ago, it was detected by a neighbor of the area that this land, 140 hectares, was not being used. A lawyer belonging to Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata made judicial inquiries to obtain the land and, together with neighbors, organized an assembly to create a project to practice agroecology. As put by a member of the same organization:

Five years ago, they began the path of being able to obtain those lands, contacting some movements because obviously the assembly had no political leverage or political contact to obtain those lands ... They got together with the Unión de Trabajadores de la Tierra and they said no, they did not want to do it jointly, they did not accept conditions of horizontality of the assembly. Then they touched the MTE (Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos), which said that yes it could come to get them, and after five years, evidently with the political leverage they have from Grabois and others, they got them, but

²³⁴ Individual interview 3. Member of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino.

²³⁵ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 22, Leguizamón, Amalia, 2016b, p. 685.

²³⁶ Individual interview 3. Member of Paren de Fumigar Pergamino.

²³⁷ Individual interview 1. Member of Movimiento Nacional Campesino e Indígena Somos Tierra.

they announced the project as an MTE project, leaving out local producers. Last Thursday that forum was held where some things were clarified, but now the MTE, since it does not have territorial roots, seeks the support of the neighbors and the producers of the area.²³⁸

MTE is a *piquetero* organization founded by Juan Grabois, who also leads Frente Patria Grande, a left-wing Peronist organization that formed part of the Frente de Todos alliance and critically supported the government. Grabois, a precandidate for the presidential nomination within the Frente de Todos successor Unión por la Patria for the 2023 elections, has ties to Kirchnerism but maintains a leftist stance.

In Chapadmalal, a forum was held in the form of an open *asamblea*, for neighbors to express their opinions on moving forward with the project, which had now been framed as being solely by MTE Rural, the organization's rural section. A group of MTE members showed up, which seemed to surprise several neighbors, as the organization did not have prevalent roots in the area and was not expected since it had not participated in the early project meetings. There also exists a certain degree of classist and xenophobic prejudice against "the people of Grabois", of whom many work in the informal economy, and are not uncommonly of indigenous background. Some neighbors had previously expressed worries that the neighborhood would have an "influx" of Bolivians, who in Argentina often work in agriculture. This xenophobia was, however, rejected by members of social movements present at the *asamblea*. Nonetheless, a representative from MTE took the word, explained their stance, and ended with saying: "We, as everyone here, also have the right to land."²³⁹ Afterwards, the representative passed the microphone along to a comrade of the organization not on the speaking list, who spoke, crying, about how the MTE had been targeted for harassment due to their participation in the project: "They have said so many horrible things, so many lies, that we're all just Kirchnerists".²⁴⁰ These comments were followed by different reactions from *asamblea* participants: half giving applause, and the other half shaking their heads with their arms crossed, evidently perceiving it as an act. Right afterwards, while other people were speaking, the members of the MTE happily posed for pictures together.²⁴¹

The MTE is an organization whose character and project challenge the dominant models of production and politics. The project has already become news in the large mainstream media,

²³⁸ Individual Interview 6. Member of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

²³⁹ Quote from member 1 of Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos (MTE) in the *asamblea* at the Foro Social Chapadmalal, 30 March 2023.

²⁴⁰ Quote from member 2 of Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos (MTE) in the *asamblea* at the Foro Social Chapadmalal, 30 March 2023.

²⁴¹ Observation conducted during participation in the Foro Social Chapadmalal, 30 March 2023.

which has referred to it as a “takeover” of land.²⁴² However, while this scenario is obviously complex, and many things most likely lie under the surface, it resembles the previously cited patronage politics of Movimiento Evita in the Institute of Agroecology.²⁴³ Many socio-environmental movements perceive contemporary Peronism – especially the current government - as toothless in materializing projects contrary to the dominant mode of production, but if an organization has ties to Peronism in power, it is apparently more likely to be given a role where funding or resources are available. There is of course a risk to this, however, since, as Gramsci mentioned, the state is the main instrument to conform civil society to the economic structure.²⁴⁴ One challenge is thus to not become hegemonized, and to persist in transforming civil society into a critical, organized, and progressive sphere.²⁴⁵ Further, these relations divide movements into different camps, where an essential line of conflict is the relationship to Peronism and the stance towards the hegemonic apparatus of the state. Conflicts counteract unity and organization and cause challenges in overcoming these differences between social movements in the long run. In Chapadmalal, these tensions were brought to the surface:

It is in that instance of whether to do something with the MTE again, which in my opinion cannot be done because trust was lost for me, and I consider it a betrayal. But on the other hand, it would be a difficult path, but it would be very good if we could reach an agreement and they would rethink themselves. Although I don't think so, because politics are like that, alter, dirty.²⁴⁶

It relates back to strategies and methods for countering the dominant mode of production and moving forward. As put by a neighbor in Chapadmalal, who had participated in sketching the original agroecology project:

We agree on the *what*, it is not the question. The question now is the *how*.²⁴⁷

²⁴² Agencia Tierra Viva, “El proyecto agroecológico del MTE en Chapadmalal y la reacción conservadora”. 30 March 2023. Retrieved 25 May 2023. <https://agenciaterraviva.com.ar/el-proyecto-agroecologico-del-mte-en-chapadmalal-y-la-reaccion-conservadora/>

²⁴³ Lapegna, Pablo, 2016, p. 169.

²⁴⁴ Gramsci, Antonio, 1971, p. 208.

²⁴⁵ Morera, Esteve, 1990, p. 29, Lapegna, Pablo, 2017, p. 10.

²⁴⁶ Individual Interview 6. Member of Asamblea Paren de Fumigarnos Mar del Plata.

²⁴⁷ Quote from participant in the *asamblea* at the Foro Social Chapadmalal, 30 March 2023.

5. Conclusion

This study has intended to contribute to a better understanding of how global agribusiness expansion affects political and social relations in Argentina, and particularly what significance Peronism in power has for the continuation of the country's development model characterized by export-driven extractivism and GM soy cultivation. By doing this, it has further explored the perceptions of socio-environmental movements in the country regarding these themes, and the strategies and challenges of movements to respond to and advance alternatives to this model.

Socio-environmental movements decisively reject the current development model of extractivism and GM soy production. This model is perceived as fiercely contradictory, unjust, and unsustainable in a wide variety of ways, and characterized by a neocolonial material structure. Contemporary Peronism in government is generally considered toothless, or simply uninterested, in challenging this hegemonic development model and therefore essentially enables its continuation. Further, the political-economic contradictions of Peronism and the government's involvement in civil society through certain uses of patronage politics towards loyal social movements further disable and passivize the advancement of alternatives, which essentially benefits the current model and enables its reproduction. The only, and much limited obstruction to the soy model by Peronism in government is done through sporadic discourse and, at times, support for small-scale projects run by Peronist-affiliated organizations. Some socio-environmental movements emphasize contemporary Peronism as the best of bad existing political alternatives, pointing to advances during the Kirchner years as well as its better, more inclusive social policies than during neoliberal governments. However, the current government is simultaneously seen as more pro-agribusiness, less progressive, and less supportive of popular sectors than the previous Kirchner administrations, and President Fernández is described as a friend to rural elites. The material structure is largely persistent during contemporary Peronist rule as during previous neoliberal governments, and GM soy expansion is expected to continue.

A variety of tactics and strategies are applied by socio-environmental movements to respond to the soy model. Due to the model's hegemonic position and existing relations between political and civil society, most of these strategies can be seen as part of a long-term war of position. These are aimed at counteracting dominant views on agriculture, nature, and production within Argentine civil society. They take shape in cultural activities such as workshops, films, theatre, as well as organizing manifestations, horizontal *asambleas*, conducting counterhegemonic

political formation and education, and establishing connections between different provincial movements. In some cases, these are combined with practical activities that promote the commercialization of products stemming from alternative models of production, advancing the long-term goal of food sovereignty. Further, some movements also make use of the judiciary to denounce the consequences of the soy model. This strategy moves into the sphere of political society and can be interpreted as a war of movement. It has been successful only in a few limited cases, and its limitations in the Argentine context can be explained by Gramsci's notion that hegemony in civil society first must be conquered through a war of position for a war of movement to be truly effective.

Further, socio-environmental movements face several main challenges in advancing alternatives to the soy model. Firstly, at the foundation of everything is the material power of the ruling class, which in turn exercises effective hegemony through institutionalization in the state, as well as within civil society through the concentration of the media in pro-agribusiness hands. The reproduction of the model has largely been integrated into a common sense within Argentine society that passivizes action and active struggle, a large challenge for socio-environmental movements to overturn. Raising one's voice against the model entails a risk of being persecuted, either by being silenced with bribes or with violent coercion. Further, socio-environmental movements also face difficulties in financing their activities. While some organizations do get government financing for projects, these often have ties to Peronism. This has created political disagreements between movements that have similar goals but different methods in relation to Peronism and the state. Overcoming these disagreements is a major challenge. Further, if movements do collaborate with the state, there is also a challenge of maintaining a critical stance and not being conformed into indirectly reproducing the model of extractivism and GM soy.

Argentina is living in a complex situation, with annual inflation of 100 %, a poverty level currently at around 40 % and a continuously large IMF debt. The extractivist model has often been cited as the way out of the crisis, but things do not seem to be improving. It is increasingly being called out as a false solution. During the Kirchner years, when fairer distribution of state revenue created some positive socio-economic effects, the model was also unsustainable and essentially vulnerable to boom and bust. The core contradiction remains: a country that extracts almost every natural resource imaginable has an increasingly impoverished population, and as influential Argentine environmentalist lawyer and scholar Enrique Viale recently put it, "leaving this model is not only possible, but it is a duty in Latin America where the maps of

poverty coincide with the maps of looting and environmental degradation. It is not by accident that it is the most unequal region on the planet.”²⁴⁸

Socio-environmental movements face the challenge of overcoming political differences – as shown in Chapadmalal – which otherwise might turn into a fight over the crumbs from the table. This is necessary to formulate a united response against a model that poisons, destroys, and kills for the profit of a few, foreign corporations and on the expense of the most vulnerable – the campesinos, the indigenous, and the inhabitants of the semi-urban, peripheral, and informal areas of the *pueblos fumigados* (sprayed towns). Meanwhile, the role and importance of Peronism in Argentina, with all its inherent complexities and contradictions, cannot be ignored. The precandidates within the Peronist alliance Unión por la Patria for the 2023 presidential election clearly illustrate these contradictions: Leftist Juan Grabois runs against center-right Sergio Massa, the current Minister of Economy. Massa, the most likely candidate, recently called for the Argentine mountain range to be viewed as a “cake” to be cut up for extractive activity, to gain dollars to pay the IMF debt.²⁴⁹ This largely contrasts with the grassroots fraction spearheaded by Grabois, which holds progressive aspirations. If Peronism seeks to be an emancipatory force in government, it must confront its political-economic contradictions, reject the model of extractivism, and actively approach alternatives rooted in popular sectors. The alternatives exist, represented by socio-environmental movements, campesinos, the indigenous, and the ‘popular economy’. This would likely also reduce the risk of disagreements with socio-environmental movements outside of Peronism that share similar goals. Grabois is in a challenging position of attempting to work within the state, an approach that, as illustrated, has been largely contested by socio-environmental movements.

To counter soy expansion, the economic structure must be changed. A crucial step would be to impose an integral agrarian reform with land redistribution, which requires political will but also a willingness among the general population to participate in transformational change. Today, a political and social transformation would further require a new way of viewing and relating to nature and re-evaluating the concept of economic growth. This is, of course, not only the case in Argentina, even though it is one of the most evident and therefore interesting

²⁴⁸ Viale, Enrique, “Organización para romper con el consenso extractivista”. Agencia Tierra Viva, 5 June 2023. Retrieved 13 June 2023. <https://agenciatierraviva.com.ar/organizacion-para-romper-el-consenso-extractivista/> (Quote translated from Spanish).

²⁴⁹ Libertad, Lisandro, “UxP. Sergio Massa: “La obsesión del próximo presidente debe ser juntar dólares para el FMI”. La Izquierda Diario. 27 June 2023. Retrieved 28 June 2023. <https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Sergio-Massa-La-obsesion-del-proximo-presidente-debe-ser-juntar-dolares-para-el-FMI>

examples of a country pursuing extractivism. This debate has been coming from Latin America for years now. Some trends in the region might hint at upcoming change, such as new left-leaning governments coming to power that this time may question the socio-environmental contradictions of the original Pink Tide's political economy.

A Gramscian framework has proven helpful in pointing out how multifaceted hegemonic systems of power are reproduced in Argentina. In such a context, one logical conclusion, with which Gramsci would agree, is that a socialist state based on popular support is needed. This is, of course, easier said than done, especially when the country is stuck in an essentially neocolonial situation, reproduced in a multifaceted manner by both global forces and internal elites. When economic power is so intertwined, institutionalized, and further connected to global structures and dependencies, it is difficult to know where to begin to construct change. This was acknowledged by participants in this study, who perceive themselves as constantly struggling against the wind, but see no alternative. The war of position is, in this case, a long-term process.

Further research is continuously needed on the consequences of Argentina's different forms of extractivism, and how resistance towards these is formed in different contexts in the country. Following this study, it is especially relevant regarding the status of GM soy but also other contested extractive projects, such as lithium extraction in Jujuy, fracking in Vaca Muerta, or urban extractivism in Buenos Aires. It is also possible to explore other regional cases where similar socio-environmental conflicts exist, opening the door for comparative analysis that may bring new insights. Fieldwork methods are fruitful for studying these issues due to their potential in gaining a deeper understanding through engagement with people living in territories affected by extractivism, whose stories and experiences are the most valuable knowledge of all. These methods also provide an important sense of humility towards the issues in question. Further, Gramsci's thinking continues to be useful, particularly while studying state-civil society relations. It could be used to gain a further understanding of the political economy of other influential populist movements, as here with Peronism. Also, due to the inherent connections between political economy and ecology, especially in Latin America, a wider 'Eco-Gramscian' theoretical framework could be developed.

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