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# Territory and psychosocial health: Producing protective factors in an encampment for the agrarian reform struggle

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## Abstract

Grounded in the affirmation of the right to the common good and to a dignified life, the social function of land – as established in the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution – serves as a guiding principle. This qualitative study aims to examine potential contributions from the field of psychosocial care to the development of documents related to agrarian reform implementation processes, through the elucidation of protective factors for mental health. In addition to bibliographic research, the study is based on an empirical corpus composed of five semi-structured interviews conducted with individuals living in an encampment associated with a land rights movement. The research was carried out in coordination with practices developed within the movement's Mental Health Network. Drawing on the findings, the concept of the Social Determinants of Health is revisited and articulated with the protective factors identified in participants' accounts of their experiences in the encampment. The results indicate that the conditions created within this territory – collectively constructed and enabled by the movement's organizational structure – constituted protective health factors encompassing living and working conditions, social and environmental relations, behavior, and lifestyle. Bringing these factors to light proves essential in supporting the defense of the community's right to remain in its territory.

**Keywords:** Camping; Political activism; Social determinants of health; Social psychology; Mental health.

The absence of a strong agrarian reform policy throughout Brazil's history (as well as across Latin America more broadly) has, since the beginning of colonization, left a legacy of violence, injustice, and social conflict. The country has never overcome land concentration, nor has it adequately addressed the resulting displacement and the violations committed against the peoples of the waters, fields, and forests. Struggles for land and agrarian reform have historically persisted under a trail of numerous forms of violence within asymmetrical power disputes – whether through the extermination and expropriation of Indigenous peoples, the forced removal of

small farmers to agricultural frontiers, the deterioration of labor conditions in rural areas, the mass migrations produced by historically adopted development models, or the current unequal struggle driven by agribusiness, which pits transnational corporations against local communities (Martins, 2022).

One example of the violent nature of territorial disputes can be seen in the repeated attacks and even the decimation of Indigenous peoples, as well as in the various massacres connected to land struggles – such as those of Corumbiara (RO), Felisburgo (MG), and Eldorado dos Carajás (PA). According to reports from the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (CPT, Pastoral Land Commission) (2023), conflicts in rural areas have been increasing year after year. In 2023 alone, 2,203 conflicts were recorded. It is worth emphasizing both the insufficiency – and at times, the complete absence – of state responses capable of protecting communities involved in land conflicts. According to the CPT, beyond failing to protect communities and their territories from agribusiness operations, the Brazilian state often ends up “fostering violence against these communities through the deployment of police and paramilitary forces” (Comissão Pastoral da Terra, 2023, p. 7, own translation) in service of agribusiness interests, to the detriment of the communities and their rights. The consequences of these violations are concrete and highly visible, yet they also entail countless effects of an immaterial nature.

Looking at the history of Brazilian territory, it becomes evident that the lives of the peoples of the waters, fields, and forests are directly tied to the defense and security of their territories. The continuity of their diverse ways of life – and of their dignity – depends on the right to (re)claim, remain in, and hold their territories.

In a recently published study, Tchalekian et al. (2024) discuss the experience of the Marielle Vive Encampment, located in the State of São Paulo. At the end of 2021, the camp began receiving eviction threats. The authors note that the coercive process itself already constituted a form of suffering, producing psychosocial effects that could be significantly worsened by an actual eviction. Beyond the direct violent actions against families, violence also manifests through the removal of a set of protective conditions that are collectively built and sustained within the territorial context of the encampments.

Living conditions in an encampment are, undoubtedly, marked by precarity and by the absence of adequate public responses regarding basic rights – such as access to healthcare, education, social protection measures, and basic sanitation, among others. At the time the aforementioned study was conducted, all families were living in makeshift shacks and under various forms of social vulnerability rooted in long-standing structural inequalities. Even so, reports from interviewees clearly reflected a perceived improvement in quality of life following their arrival at the Marielle Vive encampment.

The production of documentation forming part of legal instruments – some of which serve as the basis for this study – has supported the struggle for the right to remain in occupied territories and has, albeit incipiently, addressed health-related issues, particularly mental health. This article aims to contribute to discussions on the construction of protective health factors, in their various forms, developed within the encampment, in dialogue with the concept of the Social Determinants of Health (SDH).

## **Psychosocial Documents in Processes of Territorial and Socioenvironmental Conflict**

Professionals and scholars in the field of Psychology have contributed to the production of documents ranging from academic papers to reports forming part of legal proceedings, through

which the psychosocial dimension of human rights violations and territorial and socioenvironmental conflicts has gained visibility.

Bruno Gonçalves conducted several pioneering works addressing psychosocial dimensions in contexts of territorial conflict. In a psychological technical report, Gonçalves (2017) examined the political violence perpetrated by the State against the Krenak people during Brazil's civil-military dictatorship. The author discussed the rights violations and the production of collective psychosocial trauma that occurred within the Krenak Reformatory, a detention center established for Indigenous people in conflict with the law. In another work, Simões (2021) again addressed political violence against Indigenous peoples during the civil-military dictatorship. In that report, however, he focused on the Xavante Marãiwatsédé population in Mato Grosso. Once again, the author demonstrated the process of collective psychosocial traumatization suffered by that population and argued for the possibility of collective psychosocial reparation. In an unpublished 2018 report, Bruno Simões Gonçalves, Josiclea Pires da Silva, and Patrícia Yamamoto Costa Caldeira documented the psychosocial impacts caused by the construction of the BR-135 highway on the Quilombola territories of Joaquim Maria, Santa Rosa dos Pretos, and Santa Rosa Maria dos Pinheiros. The authors identified a range of psychosocial harms to the affected communities resulting from the construction of the highway and demonstrated how plans for duplicating its lanes could further intensify these effects. Once again, the report advocated for collective reparation for the affected Quilombola communities.

Regarding the right to comprehensive reparation, Pinheiro et al. (2019) discussed the struggle of those affected by the Samarco mudslide (Vale and BHP Billiton Brasil Ltda) and the need to provide reparations to victims of the socioenvironmental catastrophe caused by the dam rupture. Also within the framework of the right to comprehensive reparation, Gonçalves and collaborators (2024) worked alongside rural communities affected by the transposition of the São Francisco River in northeastern Brazil. The authors reported that reparations have focused primarily on financial compensation for material losses, which are often underestimated or entirely absent. Their study argues that reparation processes must adopt a perspective of complexity and take into account all dimensions of health and life.

Other unpublished reports, opinions, and technical assessments<sup>4</sup> have addressed psychosocial effects related to territorial and socioenvironmental conflicts. Some of these documents were commissioned for, and included in judicial proceedings. It is noteworthy that, in more than one case, psychosocial documents were cited in judicial rulings that favored communities or peoples affected by rights violations. A significant example is the first case of collective reparation granted by the Brazilian State to the Krenak and Guarani-Kaiowá peoples<sup>5</sup>. The psychological technical report prepared by Gonçalves (2017) was part of the process that resulted in the approval of amnesty and an official apology to the Krenak people by the Amnesty Commission of the Ministry of Human Rights.

Although psychosocial reports, opinions, and assessments can be part of judicial processes related to territorial and socioenvironmental conflicts, they are, to date, not widely utilized in this area. Specifically regarding expropriation processes for agrarian reform purposes, psychosocial documents can be prepared, but they are neither required nor sufficient. According to the Federal Constitution, the primary reference governing the possibility of expropriating land for agrarian reform is the fulfillment – or lack thereof – of the land's social function: "Art. 184. Expropriation is authorized for social interest in rural property that is not fulfilling its social function". The

<sup>4</sup> As these documents are part of judicial proceedings, their full texts and authorship will not be disclosed here.

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see: <https://agenciagov.ebc.com.br/noticias/202404/comunidade-krenak-recebe-primeira-reparacao-coletiva-da-historia-do-pais>

most important elements composing the social function of land concern property productivity, environmental protection, and the safeguarding of labor rights. Thus, even when addressing issues of significant importance, such as situations of collective psychosocial trauma, psychosocial elements may be complementary to the process but do not play a central role.

The psychosocial documents accessed by the authors of this article address different contexts and communities, demonstrating the potential for Psychology to contribute to discussions concerning various territorial and socioenvironmental conflicts. They are generally requested in cases involving rights violations and socioenvironmental vulnerabilities. Consequently, it is common for these texts to focus on negative effects and illnesses – both individual and collective – resulting from various violations. The documents largely advocate for reparative measures or actions aimed at ceasing or mitigating psychosocial risk factors. Considering the Brazilian agrarian context, historically characterized by large estates, exploitation, and violence, a landscape of suffering and illness becomes evident – issues that have been properly addressed in many psychosocial documents.

Alongside the necessity of scientifically demonstrating, through reports, technical opinions, and assessments, the psychosocial harms caused by conflicts and rights violations, it is also essential to address contexts that promote health and resilience emerging from popular, traditional, and Indigenous communities (Malheiro et al., 2021). In this way, the discussion sought to explore how communities and peoples, even in the face of various attacks and forms of violence, are capable of generating bonds, life, and health. It is crucial that psychosocial documents advocate for full reparation for victims of violence. Moreover, it becomes imperative to defend the right to the continued existence of territories and communities that provide better living conditions and protective factors for the mental health of victimized populations. From this perspective, the psychosocial report discussed below was prepared.

### **Marielle Vive Camp: Organicity and Resistance**

The camp was established in April 2018, one month after the assassination of Rio de Janeiro councilwoman Marielle Franco and her driver, Anderson Gomes. It is located in the municipality of Valinhos, in the State of São Paulo, on land that previously belonged to *Fazenda Eldorado Empreendimentos Imobiliários*, an unproductive farm owned by a real estate company. This area, just over 130 hectares, had been abandoned to real estate speculation and was occupied by the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST, Landless Workers' Movement) as a form of protest against the non-fulfillment of the social function of land and to highlight the need for agrarian reform. By early 2025, more than 350 families resided on the territory, including over 100 children, as well as people of various ages and backgrounds. Most families had previously lived in peripheral neighborhoods of nearby cities before joining the camp. Recent studies have focused on experiences at Marielle Vive Camp, discussing topics such as education, community rural tourism, and the contemporary relevance of the land struggle (Alves et al., 2024; Moreira, 2024; Rodrigues & Pacheco e Zan, 2024).

As mentioned earlier, experiences at Marielle Vive Camp were examined in an article presenting results from a study conducted in November 2021, at a time when the camp began receiving eviction threats due to a decision by the 37th Civil Law Panel of the São Paulo Court of Justice. Between MST mobilizations – in coordination with other social movements, political parties, allied organizations, and civil society participation – and court orders for removal and eviction,

multiple extensions were granted<sup>6</sup>. Following this threat, the ensuing legal proceedings, and a request from the MST, the study was conducted to support discussions on the psychosocial effects of life experiences in the Marielle Vive Camp, as well as those resulting from the threat of eviction faced by families residing in the territory (Tchalekian et al., 2024). The eviction had not been carried out at the time of submission of the present article. However, its execution is considered imminent, as threats persist: no guarantees of permanent land tenure have been secured, nor have any alternative arrangements for the camp's continued existence been offered.

When Tchalekian et al's. (2024) study was conducted, the authors, drawing on technical and scientific literature as well as collected data, discussed the psychosocial risks caused and intensified by eviction processes, highlighting the production of psychosocial trauma, dehumanization, ethical-political suffering, uprooting, and social humiliation (Gonçalves Filho, 1998; Martín-Baró, 1984; Massola & Svartman, 2018; Sawaia, 2001; Simões, 2021). These processes are complex and produce lasting and intense effects. From the interviews conducted with camp residents, it became evident that, despite the challenges faced in daily life and in maintaining the camp, the community-based organization of families functioned not as a risk factor but, predominantly, as a physical and psychosocial protective factor.

The threat of eviction represents the risk of losing a territory where people have found opportunities for safety, care, solidarity, and work through diverse community bonds. The destruction of these ties – both geographic and psychosocial – formed within the Marielle Vive Camp constitutes a risk factor for the physical and mental health of its residents. Many families would be forced to leave a place to which they are already economically and emotionally connected, being cast out without housing or employment.

Accounts revealed severe rights violations experienced even more intensely before people arrived at the camp. Reports included heightened exposure to sexual violence, food insecurity, lack of social support networks, and experiences of homelessness. The narratives also highlighted the intergenerational nature of these violations, as participants described how previous generations of their families had suffered various forms of violence. In this context, the threat of eviction constitutes a re-victimization of individuals who have already endured psychosocial traumas, many of whom come from families historically subjected to multiple forms of victimization. The victimization caused by the threat of eviction would become even more severe if it were to be carried out.

Interviews also emphasized concern for children and youth, who would have nowhere to go with their families and whose dreams and plans for a dignified life would be interrupted. The insecurity, fear, despair, and imminent exposure to various forms of violence brought about by the threat of eviction generate significant suffering throughout the process.

It is important to note, as mentioned earlier, that the struggle for land and agrarian reform in Brazil is characterized by confrontation, conflict, and violence. In the few years of the Marielle Vive Camp's existence, families have already endured a series of threats and hostile acts. Although they have received support from an important segment of civil society and hosted numerous solidarity initiatives, there are still those who deny the legitimacy of the struggle for land – even when the camp occupies territory where the land's social function is not being fulfilled.

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<sup>6</sup> In June 2021, the Federal Supreme Court had suspended, for a period of six months, all eviction and removal orders involving collective areas inhabited before the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, the measure was based on the increased vulnerability that families would face amid the public health crisis caused by COVID-19. Although the suspension was originally set to expire at the end of 2021 – when the aforementioned study was conducted – it was later extended to March 31, 2022, and subsequently to October 2022. These extensions resulted from significant mobilization efforts by the MST, in coordination with other social movements, political parties, allied organizations, and civil society participation. In October 2022, the Federal Supreme Court lifted the suspension, thus authorizing eviction proceedings that would entail the removal of families from the camp and, consequently, the loss of their homes, collective gathering spaces, and sources of food production cultivated within the territory.

Perhaps the most explicit act of violence against the camp occurred in 2019, during a demonstration on the road leading to it. The protest sought to draw public and governmental attention to the camp's lack of water and to distribute pesticide-free food produced at Marielle Vive despite challenges such as limited potable water and the absence of supportive agricultural policies. Families peacefully displayed banners demanding water, spoke with passersby, and distributed food and seeds to foster dialogue and highlight the territory's productive nature. A pickup truck suddenly accelerated toward the demonstrators and ran over one of the campers – Mr. Luis, aged 72 – who later passed away. On the day of the incident, the perpetrator was arrested, as reported by several media outlets (Barreto, 2023). In addition to this episode, the camp suffered at least three attacks in August 2022, when gunshots were fired from a vehicle toward its entrance gate (Moncau, 2022).

The continued occupation of the territory, the maintenance of ongoing activities, and the pursuit of health promotion in a context of violent threat have constituted a strong response from the Movement in defense of the camp's territorial security and that of its residents.

From this broad set of actions and from the accounts of camp residents' experiences, it was possible to affirm that the Marielle Vive camp functions as a protective space where both individual and collective health are produced (Tchalekian et al., 2024). This assertion does not conceal the hardships experienced by the camp families, which calls for the necessary attention of public authorities regarding the guarantee of these families' fundamental rights. However, regarding the camp's internal organization, these difficulties are collectively addressed, and the ongoing presence and development of life in this territory have been essential for the survival of its residents. Following the theoretical framework that guides this study, the need to remain in the territory is understood as being related to the following dimensions: work and living conditions; territory and environment; interpersonal relationships, bonds, and learning; vulnerabilities and security/protection; and struggle and organicity. Based on these dimensions, it was possible to affirm that the production of ethical-political health (Souza & Sawaia, 2016) characterizes life in the encampment.

## Method

Several documents presenting psychosocial analyses attached to cases of territorial and socioenvironmental conflict, along with relevant literature in the field, compose this study's conceptual and technical framework. The corpus also includes material from interviews conducted with camp residents at the onset of the eviction threats made against the Marielle Vive camp in November 2021 (Tchalekian et al., 2024). Five individual semi-structured interviews (Minayo, 2010) were conducted remotely via the Google Meet platform by members of the MST Mental Health Network. Diversity and plurality of perspectives and experiences were taken into account when inviting participants, encompassing criteria such as sex, gender identity, race, sexual orientation, age group, family organization, and roles and activities within the camp. It is worth noting that, as participant contacts and recommendations came from MST representatives through the Movement's Mental Health Network, a setting conducive to stronger rapport between interviewers and interviewees was established. Interviewees were regarded as primary and privileged sources of information, and, as Minayo (2010) points out, interviews also reflect the social dynamics of the contexts in which they take place.

Aiming to investigate the lived experience of camp residents, the interviews addressed: 1) participants' life histories, with an emphasis on their arrival at the camp; 2) their experiences within the camp – daily routines, activities, family relationships, challenges, and difficulties faced; and 3)

the eviction process, from initial threats to perceived effects and consequences, both individually and collectively. The interviews were conducted individually to allow for in-depth exploration of each person's experiences. All procedures followed the guidelines established by Resolution No. 510/2016 of the Brazilian National Health Council (Brazil, 2016). The identities of interviewees will be kept confidential and referred to by the initial letter of their first names.

## Results and Discussion

The guiding framework for this analysis is the concept of the Social Determinants of Health (SDH). According to Buss and Pellegrini Filho (2007), although interpretations vary, the general premise of the SDH concept is that individuals' and groups' living and working conditions are directly related to their physical and mental health status. The authors further define SDH as "(...) the social, economic, cultural, ethnic/racial, psychological, and behavioral factors that influence the occurrence of health problems and their risk factors in the population" (Buss & Pellegrini Filho, 2007, p. 78, own translation).

Within the scope of public health and the World Health Organization – and in alignment with the principles of Brazil's Unified Health System – the SDH framework relates to the promotion of equity and social justice, a perspective that integrates the health-disease process and underscores the need for intersectoral public policy responses. From a critical perspective on health equity, it is essential to highlight that inequities and inequalities are structured and constituted within the capitalist mode of production, and that the understanding of the factors comprising the SDH must be approached in an integrated manner rather than through a fragmented lens (Mario, 2023; Vaselchi & Marques, 2023).

As the previous definition indicates, many SDH studies focus on risk factors associated with the deterioration of these determinants. However, in line with the approach of this article, the focus here is on how life in the camp can foster improvements across various SDH and, consequently, strengthen and promote health.

The following topics are based on a document from the *Comissão Nacional sobre Determinantes Sociais da Saúde* (National Commission on Social Determinants of Health [CNDSS], 2008). To these topics, a discussion on praxis and organicity is added.

### Living, Environmental, and Working Conditions

At several points during the interviews, participants discussed improvements in their living conditions after joining the camp and becoming part of the social movement.

Yes, I believe so [that life changed after moving to the camp]. Because they are happy people, people who eat – many of them had practically nowhere to sleep before, and now they have a small place to lie down, to rest their heads on a pillow, something they didn't have before. Food – they have food. If someone arrives here with nothing, they are welcomed, with blankets, with food, with everything. Everything. (Interviewee E.)

My life was just working and paying rent (...). I was so depressed and so anxious (...). So, I wasn't living, I didn't have a life; my life was reduced to planning how to pay bills, how to pay rent. (Interviewee A.)

The interviewees reported significant improvements in their families' housing and food conditions. These are two major social determinants of health and, in the case of the camp, are

directly linked to another crucial determinant: work. “For them [the camp] means an opportunity for housing. Of leaving the big city and producing their own food” (Interviewee M.).

The camp provides families with a place to live and, through agricultural work, ensures access to food for both consumption and sale, thereby improving their income.

(...) because here we have large plantations developed organically. That’s what matters. There’s the camp’s mandala garden. I have my own mandala garden by the shack where I live, where I grow a lot of coffee, bananas, acerola; I already have passion fruit (...) we’ve already built up a good plantation here (...). [I’m a] big farmer here at Marielle. A skilled carpenter, helping to build up this camp. (Interviewee M.)

[Living in the camp] I learned how to plant, to work in the garden. I worked a lot in the mandala garden. The mandala is our garden, you know? (...). It’s really good here. (Interviewee R.)

Interviewee M. expresses pride when talking about the camp’s crops and his carpentry skills. Interviewee R. also proudly recounts what he has learned through his work. Beyond the improvements in food and income, it is worth highlighting how the interviewees’ work activities are full of meaning, strengthening their sense of community and promoting health. Rosa (2017) suggests that participation in the MST can generate various “therapeutic factors”. Among these, the author emphasizes two “psychopolitical” therapeutic factors: ensuring survival and material security for one’s family, and the sense of accomplishment derived from the struggle.

Life and work in the camp foster the interviewees’ connection with the common natural resources of that territory.

So our struggle here is to live, to plant, to produce, and to preserve. Above all, to preserve – because when we arrived here, the spring was being trampled by the farm’s cattle. We fenced off the area. Together with the reforestation technicians, we planted trees around the spring. (Interviewee M.)

The agroecological approach to production prioritized by the MST does not oppose agricultural production and environmental protection. The productive methods – such as the mandala-style gardens – link environmental preservation with food production. This connection fosters improved working conditions, as well as healthier food and environments. Coelho (2024) argues that the MST’s agroecological model of organizing work and production is related to strengthening respect for and cultivation of diversity – both human and socioenvironmental – as well as to promoting the health of its members. The interviewees report a strong sense of identification with the territory.

This is a place where you feel something special. You feel a very powerful energy here. You feel peace, you feel tranquility, you feel welcome. You feel like you’re in paradise, you know? (...) here at home there are lots of plants – then the birds come, the animals come – it’s a very good energy. (...) planting the first plant and feeling how gratifying it is to receive the good energy that comes from it, to watch it grow. (Interviewee L.)

Beyond the improvements already discussed, several excerpts describe the welcome and support people received upon arriving at the camp: “Quality of life improves, and so do our relationships, right? Our relationship with other people changes too, you know? And that’s really good, man. Really, really good. It’s so gratifying to live here”. (Interviewee L.)

Interviewee L. speaks about how their quality of life has improved due to material gains, but also links this improvement to the relationships formed with the people from the community. In the next section, these relationships are also addressed as a social determinant of health.

## Social and Community Networks and Health

Popular organization and the sense of community expressed in the interviews proved to be essential factors for improving the psychosocial health and living conditions of camp residents – from concrete actions, such as finding collective solutions to the lack of water supply, building shelters and the communal kitchen, to the shared care for children and the camp's overall health concerns. In addition, participants repeatedly mentioned a strong sense of belonging, which brought greater meaning and social value among peers.

Coming to the camp changed a lot of things for me. In knowledge, in culture. I've gained more cultural knowledge in my life, you know? More awareness through the Movement. More love for others, truly. And you know you're not alone, you know? When you receive help from allies, from your companions, you feel you're not alone in that struggle. And that there are a lot of angels that God sends to help us in the hardest moments. That's how it was in my life. My knowledge changed – I took several courses here at the camp: a bamboo course, a course for activists, an agroecology course, many things that happened in my life that, if I were outside, I wouldn't have had the opportunities that I have in here. Of knowledge itself. I learned about bamboo here. An ally came and offered that course. And I developed this talent that had been dormant inside me. So, these are things that have only done me good. I am very grateful to be here in this camp, part of the Landless Workers' Movement, because you are truly welcomed, you know? (...) Here I learned to live with my companions. To be there for one another, you know? To exchange knowledge as well. And to awaken this desire, which is to have that focused attention on nature. (Interviewee L.)

The interviews strongly highlight the importance attributed to the Movement and its organic structure in improving living conditions, with particular emphasis on relational aspects. The strengthening of bonds of solidarity, mutual support, and help received from companions and allies fosters a change in the way individuals view others and themselves. In this context of developing relational ties among people, as well as with the spaces and activities within the camp, one observes the emergence of new forms of relational dynamics, which also promote learning and knowledge.

I learned a lot. I learned that here we are human beings who have value, something we don't have outside; that these are welcoming people who provide support, who don't discriminate against anyone, be they young or old – everyone is welcomed by them. I learned a lot. I learned to feel like a woman, because back then, outside, we were very discriminated against for being female, and here we are not. I learned this because they brought it [the information] to us. For us to learn to defend ourselves against aggressions, against the things that happen to us. That's what I learned here in the MST. I don't know if I would survive if I left this place. (...) It's the learning, you know? To be someone, to know that one day we can have a future. Maybe I won't, but the little ones will. There's school, there's learning for these children; there's that care, a care that they give to us, so much. (Interviewee E.)

The recognition of people as human beings alludes to the construction of conditions that dignify the lives of camp families, which implies access to a set of resources that also provide a foundation for building future projects, such as housing, food, work, healthcare, contact with nature, education, establishing safe and affectionate bonds, and mutual respect and support (Tchalekian et al., 2024). It is important to highlight the significance of community networks in the lives of women, single mothers, children, youth, pregnant people, individuals experiencing homelessness or facing eviction, and LGBTQIAP+ people – some of whom shared their experiences during the interviews (Gomes & Knox, 2023; Lopes et al., 2023). Recognizing the complexity and diversity of violence experienced by different bodies can inform the development of appropriate care responses that address a broad spectrum of needs. According to the document produced by the CNDSS (2008) on SDH and their protective factors, social and community networks encompass support relationships

among people and groups guided by solidarity and trust – relationships that constitute social capital. The strengthening or erosion of social capital are mechanisms that produce impacts in the field of health and are linked to socioeconomic inequities and social cohesion ties. The document emphasizes that these ties go beyond the trust bond within the family network, referring to the various possibilities for social participation, belonging to collective spaces, and engagement with public life, which correlate with members' longevity and the reduction of violence (CNDSS, 2008; Machado et al., 2023). The change perceived by interviewees regarding the quality of their relationship with culture and knowledge – which are related to and made possible by community ties – highlights the psychosocial implications for health strengthening that the creation and maintenance of meaningful connections can produce, experiences that are supported by other forms of interaction distinct from those guided by discrimination and prejudice, as illustrated in the following account:

It makes a big difference being LGBT outside and being LGBT inside the settlement, in the field, within the MST. Outside, even if you... I don't have the appearance, you know? When you have an effeminate appearance, you face a lot of discrimination – whether from colleagues, in your work environment, or with friends; whether you like it or not, prejudice exists (...). Here, I've never experienced any criticism about my sexual orientation, you know? On the contrary, I was welcomed. And here, no one tolerates speaking about an LGBT person, a lesbian, or a trans person. Here they are very welcoming and do not allow this... Not only LGBT people but also women, children... Inside here, we do not allow any act that is prejudiced, that is against a human being. We are human beings, and we need to respect each other. (Interviewee L.)

The promotion and protection of individual and collective health are closely related to social participation (CNDSS, 2008; Rosa & Sandoval, 2022). In line with the concept of “ethical-political health” discussed by Souza and Sawaia (2016), health is understood as the capacity for life and action fostered by positive encounters, a perspective that encompasses the dimension of affectivity and the dialectical nature of its historical and social constitution, recognizing that it is through collective struggle against subjugation that the common good is strengthened. This perspective seeks to overcome an individualistic reading of health. Rosa and Sandoval (2022) argue that the collective represents a space and context that promotes the capacity for action, and that political participation in social movements offers an opportunity for empowering and therapeutic moments to be experienced. The interviews revealed elements that closely align with these conceptions, reinforcing the claim that the individuals' autonomy expanded throughout their experience in the camp.

## **Behaviors, Lifestyles, and Health**

An important dimension of SDH concerns behaviors and lifestyles considered risky, such as poor diets, excessive alcohol or drug use, sedentary lifestyle, among others (CNDSS, 2008). In line with the focus of this article, the discussion will address behaviors and lifestyles that can be considered protective factors for health. According to the interviewees, joining the camp fostered progress in this regard: “We eat what the camp itself produces because the camp also grows healthy food, without chemicals. So, my health – I really can't complain about it. It is very good” (Interviewee L.)

At various times, the interviewees spoke about improvements regarding access to quality food within the camp, a central factor in the production of health. In addition, one participant reported that he had been homeless before joining the Movement and stated that living at Marielle Vive and taking part in the MST brought about a positive change in his behaviors.

I also spent a long time in *Cracolândia* (an area known for heavy drug use). I went through a very difficult time there. And thank God, when I'm here at the camp... For me, it was really good. Because I used a lot of chemicals, a lot of hard drugs... When I got here, this camp was my hospital (laughs) (...). Because I didn't get involved with that anymore, you know? (...) Thank God I live peacefully here. (Interviewee R.)

In addition to the abusive use of illicit drugs, it can be inferred from his account that before living in the camp, the interviewee was exposed to various situations of physical and psychosocial risk. However, through his participation in the Movement, he reports changes that he considers positive and even describes the community as a "paradise." Community life at Marielle Vive is guided by the rules and organizational structure of the MST.

So, everyone learns right from the start, when they enter through the gate. Because there we explain that here you can't hit a woman; you have to show respect. There can't be prejudice here in the camp; you can't fight with one another over an argument. So there are rules. (Interviewee L.)

Interviewee L. highlights the importance of these rules within the territory, which discourage violent and discriminatory behavior. Interviewee A., on the other hand, reported that in the camp she had the opportunity to care for her mental health through psychotherapy.

There are also people who come here to provide care – the psychoanalysts, I don't know exactly where they're from, I just know they come here, from Campinas and the surrounding region. They're allies. They come to offer care, and whenever they come, I'm here. They've really helped me a lot to work through all my conflicts and my inner struggles – things that didn't originate in the MST. The MST was where I found refuge to forget about those things and to heal the wounds that my childhood and past brought me. So it's here that I'm healing from those wounds. (Interviewee A.)

Through her participation in the MST, the interviewee gained access to a health service she previously did not have. The camp provided her and others with the opportunity to adopt self-care behaviors through psychotherapy. In addition, there were accounts of how the community offered protection to its members during the COVID-19 pandemic (Laurentino et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2021).

I wouldn't feel safe if I were out there, because here inside, no. Here, everyone follows rules, but it's not the kind of rule like: "You are obliged to do this." No. They are rules conveyed through words, through teaching. Hand sanitizer, clean hands. So everyone does it. If anyone got that disease, it was very few people, because everyone needed to work, and without work, no one survives. So people had to take the bus, right? But here inside, no – I didn't feel at all threatened by that disease. (Interviewee E.)

The camp environment can foster and encourage health-promoting and protective behaviors. Beyond individual choices, the form of organization and organicity established by the MST contribute to the adoption of healthy behaviors and lifestyles that, prior to joining the camp, were less likely or even impossible due to the adverse and vulnerable contexts in which people lived. Several studies have shown that even in situations of severe deprivation and violations of rights, communities linked to the MST are capable of creating spaces and relationships of care and health (Coelho, 2024; Rosa, 2017; Souza & Sawaia, 2016).

### **Political Praxis and Organicity: Social Determinants of Health, Protective Factors, and Praxical Transversality**

From the interviews, another element drew attention for being directly related to the SDH and to protective factors: collective political organization. Authors such as Gonçalves Filho

(1998), Rosa (2017), and Coelho (2024) view engagement in social struggles by individuals and communities as something that can, among other effects, generate responses to suffering and strengthen protective factors. In this same vein, political praxis can be seen as a response to the goals proposed by authors such as Martín-Baró (1996) and Arroyo & Dobles (2020), who discuss, among other things, the struggle for de-ideologization and the fight against institutionalized lies and fatalism. The *Sistema Único de Saúde* (SUS, Unified Health System), in its very principles, is grounded in a model that fosters popular participation through its councils and the system of conferences that underpin it.

The everyday experience of praxis – marked by varying degrees of engagement and obstacles – appeared to have a significant influence across several spheres of the interviewees' lives, both in terms of how they saw themselves as subjects (individual and collective) capable of transformative action through organized collective work, and in their daily coexistence. In his interview, L. recounted:

We learned a lot about respecting one another. We learned to live together, to value the collective, the organicity of building. You have nothing, and yet you build everything collectively, you know? Through organicity. So that proves that we're capable of moving mountains without money. So, the time we've lived here so far has been very good. (Interviewee L.)

From the organicity built within the camp, sociability itself begins to change. Decisions must be made collectively, which requires a certain method and is accompanied by ongoing education. Agreements are reached, and the community must uphold and engage with them so that decisions can materialize. Within the camp, participants engage in collective work oriented toward the common good – a collective “capable of moving mountains without money,” in L.'s words.

Likewise, a shift in perspective regarding the present and the future becomes evident. By overcoming traces of fatalism (Martín-Baró, 1996), the transformation of the present through collective work and the cross-cutting nature of praxis opens up new horizons for the future – new political projects that are more robust, collective, and hopeful. This dimension becomes quite clear in the statements by E. and R., below:

This struggle means everything to us; it is our hope. It's the hope we don't have out there – it's the hope we find here. The hope of being able to put beans on the table without paying so much, to have cassava, potatoes, lettuce, tomatoes. That's the hope. Because when we go to the market, if we buy potatoes, we can't afford tomatoes. If we buy tomatoes, we can't buy cassava. If we buy beans, we can't buy anything else, because it is too expensive out there. But not in here. Here, we plant those things. So we have them. We go to the garden, pick chives, lettuce, kale – that's what the struggle means to me, you know? It's very important, even though the struggle is hard – at times without water, or there's water scarcity – but with the little we have, of the rainwater we collect to fill our containers, we water the plants and see them grow. (Interviewee E.)

And if things don't work out, the MST won't leave anyone behind. The MST won't abandon anyone. (Interviewee R.)

In A.'s interview, this same perspective of a better future emerges for herself as a mother and for the children who live in the camp. In addition to the communal kitchen, the *ciranda infantil* (collective childcare spaces within the MST), and the activities designed for the children, the daily organization of community life has brought benefits to them. There is a shared sense of increased safety and of transformation regarding the responsibility for children's development. Interviewee A. reflects that:

It's completely different. Here, they [her children] have freedom. (...) Then I started talking to them and explaining that this was a way for them to have a better future –that I wasn't fighting just for myself, but that this battle I was part of was about their future. (...).

The effects on health – as social determinants and as psychosocial protective factors stemming from political organization and the concrete possibilities that arise from it – can also be observed in other organizations and social movements beyond the struggle for land and agrarian reform. The praxis of organizing life and work in community can produce emotional bonds and feelings of identification among individuals and with the territory. It can even be a common feature shared by other organizations and social movements.

## Final Considerations

Based on the literature reviewed, the interviews conducted, and the proposed analysis, it is understood that the conditions – both fostered by the territory and collectively built through the Movement's internal organization – constituted protective health factors. These encompass living and working conditions, social and environmental relationships, and behavior and lifestyle, revealing the strengthening of people's ties with the territory and with what has been developed there. Highlighting these factors, which compose the social determinants of health for this population, is relevant to supporting the defense of their right to remain in the territory. Recognizing the protective factors linked to remaining in the territory – both as a right and as a necessary step to strengthen them – can help reduce suffering and highlights the preventive role this strengthening can play.

This was an exploratory, preliminary study. It used a small sample and focused on a specific territory. Thus, further studies are needed to address other experiences and deepen the theoretical discussion of the topics presented here.

It is understood that, alongside documents addressing trauma, violence, and psychosocial risks, it is also necessary to produce knowledge focused on the protective factors present in these territories. Psychosocial opinions, assessments, and reports have proven highly relevant in revealing the many processes of rights violations in contexts of territorial and socio-environmental conflicts. This study supports the view that it is possible to demonstrate how life in certain communities is marked not only by severe deprivations of rights and major challenges but also by elements of care, prevention, and health promotion. In this way, it may be possible not only to demand full and legitimate reparation for individuals and peoples whose rights have been violated, but also to help prevent further and more severe harm and violence – such as the eviction of families from the Marielle Vive encampment. Therefore, further studies are recommended to further substantiate the contribution of psychosocial aspects in processes involving the implementation and strengthening of a popular and agroecological agrarian reform – a policy that is fundamental to fostering good living in Brazilian territories.

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