

# The role of dualism in environmental discourse: an analysis of documentary films that address the agriculture issue

## *O papel do dualismo no discurso ambiental: uma análise a partir de filmes documentários sobre a questão agrícola*

PRISCILA MUNIZ DE MEDEIROS<sup>a</sup>

Universidade Federal de Alagoas. Maceió – AL, Brazil

ISALTINA MARIA DE AZEVEDO MELLO GOMES<sup>b</sup>

Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Graduate Program in Communication. Recife – PE, Brazil

### ABSTRACT

Focusing on the concept of discursive formation, in this study we tested the hypothesis that dualism would play a central role within what we called an anti-industrial agriculture discursive formation. Therefore, we analyzed the presence of several binary schemes shared by the six documentary films that composed the corpus of the study. French discourse analysis was the theoretical and methodological approach that conducted the research. The hypothesis was confirmed, and after the identification of the binary schemes, we were able to divide them into two groups: the ones that are connected to the archetypal opposition between life and death and the ones that integrate the opposition between the antagonistic principles of freedom and slavery.

**Keywords:** Discursive formation, environmental discourse, documentary film

<sup>a</sup> Assistant professor of Universidade Federal de Alagoas (Ufal). Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3173-8596>. E-mail: [prismuniz@gmail.com](mailto:prismuniz@gmail.com)

<sup>b</sup> Full professor of Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE). Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2256-8564>. E-mail: [isaltina@gmail.com](mailto:isaltina@gmail.com)

### RESUMO

Tomando como base o conceito de formação discursiva, este estudo partiu da hipótese de que o dualismo desempenha papel central dentro do que nomeamos de formação discursiva antiagricultura industrial. Assim, analisamos a recorrência de diferentes esquemas binários compartilhados pelos seis filmes documentários que compuseram o *corpus* do trabalho. A análise de discurso de linha francesa foi a abordagem teórico-metodológica que norteou a pesquisa. A hipótese foi confirmada e, após a identificação de tais esquemas, percebemos que se dividiram em dois grandes grupos: os que se relacionam com a oposição arquetípica entre vida e morte e os que integram a oposição entre os princípios de liberdade e escravidão.

**Palavras-chave:** Formação discursiva, discurso ambiental, filme documentário

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v12i3p277-296>

## INTRODUCTION

THIS STUDY IS part of the doctoral thesis entitled *O meio ambiente na narrativa documental: uma análise das estratégias discursivas de documentários sobre a agricultura industrial* [The environment within the documentary narrative: an analysis of the discursive strategies of documentary films on industrial agriculture] (Medeiros, 2017). In such thesis, we try to create, from the mapping of argumentative regular modules, the idea of the existence of an anti-industrial agriculture discursive formation (DF) that would contemplate the heterogeneous set repertoire that is conventionally named *environmental discourse*. In this article, we intend to introduce a specific focus on the analysis conducted on the thesis. Here, we will focus on the central role played by dualism within the DF in question. In our analysis, dualism emerged as central element of the discourse of the studied documentary films thanks to the identification of different binary schemes that are used widely and regularly by the rhetoric of the films as persuasive strategies. The discursive flows that problematize the productive agricultural models are, nowadays, at the center of ecological debates, alongside themes such as climate change and solid waste. Such centrality justifies the importance of analyzing the senses that permeate such discourses.

The corpus of this research consists of six documentary films that address the theme of industrial agriculture from a critical perspective. We chose the documentary genre especially because it has as one of its main features the possibility of open expression of point of views (which differs, for instance, from the informative journalistic genres, which work with a scenography aiming to produce an objective effect of the speaker's neutrality). The open expression of point of views on industrial agriculture has allowed a more comprehensive mapping of the processes involved in the debate on the theme. We believe that, due to the relevance and the scope that the genre documentary has been acquiring as a means of expression of discourses emerging from social and environmental movements, such is perceived as object relevant to research in communication.

The studied films were the North American *Food, Inc.* (2008) and GMO OMG (2013), the French *Bientôt dans vos assiettes* (2014) and *Solutions locales pour un désordre global* (2010), the Brazilian *O veneno está na mesa 2* (2014), and the Argentinian *Desierto verde* (2013). For the choice of the corpus, we sought to study movies that comprised a certain geographical range of production, since industrial agriculture is a global problem addressed in different discursive genres worldwide. We also choose films that have been awarded prizes at film festivals and, at the same time, have had relevant circulation (which ensures that certain legitimacy within the discursive community). In other words: the choice of the

corpus prioritized identifying films representing an environmentalist discourse, having as parameters relevant circulation between public and support through the awards.

The theoretical-methodological approach used was the French discourse analysis. We sought to conduct an analysis strongly focused on materiality (verbal and non-verbal) of the chosen corpus, in such a way we constantly relied on transcriptions of excerpts and exhibitions of frames taken from the films. Concerning verbal texts, considering we have films whose official languages are different (two in English, two in French, one in Spanish, and one in Portuguese), our analysis was conducted based on the translations to the Portuguese language of transcripts of texts of the movies (assuming all risks and inaccuracies that such procedure might have brought to the analysis). The translations were all carried out by the authors of the study.

Finally, it is worth defining *industrial agriculture*, since this concept is at the heart of our research object. Industrial agriculture consists in the agricultural model that began to emerge with the end of World War II, thanks to a transformation known as the Green Revolution. It promoted the use of technological innovations in the field, disseminated under the argument to promote the increase in productivity of food. Soon, the model proposed by the Green Revolution spread in the fields around the world, becoming dominant, favoring monocultures, and spreading the use of heavy machinery, pesticides, and chemical fertilizers. Changes in the system of agricultural production were intensified in the 1990s, thanks to what was known by some as the Second Green Revolution, carried out with the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMO, transgenic foods).

### **ANTI-INDUSTRIAL AGRICULTURE DISCURSIVE FORMATION**

For this analysis, we chose to work with a complex and somewhat controversial concept: the DF. Due to different formulations and reformulations of the concept, its definition is neither accurate, neither consensual, which means that different authors use the idea of DF in different ways.

Such notion first emerged in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, by Michel Foucault. According to the formulation of Foucault (2008), discourses comprise a dispersion, since, a priori, they are not connected and do not comprise a single character. Through the description of this dispersion, it would be possible to research if among its elements we can detect certain regularity, “an order in its successive emergence, correlations in its concurrency, substantial positions in a common space, reciprocal operation, linked and hierarchical transformations”



(ibidem: 42) [free translation]. Whenever we can detect this regularity within the discursive dispersion, there is, according to Foucault, a discursive formation. With the notion of DF, Foucault intended, then, “to assign sets of statements that can be associated with the same system of rules historically determined” (Charaudeau; Maingueneau, 2012: 241).

The concept of DF is part of the Francophone discourse analysis based on its ownership by Michel Pêcheux, who inserts it into an Althusserian-marxist theoretical perspective. In Pêcheux, the concept of DF is based on historical materialism, becoming associated with notions such as ideology and class struggle, which were absent in the Foucault’s original formulation. Pêcheux defines discursive formation as

that which, in a given situation, determined by the state of class struggle, determines what can and should be said (articulated in the form of a lecture, a discourse, a pamphlet, an exhibition, a program, etc.). (Pêcheux, 1995: 160)

Later, to avoid using the concept of discursive formation in such a way each DF was isolated as an autonomous space when compared with others, Michel Pêcheux himself and, later, Jean-Jacques Courtine highlighted their dependence on interdiscourse.

which means that meanings, within DFs, are dependent on interdiscourse. In other words, interdiscourse is the place in which, for subjects who produce a discursive sequence dominated by a certain DF, objects are constituted, objects used by the speakers in such a way to be part of their discourse, as well as the articulations among these objects, by which speakers will give coherence to their inner purpose within the interdiscourse, the discursive sequence enunciated by them. (Gregolin, 2005: 4)

The dual origin of the DF concept made such to keep great instability, being plastically used to designate any group of utterances “socially and historically circumscribed that can be related to an enunciative identity: the Communist discourse, the set set of discourses given by an organization, the utterances based on a certain science, that of bosses, peasants, etc.” (Charaudeau; Maingueneau, 2012: 243). For the authors, such plasticity impoverishes the concept.

In *Discours et analyse du discours*, Maingueneau (2014) divides the categorizations used by analysts of discourse into topical and non-topical units. Whereas topical units are somehow given, previously grasped from social practices, non-topical units are created by the researcher. Genres and types of

discourse (such as administrative, advertising, etc.) would be topical units, as well as source groupings (discourses of certain social actors). On the other hand, DF would be part of the non-topical units, created by researchers according to the purpose of their research. When addressing anti-industrial agriculture discursive formation, we work with what Maingueneau (2014) calls thematic discursive formations.

Considering what has been exposed, the main argument of our study is that the dualistic discourse is a core element for constituting what we call anti-industrial agriculture DF. In the doctoral thesis of which this article is part (Medeiros, 2017), we were able to map, from the analysis of different studied documentary films, certain argumentative modules shared by all or most of the movies. Such modules, with their verbal and visual elements, are part of a discursive *repertoire* used by social actors who are opposed to the industrial agriculture model, without, however, depleting it. And this *repertoire* is, partially mapped in our analysis, which we call anti-industrial agriculture DF.

The term *anti-industrial agriculture* is widely used by the environmental discourse to refer to an agricultural production model based on the principles of the Green Revolution: “a high-performance agriculture, based on the intensive use of capital (tractors and high-productivity machinery) and external inputs (seeds of high genetic potential, fertilizers, and synthetic pesticides)”<sup>1</sup> (Cáceres, 2009: 124). The term, however, is not part of the discursive repertoire of agrochemical companies, which prefer to use conventional farming or traditional agriculture (Medeiros, 2017). The Green Revolution, which began in the post-war period, promoted strong technical and social changes in the field. Discourses in favor of such transformations have as the main argument the increase in productivity provided by the use of chemical inputs, genetically modified seeds, and agricultural machinery. Discourses against the model, almost always related to environmentalism, feature criticism of several natures. Moreira (2000) distinguishes technique criticism, social criticism, and economic criticism. As for the first, it is argued that such practices have been causing pollution, poisoning natural resources and foods, loss of biodiversity, soil destruction, and siltation of rivers. Social criticism, on the other hand, mentions that the agricultural model of the Green Revolution, based on large estates and heavy machinery, generates “impoverishment, unemployment, rural workers’ slum formation, urban and rural exodus, emptying of the land, overexploitation of rural workforce, including working women, children, and older adults” (Moreira, 2000: 45). Finally, in the economic criticism there is an emphasis on the process of increase in costs of the technological development of the Green Revolution.

<sup>1</sup> In the original: “una agricultura de alto rendimiento, basada en el uso intensivo de capital (tractores y maquinarias de alta productividad), e insumos externos (semillas de alto potencial genético, fertilizantes y pesticidas sintéticos)”.



### DUALISTIC DISCOURSE

Observing the argumentative schemes identified in the analyzed documentary films, we perceive that at several moments they use a dualistic discourse to create an opposition between industrial agriculture and organic/agroecological agriculture. It is by using binary schemes – such as life versus death, creation versus destruction, fertility versus sterility, and freedom versus slavery, among others – that the dualistic discourse manifests itself more evidently in the analyzed corpus.

According to the *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, the term “dualism” has a variety of uses in the history of thought, being the most common, regarding a given domain, that referring to the existence of two essential types or categories of things or principles (Robinson, 2003). Dealing with the agricultural issue based on binary schemes that oppose antagonistic principles can, thus, be considered within the scope of the dualistic thinking. It is also worth mentioning that the dualism present in the studied discursive formation has a fundamentally Manichean character, since there is clear discursive construction that defines the *good* side from positive principles and the *bad* side from negative principles.

A discursive strategy that helps supporting the Manichean discourse is the *dehumanization* of the other side: the enemy to be fought, most of the time, has no face. People consider the industry, within industrial agriculture, in corporations or even in Monsanto (multinational company of agriculture and biotechnology), but since any of these subjects have no personality, it becomes simpler to associate them with the idea of evil in the mythological sense. Next, we will present some of the binary schemes identified within anti-industrial agriculture discursive formation. We divided such schemes into two main groups: those relating to the archetypal opposition between life and death, and those integrating the antagonistic principles related to ideas of freedom and slavery.

### LIFE VERSUS DEATH

In all studied documentary films – some to a greater, others to a lesser extent – there are recurrences of utterances and images that evoke the archetypes of life and death. More precisely, there is the discursive creation of confrontation between life and death, creation and destruction, fertility and sterility, among other dualisms. Such confrontation is generated, for example, from the constant use of the sign *war* and others related to this idea. Among the six studied films, five of them associate the origin of industrial agriculture with war (literally),

whereas four of them contain statements which propose the metaphor of a war against nature and/or against life. Overall, we have war in its literal sense giving legitimacy to the bellicose metaphor, in a logic-discursive scheme that we could synthesize as follows: industrial agriculture was born from war weapons (literally), which started being used as inputs. These inputs are nowadays used in a war (bellicose metaphor) against nature or life. The following image demonstrates the game between literal and metaphorical meanings of war from a visual metaphor.



FIGURE 1 – Sequence of images displayed in *GMO OMG*  
 Source: *GMO OMG* (2013).

The sequence of images present in Figure 1 was taken from the movie *GMO OMG*. In it, an animation shows war tanks, soldiers holding guns, and warplanes that become, in the following frames, men holding manual sprayers, ploughing tractors, and spray planes.

Next, there are some examples of utterances that aim to address the issue of industrial agriculture from the use of the war metaphor.

1. After World War II, the battle with nature became an all-out war. Chemicals produced for explosives and nerve agents were reformulated as fertilizers and pesticides, then rained down on farmland around the world. (Narrator in *GMO OMG*, 2013)

2. GMOs emerged in the 90s as the industry's most advanced weapon against nature, plants engineered to produce pesticides and withstand deadly weed killers. But

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as weeds and bugs quickly adapted, the cure became a curse. (Narrator in GMO OMG, 2013)

3. The agribusiness industry does not produce food and does not collaborate with nature. In fact, it works based on the war against nature. (Vandana Shiva in O VENENO..., 2014)

4. Seeds are the nerve of the war. The entire population is controlled by this business to providing seeds. It's a cold war. I think it's a cold war against the population, this seed business<sup>2</sup>. (Narayan Reddy in SOLUTIONS..., 2010)

5. GDP<sup>3</sup> does not comprise, for example, people who get all kinds of illnesses, including cancer. It doesn't consider the cost of the treatment of these diseases, the lives that are lost, the pain of the families. For them, it's only a matter of money. Quality of life or the destruction of nature are not put into question. The business world is all that matters. They are contaminated by the deceiving statistics that mask a war against life. In 2011, we accounted for about 20 entities. Today we are much more. A huge part of the society fights against the poison that kills us a little every day when we consume foods contaminated by pesticides. We fight for life. (Vandana Shiva in O VENENO..., 2014)

<sup>2</sup> In the original: "La semence c'est le nerf de la guerre. Ils contrôlent toute la population avec cette combine de fournir les semences. C'est une guerre froide. Je pense que c'est une guerre froide contre la population, ce business de semence".

<sup>3</sup> Gross domestic product.

We can observe that, in verbal utterances contained in the movies, the agent of this metaphorical war is Western agriculture, industry, agribusiness industry, or, ultimately, the capitalist system, the latter implied in excerpt no. 5, in which there is a "they" without referent. The close association between "they" and the capitalist system, or their agents, can be made thanks to the lexicon used in the utterance, using terms such as "GDP," "money," and "business."

Still in excerpt no. 5, we can verify that it discursively creates both sides of the trench: we have a "they," which we can relate to the capitalist system and that promotes a war against life, and a "we," described as "a huge part of the society" that fights for life. While the narrator states that there is "a huge part of the society," we see in this picture a list of several NGOs and social movements engaged in the agroecology cause. There is a clear discourse of confrontation between life and death. This idea is present in all films, whether through the dualism "life versus death" itself, or through varying binary schemes such as "preservation versus destruction" and "fertility versus sterility." While industrial agriculture is associated with signs of death, whether verbal or imagery (the war, previously highlighted, is one of them), the alternative models linked to an agroecological production are associated with signs of life. In the excerpt



no. 6, such a construction clearly appears: We, the peasants of Haiti, are the guardians of the seeds of life. At the moment, we see the seeds of death invading our country. (Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, leader of the Papaye Peasant movement, in *GMO OMG*, 2013)

The “seeds of life” are landrace seeds, used in ecological agricultural models, whereas the “seeds of death” are the transgenic marketed by the multinational company of biotechnology Monsanto. In the excerpts 7-11, we can verify other forms of association of industrial agriculture with signs of death:

7. We all have to eat, and it’s about time for society to become aware that a diet full of toxics is a diet of death, of disease, of cancer<sup>4</sup>. (Vandana Shiva in *O VENENO...*, 2003)

8. They say they have a gift to give you. It’s a gift to kill you. It’s a gift to destroy you, destroy who you are. (Unidentified farmer in *GMO OMG*, 2013)

9. The poison comes from the air, the soil, it is sprayed, it kills in every way. It infects and destroys human beings, birds, bees, it destroys the soil, it pollutes the air and water. When it comes to combating pests, we must know that the plague is the poison itself. (Narrator in *O VENENO...*, 2014)

10. In old roads, birds flee, animals disappear, waters dry up. Where there was life, a green desert is born. This is the model that agribusiness proposes: devastated lands for the people, and a lot of money for the rich. Contrary to what the prophet foretold, the backlands won’t turn into sea and neither the sea will turn into backlands. If the current agricultural model persists, Brazil will turn into a great desert. (Narrator in *O VENENO...*, 2014)

11. You eliminate the chemistry, synthesis fertilizers from a certain region in France and what happens? Nothing, because the soil is dead. That means that we don’t live in a desert like the Sahara, but in a virtual desert, because the land has already given us everything; it is burned, it is dead. It will no longer give us life. It just gives me because we use synthesis fertilizers. So, in fact, we live in a desert, but a virtual desert. But one day, maybe, it will be a real one, especially if oil continues to rise, since the entire chemical agriculture has oil as its basis<sup>5</sup>. (Dominique Gillet in *SOLUTIONS...*, 2010)

In the excerpts no. 7, 8, 9 and 11, the noun “death,” the verb “to kill,” and the adjective “dead” are connect with the elements associated with industrial agriculture. The agents of death are “a diet full of toxics” (reference

<sup>4</sup> In the original: “Todos tenemos que comer, y ya es hora de que la sociedad tome conciencia de que una dieta llena de tóxicos es la dieta de la muerte, es la dieta de la enfermedad, es la dieta del cáncer”.

<sup>5</sup> In the original: “Tu enlèves la chimie, les fertilisants de synthèse d’une certaine région française et qu’est-ce qui se passe? Il se passe rien, parce que la terre elle est morte. Donc ça veut dire on vive pas dans un désert comme le Sahel mais on vit dans un désert virtuel, parce que la terre elle a déjà tout donné, puis elle est brûlé, elle est morte. Elle ne donnera plus rien. Elle me donne que parce qu’on met du fertilisant de synthèse. Donc en fait on vit dans un désert, mais c’est un désert virtuel. Mais un jour sera peut-être un désert total, surtout si le pétrole continue de monter, puisque toute l’agriculture chimique elle est basée sur le pétrole”.

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to pesticides), “a gift” (reference to transgenic seeds donated by Monsanto to Haitian farmers), and “the poison” (another reference to pesticides). On the other hand, in excerpt no. 11, the soil is dead because of chemical inputs with which it is treated. In excerpts no. 8 and 9, we perceive the presence of the verb “to destroy,” which also has as agents the pesticides and transgenic seeds. In excerpts no. 10 and 11 a possible transformation of Brazil and France into deserts is mentioned. The sign “desert” is associated with ideas of absence of life and sterility.

In addition to the aforementioned signs, others are triggered with certain frequency by the films to discursively connect industrial agriculture to the idea of death – among them, the words “suicide” (of farmers who adopt industrial agriculture) and “genocide” (of human populations killed by cancer).

If the previous excerpts demonstrate discursive association between industrial farming and its elements with the signs of death, in the following statements we can see that, constantly, ecological agriculture is associated with signs of life:

12. There are alternatives to feed ourselves with quality and without risk of contamination. These are the organic cultivated in Paracambi, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. In this site, where culture is organic, animals are not confined, and everything inspires quality of life. (Narrator in *O VENENO...*, 2014)

13. Agroforestry is a farming system that considers the soil as a living being. All life depends on this life. If this life here is in ICU<sup>6</sup>, where are we, [since] we who depend on it? What we eat, what we drink, the air we breathe, the clothes we wear, it all depends on how this soil is. (Jonas Severino Pereira in *O VENENO...*, 2014)

14. Producers of landrace seeds fertilize life fighting against the monopoly of transgenic seeds (Narrator in *O VENENO...*, 2014).

15. The encounter of organic agriculture... We usually say that is an encounter for the good. There, everyone is concerned about the quality of what we eat. No one is worried about getting along with each other, or getting rich, or not that rich. I want to leave for my daughter something to be preserved, something that is sustainable, something she can be proud of. I’m preserving my water, I’m preserving my woodland, I’m preserving my animals, I’m preserving the forest, I’m preserving our health. (Marcos Palmeira on *O VENENO...*, 2014)

<sup>6</sup> Intensive care unit.

16. I'm going to get the soil under the forest, you'll see. We're going to see the structure of a soil when it is alive. There are tiny balls, it's a "couscous," as we say. Oh, but here there are several roots, here I am in the woods. The soil is not very attached, it is structured by life, it is a true "couscous." Because that is a land that's alive<sup>7</sup>. (Claude Bourguignon in SOLUTIONS..., 2010)

Instead of destruction, preservation (excerpt nº 15). Instead of death, life and quality of life (excerpts no. 12, 13, 14 and 16). Instead of desert, fertilization (excerpt no. 15). The opposition death/life is very clear when we compare the discourses on industrial agriculture with those on ecological agriculture models. In excerpt no. 14, we also perceive the construction of an opposition good versus bad, when the respondent states that the encounter of organic agriculture is the "encounter for the good."

In *O veneno está na mesa 2* [The poison is on the table 2], the dichotomy life versus death is also addressed from visual elements. In Figure 2 we show a visual metaphor: while the image of oranges is verbally associated with health benefits, another image, this time of rotten oranges, is verbally associated with the use of pesticides, which, for its turn, are textually linked to certain health problems such as cancer. Rottenness, which can be understood as the deterioration of life, establishes a visual connection between pesticides and death. The use of this metaphor is a discursive and visual strategy that, in addition to strengthening the life/death duality, aims to overcome a filmic difficulty: it is impossible to visually distinguish a fruit grown with and without pesticides. Hence, the *rottenness* of the fruit treated with pesticides, though unreal, or rather, not literal (the pesticide itself does not rot fruits), creates a meaning effect that strengthens the central argument of the movie. In the documentary film, the same process of *rottenness* is done with various other fruits and vegetables.

<sup>7</sup> In the original: "Je vais aller prendre du sol sous la forêt tu vas voir. On va voir la structure d'un sol quand il est vivant, c'est que des boulettes, que du couscous comme on dit. À mais là il y a énormément des racines, là je suis en forêt. Le sol se tiens pas tellement, il est structuré par la vie, c'est du vrai couscous. Parce que ça c'est de la terre qui est vivante".



FIGURE 2 – Image of rotten fruits that work as a metaphor for health impairments that would be caused by pesticides

Source: *O veneno está na mesa 2* (2014).



### **FREEDOM VERSUS SLAVERY**

Another dichotomy very addressed discursively in documentary films is the opposition between freedom and slavery. On the one hand, we have an entire lexicon connected to the idea of slavery that is associated with industrial agriculture, whereas terms associated with the idea of freedom are used to refer to organic/peasant agriculture. We also observed the presence of correlated binary schemes such as autonomy/independence versus dependence. This discursive strategy appears in all the studied documentary films except the French *Bientôt dans vos assiettes*. In this excerpt, we can see the use of the word “slave” in the movie *Food, Inc.*:

17. The companies keep the farmers under their thumb because of the debt the farmers have. To build one poultry house is anywhere from \$280,000 to \$300,000 per house. And once you make your initial investment, the companies constantly come back with demands of upgrades for new equipment, and the grower has no choice. They have to do it or you're threatened with loss of a contract. This is how they keep the farmers under control. It's how they keep them spending money, going to the bank and borrowing more money. The debt just keeps building. To have no say in your business, it's degrading. It's like being a slave to the company. (Calore Morison in *FOOD...*, 2008)

In the utterance, we have a comparison between the system of industrial production of chickens and the social phenomenon of slavery (“It's like being a slave to the company.”). The discourse in question triggers a discursive memory of slavery and its negative historically meaning. We also have the use of the word “control” in the expression “keep [the farmers] under control”; as we shall see, this is a word widely used in documentary films to describe the relationship of domination of companies with farmers. The expressions “has no choice” and “to have no say” also help coming up with the idea of restriction of freedom. In addition to “slavery,” sometimes words referring to another historical process are used: serfdom.

18. Serfdom makes tobacco planters totally dependent on it. (Narrator in *O VENENO...*, 2014)

19. Smoke-producing families, in addition to all the risks in terms of health which they take, no longer produce their own food. These are families that have no community life, because this is a kind of work that some even call serfdom. It's a strong term, but is a style of serfdom, because it has nothing to do with the peasant

logic of work organization. Each family, on their own property, working for a company. (Paulo Petersen in O VENENO..., 2014)

Although comprising labor systems historically distinct, slavery and serfdom are similar because they evoke a discursive memory related to the restriction of freedom and autonomy. We can notice in the excerpt no. 19 why the word “serfdom” is used. It occurs because the speaker realizes that the use may sound inappropriate to the listener, since this can trigger a discursive memory linked to feudalism, a social mode of production located in time and space (European Middle Ages). In addition to the opposition freedom versus slavery/serfdom, we also perceive discourses that oppose freedom to dictatorship, as in this case: 20. We can have the monoculture of the mind, which is a military dictatorship, or we can have the diversity of mind and planet, which is freedom and prosperity for all (Vandana Shiva in O VENENO..., 2014).

In the excerpt, “military dictatorship” and “freedom and prosperity for all” are placed on opposite sides, the first being associated with the metaphor of the “monoculture of the mind” and the second with the idea of “diversity of mind and planet.” The metaphor “monoculture of the mind” creates an implicit association between military dictatorship and industrial agriculture, which normally works with monocultures – whereas freedom, discursively related, in the excerpt in question, to the word “diversity,” is indirectly associated with peasant farming, which usually works with different crops at the same space.

In the statement present in excerpt no. 18, we have an association between serfdom and dependence, which is another term used with certain frequency in the documentary films. If, on the one hand, industrial agriculture is associated with the word “dependence,” on the other, in the discourses of the documentary films, organic agriculture makes the producers “independent,” as we can observe in the following excerpt.

21. The seed, it is the independence of the poor people. The producers, they are only independent if they have land and seed. The importance of landrace seed, organic seed, organic vegetable garden, they have such a great importance in our lives, this is our freedom project. (Olalia de Fátima da Silva in O VENENO..., 2014)

In the aforementioned excerpt, independence and freedom are associated with a discursive scheme that connects both to the peasant organic agriculture. We have a clear counterpoint between serfdom/dependence, which are related to industrial agriculture. Also associated with the idea of independence, the



words “autonomy” and “sovereignty,” as well as its variants, are often triggered by documentary films, as we perceive in these utterances:

<sup>8</sup> In the original: “Prêt de Bangalore nous avons rencontrés Narayan Reddy, un petit paysan. Autrefois, il était un champion de l’agriculture chimique intensive, gagnant tous les concours agricoles, est sacré meilleur producteur de l’état du Karnataka. Mais, comme il le dit, I was a loser, j’étais un perdant. Tout l’argent qu’il gagnait par sa production partait en fumé en achat de semences, de pesticides, d’engrais et de tracteurs. Il décide un jour de tourner le dos à l’agriculture chimique et des méthodes traditionnelles. Après une ou deux années difficiles, il retrouve un très bon niveau de production, devient autonome, n’a plus de débit”.

<sup>9</sup> In the original: “Dès que les fermiers deviennent autonomes en semence et en engrais, l’agriculture devient vraiment facile. La semence c’est le nerf de la guerre. Ils contrôlent toute la population avec cette combine de fournir les semences. C’est une guerre froide. Je pense que c’est une guerre froide contre la population, ce business de semence. J’ai bon espoir que d’ici cinq ou six ans au moins cinquante pour cent de nous petits fermiers et éleveurs vont se reconverter à ce système”.

<sup>10</sup> In the original: “Et je dis que cultiver son jardin aujourd’hui quand on a la possibilité c’est un acte politique, un acte de résistance [...]. Et l’autonomie c’est le maître mot aujourd’hui”.

22. Near Bangalore, we found Narayan Reddy, a small farmer. Formerly, he was a champion of intensive agriculture, winning all farming competitions and being praised as best producer in the state of Karnataka. But, as he says, “I was a loser.” All the money he earned with his production turned to dust with the purchase of seeds, pesticides, fertilizers, and tractors. One day he decided to turn his back to chemical agriculture and traditional methods. After one or two difficult years, he achieved a very good production level, became autonomous, and has no debt anymore<sup>8</sup>. (Narrator in SOLUTIONS..., 2010)

23. When farmers become autonomous with seeds and fertilizers, agriculture becomes really easy. Seeds are the nerve of the war. The entire population is controlled by this business to providing seeds. It’s a cold war. I think it’s a cold war against the population, this seed business. I hope that five or six years from now at least 50% of our small farmers and breeders are going to convert to this system<sup>9</sup>. (Narayan Reddy in SOLUTIONS..., 2010)

24. In my opinion, growing your own garden today, when we have a chance, is a political act, an act of resistance. [...] And autonomy is the keyword nowadays<sup>10</sup>. (Pierre Rabhi in SOLUTIONS..., 2010)

25. We know our everyday struggle. If we lose our lands, if we lose our territories, we don’t lose our financial independence only, but the sovereignty over our bodies and our lives. (Nalu Farias in O VENENO..., 2014)

26. The Haitians weren’t the only ones protesting genetically modified seeds in the biotech industry. Resistance was springing up all over the world. For Haiti, accepting Monsanto’s gift would mean losing their own seeds, their food sovereignty, an essential piece of their culture and way of being. And they were fighting for something that we had lost without even knowing we were giving it up. They believe that the seeds of life are the common inheritance of all humanity, as numerous and diverse as the stars above, owned by none, and shared by all. (Narrator in GMO OMG, 2013).

27. So nowadays the ecological-based production for local markets is a real alternative for generating or resuming the food sovereignty and safety of the people. (Walter Pengue in DESIERTO..., 2003)

28. The global intervention of governments will have to care about food market, and production of food, I insist, is strongly associated with another concept we cannot afford to lose, which is food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is a sovereign right of the people, not just to eat, but to produce their own food. How? In their own style. Under which agenda? Their own agendas. (Walter Pengue in DESIERTO..., 2003)

In the previous utterances, speakers mention autonomous farmers, autonomy, and financial independence. In the excerpt no. 22, the idea of autonomy is associated with the end of the debt to companies that sell seeds and agricultural chemicals thanks to the abandonment of industrial agriculture-related practices. In no. 23, we perceive autonomy in the production of the very seeds and fertilizer. In no. 24, it is in the production of the very food. On the other hand, in excerpt no. 25, which addresses financial independence, it is linked to land ownership. Overall, all these uses of the words “autonomy/independence” are related to a discourse of independence in relation to industrial agriculture and its products. The ideal model of the autonomous farmer created by such discourses comprises farmers who own the land and produce their own seeds and fertilizers, without using the industry inputs. Moreover, in excerpt no. 24, the focus on rural farmers is extrapolated, addressing all who have the opportunity to grow their own garden, which would be an act of resistance. The use of the word “resistance” gives the impression that on the other side, industrial agriculture, there is oppression. In no. 25, we also observe the use of the word “sovereignty,” which here is specified as “sovereignty over our bodies and our lives.” In excerpts 26, 27, and 28, the importance of “food sovereignty” is highlighted, a concept strongly associated with previous discourses on farmers’ autonomy.

From such discourses, we can visualize the creation of an implied discursive analogy, which places companies of agricultural inputs as the new slave masters or feudal lords. The refusal of farmers to their products would be a form of resistance, a cry for independence. Clearly, when it comes to autonomy, sovereignty, and freedom in documentary films, release is sought concerning the *modus operandi* of industrial agriculture.

An element that goes through several of the excerpts aforementioned is the issue of property. Ownership of land, seeds, and food (when it comes to “having their own seeds” or “producing their own food,” for example). We can see how such issue is addressed also in these statements:

29. The devilish idea of seed producers is: getting a very small stamen and a very small pistil, worthless, and making attempts until these two mediocre parents

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<sup>11</sup> In the original: “L’idée diabolique des fabricants de semences c’est je prends un parent tout petit, un autre parent tout petit qui vaut rien, les deux valent rien et je fais des essais jusqu’à ce que 2 parents minables, donnent un hybride magnifique. Et ça je vais le vendre à l’agriculteur parce que comme ça quand il va replanter et que les graines de parents reviendront, il aura des trucs minables, donc il ne pourra pas gagner sa vie. Donc je le coince, comme ça je l’étrangle. C’est complètement diabolique l’hybride, c’est l’idée d’empêcher l’agriculteur d’être propriétaire de ses semences”.

<sup>12</sup> Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement.

<sup>13</sup> In the original: “Quand on enlève au peuple ce qu’il a de plus sacré, c’est à dire la semence, là vous faites vraiment du terrorisme ça c’est du terrorisme. Quand on vole aux gens ce qui est à eux ou ce qui devrait leur appartenir c’est les obliger à se soumettre à vos quatre volontés. Avec l’apparition de la question des transgéniques, avec tout ce débat, le mouvement a ouvert les yeux. C’est là qu’ils ont vraiment compris que le petit paysan, le paysan du MST, le sans-terre commençait à courir un grand danger s’il ne cultivait pas avec sa propre semence”.

result in a magnificent hybrid offspring. And I will sell it to the farmers, because then, when they replant it and the parents’ beans revive, they will have mediocre plants; then, they won’t be able to make a living. I hound them, I strangle them. The hybrid is completely devilish, it’s the idea of preventing farmers from owning of their very seeds<sup>11</sup>. (Claude Bourguignon in SOLUTIONS..., 2010)

30. So I say to the peasants: grow your own seeds; when you have them, they control the food chain. Then, resume the agriculture that formerly existed in this country. That doesn’t mean I’ll take you to the Stone Age, but at least I do this: I’m preventing you from killing yourselves. (Devinder Sharma in SOLUTIONS..., 2010)

31. When you take from the people what is most sacred to them, which is the seed, you’re really promoting terrorism. That’s terrorism. When you steal people what is theirs or what should be theirs, that is forcing them to submit to all your wills. With the emergence of the transgenic issue, with all this debate, the movement has opened my eyes. That’s when they really understood that small farmers, MST farmers<sup>12</sup>, the landless farmers, began running great danger if they did not cultivate with their own seeds.<sup>13</sup> (Amarildo Zanovello in SOLUTIONS..., 2010)

32. It was to change life, the seeds Monsanto sent to us. Understand? We wanted to have our own homegrown seeds to plant. We plant produce that you can plant every year. With the Monsanto product, you can plant just one time. That’s why we didn’t take it. (Unidentified man in GMO OMG, 2013)

33. When you genetically modify a crop, you own it. We’ve never had this in agriculture. (Michael Pollan in FOOD..., 2008)

34. In the case of Monsanto, their control is so dominant. If you want to be in production agriculture, you’re gonna be in bed with Monsanto. They own the soybean. They are going to control that product from seed to the supermarket. They are, in effect, gaining control of food. (Troy Roush in FOOD..., 2008)

Here we perceive the similarity of certain discourses propagated in documentary films by the Marxist discourse, more precisely when discussing the ownership of the means of production. However, the classical Marxism did not comprise peasant workers, turning its attention to urban-industrial labor relations. We can understand, in some lines of the documentary films, a type of transposition from the Marxist discourse to the current relationships in the field by the following logic: with transgenic seeds, companies become owners



of certain food types, making farmers dependent on their inputs (in a type of ownership of the means of production). In excerpts 29-32 the possession of seeds is addressed, which would have been denied to farmers by the logic of industrial agriculture. On the other hand, in excerpts 33 and 34 there is more: speakers attribute to industrial agriculture the possession of “a crop” and of “soybeans” (in the second sentence, the ownership subject is specified: Monsanto). This excerpt (n° 35) can also be related to certain Marxist discourse on the ownership of the means of production and exploitation of labor in the capitalist model: It’s about delivering all our lands to the major capital. And pretending that we, workers, rural workers, are only able to be employees. We don’t agree with this. (Francisco Negrin in *O VENENO...*, 2014).

In some of the aforementioned utterances, we observe that the lexicon linked with the idea of property comes along with the noun “control” or the verb “to control.” In one of the excerpts, Monsanto controls the soybean “from seed to the supermarket,” it controls the food. In another, when peasants own the seed, they control the “food chain.” The expression “from seed to the supermarket” is strongly associated with the idea of the food chain. So, both utterances, delivered in different movies, bring the idea of power struggle for controlling the food chain.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed at demonstrating that dualism plays a central role in anti-industrial agriculture DF, identifying its constant presence in the discourse of the analyzed films and seeking to understand how the creation of such binary schemes linguistically works. Considering that what we call anti-industrial agriculture discursive formation a DF constituting a whole wider and heterogeneous context, which is the environmental discourse, an interesting suggestion for future research would be to verify to what extent the dualistic thought is triggered when addressing other environmental themes such as climate change, solid waste production, and the overall production of energy, among others.

It is noteworthy that, for the sake of focusing, we decided to work in this article with two groups of binary schemes that have outstood the most, which were the ones opposing ideas related to life and death and those opposing the lexicon related to the concepts of freedom and slavery. However, in our doctoral thesis, we also analyzed other binary schemes such as the opposition between local and global (being “local” related to ecological agriculture and “global” to industrial agriculture) and between traditional and modern/scientific (being



“traditional” associated with organic farming and the “modern/scientific” with industrial agriculture). Such schemes, however, were less strict concerning their antagonism than those presented in this article. Whereas the dichotomies life/death and freedom/slavery were discursively created based on irreconcilable opposition, in the case of local/global and traditional/modern, some utterances present in the films point to the possibility of a synthesis, which breaks the notion of dualism, in the philosophical sense of the term.

Furthermore, it is worth highlighting the fact that, even though having studied six different films, based on the discursive recurrences we found in such, and having created a repertoire of argumentative modules that would be part of the anti-industrial DF, the films were not homogenous, since they obviously have their own discourse particularities. *Bientôt dans vos assiettes*, despite sharing many other argumentative modules listed in our thesis, does not use in a relevant way the binary schemes studied in this article. In *Desierto verde* and *Food, Inc.*, such schemes are present, but they do not constitute a central element in the discursive construction of the films. It is in the documentary films *GMO OMG*, *Solutions locales pour um désordre global*, and *O veneno está na mesa 2* that the dualistic discourse emerges in a stronger and more central way. In the latter, a particular utterance is able to discursively synthesize the problem discussed in this article, when simultaneously triggering both dualisms groups studied here. In it, the physicist Vandana Shiva states that “it is about choosing what kind of world we want to live: in a world of beauty and freedom or in a world of exploitation, diseases, and devastated lands.” Such statement also demonstrates another argument developed in this article: dualisms triggered by the discourse of documentary films have a markedly Manichean character.

A final conclusion to be highlighted is the fact that, even considering only the three films that address dualism the most, each of them are produced in a different country, with different agrarian contexts (United States of America, France, and Brazil). Therefore, we can assume that the presence of dualism in discourses opposed to industrial agriculture goes beyond geographical boundaries. The dualistic approach of the agricultural issue would be, hence, as global as the anti-industrial agriculture DF and the very environmental discourse. In other words: the agricultural issue, in our study verified with documentary films, is probably being addressed by a discourse strongly marked by dualism. Such conclusion allows two important perspectives for continuing the research. The first, confirmative, would be the verification of the existence of such centrality in other genres of discourse. Efforts to this end have already been considered in our doctoral thesis (Medeiros, 2017) and demonstrated the presence of the

same binary schemes in genres of digital media such as websites and posts on Facebook. The second perspective would have the purpose of investigating, from reception studies and/or theoretical reflections, the implication of the strong presence of this dualism in environmental communication. Is it successful in creating negative senses concerning the industrial agriculture model and, consequently, positive senses as for the alternative models? ■

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Article received on April 19, 2018 and approved on September 7, 2018.