

Challenging Social Inequality

Selected chapters translated from the Portuguese by Miguel Carter



The Landless Rural Workers Movement and Agrarian Reform in Brazil

EDITED BY Miguel Carter

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Book cover photograph: Occupation of the Giacometti estate in Paraná (1996).

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Frontispiece: More than 12,000 people participate in a sixteen-day National March for Agrarian Reform to Brasília, 2005. Photo courtesy of Francisco Rojas.

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15 Beyond the MST The Impact on Brazilian Social Movements

The Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) has had a significant influence on Brazil's contemporary struggle for agrarian reform. Its mobilization strategies have become emblematic symbols of the demand for land redistribution.

Social scientists of various disciplines and leanings assume that the MST's relative success can be understood by analyzing its formation, internal structure, conflicts, and their direct consequences. This approach owes much to the movement's image as a path-breaking social actor. Its landless camps with black tarp-covered shacks, long-distance marches, and occupations of state-owned buildings, after all, represent a novel form of grassroots mobilization in Brazil.¹ Along with the allure sparked by these activities, scholars have also focused on the country's sharply unequal agrarian structure and attributed MST effectiveness to Brazil's historic need for land reform. The movement's success, however, also encompasses issues that go well beyond the nation's agrarian scene.²

This chapter highlights a particular contribution: the MST's role in fostering a new pattern of interaction between the Brazilian state and social movements, replicated in a variety of urban and rural settings. The argument unfolds in two parts. First, it shows that MST actions contributed in a decisive way to the creation of a number of grassroots groups driven by a host of demands other than land redistribution. It demonstrates this by providing an overview of four such movements, all of which have had historically close ties with the MST: the Peasant Women's Movement (MMC), the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB), the Small Farmers' Movement (MPA), and the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST).³

The chapter then examines the MST's impact on Brazil's rural trade union movement and the formation of other landless groups that have drawn inspiration on the MST's mobilization template.⁴ This section builds on a case study of Pernambuco. In the mid-2000s, this state had fifteen organizations engaged in

land struggles, the largest concentration of such groups in any part of the country.⁵ A review of these developments will show how the MST's pattern of mobilization has been adopted by other poor people's movements and became the main formula for advancing popular claims in contemporary Brazilian politics.⁶ This new dynamic had an important influence on state interactions and policies dealing with a wide range of historically disadvantaged groups.

A Single Pattern for Many Processes

The landless movement's early mobilizations among the *colonos* (family farmers) of southern Brazil, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, brought together groups of small farmers afflicted by an array of conflicts that permeated Brazilian society. Its first landless camps involved sons and daughters of *colonos* unable to purchase a farm plot as result of rising rural property prices. They also included families that had lost their farms due to the construction of hydroelectric dams, and people who had returned from failed colonization schemes in the Amazonian region. These landless camps became a symbol of struggle and hope for thousands of peasant families who took shelter under their black-tarp shacks. Moreover, they inspired and engaged the support of various progressive groups—dissenting politicians, religious activists, trade unionists, and intellectuals—who came to see these camps as an exceptional site for political contestation.

The intense exchanges that took place between these emerging landless groups and their political supporters helped establish a new generation of popular leaders among the landless peasants of southern Brazil. The ambiance enveloping these first camps also served as a stimulus for the development of other initiatives at the grass roots. Over time, then, land mobilizations in the southern region inspired the creation of a number of other social movements, which are briefly reviewed here.

From Land to Water: Movement of People Affected by Dams

The Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) emerged out of the same political and geographical context that gave rise to the MST. Its early stirrings started in 1980 when a group of university professors, pastoral agents, and peasant families opposed to the federal government's plan to build a series of hydroelectric dams on the Uruguay river, in northern Rio Grande do Sul, formed a commission to gather information on the families to be dislodged by the dam's reservoir. The Regional Commission of People Affected by Dams (CRAB) evolved subsequently into a movement by adopting various protest tactics to demand, at first, a fair compensation for those affected by the dam's construction and, eventually, the cancellation of these large construction projects.⁷ The formal shift from a regional committee to a national movement took place

in March 1991. By then MAB members had embarked on the development of an organization akin to that of the MST, with active branches in various parts of the country.

CRAB leaders were very familiar with the landless peasant camps that had been set up near the village of Ronda Alta in the early 1980s, scarcely 100 kilometers away from the epicenter of their own struggle. In these camps they met with many peasants that had lost their farms due to the construction of hydroelectric dams in the 1970s. CRAB's initial organization, made up of people displaced by dams and their supporters, was akin to the first commissions established by landless peasants to travel to Porto Alegre and present their demands before state authorities. This similarity contributed to CRAB's early legitimacy.

CRAB and the landless movement in northern Rio Grande do Sul played a pivotal role in the formation of their own national organizations. Their territorial expansion was shaped by their shared ability to organize at the grass roots, connect popular sector groups scattered across Brazil, frame their claims as rights, and pursue their demands vis-à-vis state authorities. Though run independently, MST and MAB have often collaborated on various activities. Many MAB activists have taken part of MST trainings and joined the landless movement in numerous mobilizations. Both groups, in fact, have common protest tactics and symbols. MAB has sponsored the occupations of various dam construction sites in order to enhance its bargaining position. Like the MST, its members also march with red flags and wear red caps with emblems that identify their movement. The MST has continued to offer valuable support for Brazil's anti-dam movement, thanks to its larger organizational structure.

Over the years, MAB spearheaded several campaigns to stop the development of large hydroelectric plants. In cases that appeared to be irreversible, the movement would lead negotiations with dam contractors and investors to protect the rights of the affected families. By 2006, MAB included ten regional organizations that were active in seventeen Brazilian states, including, Ceará, Paraíba, and Sergipe in the northeast; Bahia and the Jequitinhonha Valley in Minas Gerais; Mato Grosso; Goiás; Tocantins and Maranhão; Rondônia; Pará; São Paulo; and Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul in the south.⁸

From Land to Gender: The Peasant Women's Movement

Brazil's movement for land reform generated a momentum and space that facilitated discussions on a variety of other social issues, including women's rights and their political participation. The first women's groups were formed in the MST's landless camps during the early and mid-1980s with the support of pastoral agents. Discussions within this nascent network of women study circles, linked to the MST and rural trade unions, fueled awareness of the need to advance their agenda independently from the church, the trade unions, and the landless movement.⁹

One of the first campaigns organized by these peasant women centered on obtaining state recognition as “rural women workers,” a legal category that would confer this segment of the agricultural workforce the same rights to health care and pension benefits granted to urban women and male farm workers. Over time, the peasant women also started to question the patriarchal structure of the rural organizations of which they were a part. As a result, they began to insist on more positions of leadership in the rural workers unions, MST, and other social movements, and call for their effective participation in the committees formed to negotiate policy demands with state authorities.

Though active in the MST’s struggle for land redistribution, many of women engaged in this alternative network felt the problem of gender inequality transcended their fight for agrarian reform and needed to be addressed by peasant women in an autonomous way. These discussions stimulated the creation of the Rural Women Workers’ Movement (MMTR) in 1989. Similar to the MST and MAB, this new movement emerged largely out of organizing activities that took place in northern Rio Grande do Sul.

The MMTR eventually expanded to various other parts of the country and did so by engaging women’s groups linked to the MST and rural trade unions. In all this, the MMTR retained its organizational autonomy and became one of the most active women’s groups in Brazil, notably during the 2000s. A National Coordination Committee of Rural Women Workers set up in 1995 helped strengthen the MMTR’s network by bringing together peasant women linked to several different rural groups: the MST, MAB, the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), the Church’s Pastoral Service for Rural Youth (PJR), several rural trade unions, a number of local rural movements, and eventually the Small Farmers Movement (MPA).¹⁰

In 2004, the MMTR joined La Via Campesina’s international network of peasant associations. This decision was preceded by an internal debate that led to a rebranding of the organization’s name to the MMC. The MMC’s first National Congress was held in March 2004 and attended by 1,500 delegates from sixteen states.¹¹ Like the MST, the MMC members regularly employ different mobilization tactics to advance their claims and pressure the state to enforce their rights. They sponsor workshops and other activities aimed at promoting political activism among peasant women.

In March 2006, women activists linked to the MMC and MST invaded and destroyed part of a tree seedling plantation and laboratory owned by Aracruz Cellulose, a large pulp mill conglomerate. This contentious episode occurred in Barra do Ribeiro, close to the state capital of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, which was then hosting the United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Second International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development. The protest action taken at the Aracruz facilities sought to draw attention to the indiscriminate expansion of large-scale eucalyptus plantations.

La Via Campesina advocates charged these agribusiness corporations of creating vast “green deserts” that undermined biodiversity, local food production, and the sustainability of family farming. This conspicuous and atypical episode generated national headlines. Thirty-seven activists were subsequently charged with breaking the law.

From Land to Credit: The Small Farmers Movement

With the MST’s territorial expansion and consolidation a number of new challenges appeared on the scene. One that gained particular salience in the 1990s concerned the access to farm credit. This issue was raised by new land reform settlers and embraced soon thereafter by other peasant farmers. These demands were fueled in many ways by the MST’s relative success in establishing land reform settlements in many parts of the country, in areas once dominated by large cattle ranches and plantations oriented mostly to the production of export commodities.

The first government program established to provide farm credit to the new settlers was the Special Credit Program for Agrarian Reform (PROCERA), which was instituted in 1985 to “increase the agricultural production and productivity of land reform beneficiaries, by promoting their full integration into the market, and thus allowing their ‘emancipation,’ or rather, independence from the government’s guardianship, along with obtaining property titles to their new landholdings.”¹² PROCERA, however, only became effective in 1993, as a result of a series of MST mobilizations to demand land expropriations and state support for its settlers.

Other small farmers also began to mobilize for agricultural support policies, particularly in southern Brazil. In 1996, MST activists helped organize many of these peasants into the MPA. This new movement—like the MST, MAB, and MNC—was also started in northern Rio Grande do Sul. In fact, the mobilization that prompted the MPA’s formation was a large protest camp of 15,000 peasant families that called on the federal government to provide emergency relief to family farmers that had lost their crops due to a prolonged drought. The camp’s long rows of black tarp shacks were mounted on the outskirts of the town of Sarandi, scarcely 20 kilometers from the site of the 1981 encampment at Natalino’s crossing that gave birth to the MST.

Through their joint mobilizations in the late 1990s, the MST and MPA helped foster several new government programs geared toward peasant farmers, notably the National Program for the Strengthening of Family Agriculture (PRONAF), among other initiatives administered by the Ministry of Agrarian Development. MST and MPA have continued to collaborate closely through the La Via Campesina network. Their common advocacy efforts and protest actions have facilitated important changes in the state’s agricultural policies. Prior to the 1990s, the state’s rural priorities were geared almost entirely to support large land-

holders and commercial farmers. The rise of a new wave of peasant movements, however, created the conditions needed to introduce a series of new public programs aimed at benefiting small landholders. Despite these reforms, the state's historic largesse toward the landed elite has remained basically intact.

From the Countryside to the City: The Homeless Workers Movement

The MST's impact on other grassroots groups has not been confined solely to rural areas. In the 1990s, its organizing and mobilization strategies were also replicated by urban popular movements, which began to alter in a radical way traditional forms of protest in Brazil's major cities. During the 1970s and early 1980s the country's larger metropolis experienced a surge of neighborhood associations, formed to get state agencies to provide basic public services such as sanitation, electricity, and street pavement. These urban groups became an important space for political socialization under the military regime, when strikes and other demonstrations were severely repressed, since their demands for local improvement were rarely perceived as a sign of serious political contestation.¹³

These neighborhood associations have remained active in several Brazilian cities. But after the mid-1990s, the most visible urban movements were not the ones engaged in the effort to improve public services in the *favelas* (shantytowns) or middle-class neighborhoods. By then a new wave of mobilization began to coalesce around the demands of the *sem-teto* or homeless movement, composed of poor city dwellers who lacked access to housing and the means to obtain it.¹⁴

The homeless movement's newfound prominence in urban Brazilian struggles is directly related to the MST's success in the countryside. This stems from more than just their similarity in name. Like their landless counterparts, the main mobilization strategy of the homeless is carried out through the occupation of buildings and undeveloped urban properties.¹⁵ When the homeless movement occupies a vacant parcel of land it also sets up a protest camp like the MST with black-tarp shacks and the group's flag displayed on a tall flagpole. In some cities, notably in the state of São Paulo, the movement has occupied abandoned buildings, both public and privately owned, and demanded state authorities to transform these constructions into residential units.¹⁶

More than a dozen homeless movements had emerged in Brazil by the late 2000s, most of which have remained active in specific metropolitan areas, in particular Porto Alegre, São Paulo, and Recife. The MST has played an influential role in bolstering many of these groups by offering workshops for its activists. Other supporters include Catholic agencies that work among the urban poor and left-wing political parties.¹⁷ The most important of these associations is the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST), which was founded in 1997, and has operated mainly in the cities of Recife and São Paulo.

In 2003, more than 10,000 MTST members occupied a large area in the metropolitan region of São Paulo donated by the state government to the Volkswagen car company. A village of hundreds of black-tarp shacks was created overnight on the site. The action and close similarity to MST's protest tactics triggered national news headlines. These urban mobilizations have, in effect, helped consolidate a distinct way of asserting popular claims Brazil.¹⁸ These popular sector groups have gained societal recognition by infusing their takeover of public spaces with a *movement approach* grounded on occupations and protest camps organized in both urban and rural settings.

The MST and Rural Trade Unions: The Case of Pernambuco

Since their creation in the early 1960s, the rural workers unions have served as the nation's main political representative for Brazil's agricultural labor force. This section will show the MST's significant impact on these unions through a case study of the country's largest rural trade union association, the Federation of Agricultural Workers of Pernambuco (FETAPE).

Following the 1964 military coup d'état and the suppression of the Peasant Leagues and other independent movements in the countryside, the rural trade unions became the only legal form of political representation available to underprivileged rural people. Their monopoly of representation rested on two pillars: the struggle to enforce existing rural labor laws and the effort to provide their members with access to state-funded medical and retirement programs.¹⁹ Various other demands were raised at trade union congresses conducted in the course of more than four decades, including repeated calls for land reform. Still, the agrarian question was not deemed a central topic of discussion among national union leaders.²⁰

Since its founding in 1963, the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG) has been strongly influenced by FETAPE leaders. As such, historically, CONTAG's decisions have been affected by the experience of rural trade unions in Pernambuco, and particularly the sugarcane plantation workers in the state's coastal region, or Zona da Mata. There, FETAPE had shown a combative spirit by organizing, in 1980, the first rural labor strike under the military regime. After the mid-1990s, FETAPE rekindled its organization by sponsoring hundreds of land occupations. These undertakings were instrumental in changing CONTAG's approach to the struggle for agrarian reform and illustrate the MST's impact on other Brazilian popular movements.²¹

The sugarcane industry in Pernambuco entered a period of steady decline following President Collor de Mello's decision to abolish the federal government's marketing board—the Sugar and Alcohol Institute—and terminate a series of subsidies that had kept the industry afloat. Thousands of sugarcane plantation workers were laid off as a result, many of them without the compen-

sations required by existing labor laws. This situation prompted a dramatic decline in union participation. Trade union leaders explained this demobilization in terms that were quite similar to the plantation owners: the economic crisis had reduced the number of jobs available in agriculture and produced a vast reserve of unemployed laborers, hence the drop in union membership.²²

During this time, labor leaders found it very difficult to deploy traditional strategies for pressing their claims on sugarcane plantation owners—such as strikes, court injunctions, and wage campaigns—because of the bankrupt status of many of these estates. Other landlords could dismiss calls for wage increases by alleging financial constraints as a result of the region's economic downturn. The massive layoffs of sugarcane workers also led to a substantial decline in union dues, which were normally deducted from the plantation payrolls. This sudden drop in funding weakened the union's capacity for mobilization.²³ Even some of the strongest trade unions in the region experienced a rapid deterioration of their once well-built organizations. Among union leaders, all these developments enhanced perceptions of a serious crisis.

In 1992, a senior and respected union president in the Zona da Mata's southern region agreed to support a group of MST organizers. Working in close collaboration with the landless activists, the union leader helped sponsor the occupation of an unproductive sugarcane estate, the first major land takeover in the region.²⁴ After this, a handful of other trade unions teamed up with the MST to establish an unprecedented wave of land occupations in the Zona da Mata. FETAPE itself, however, was not involved in the initial land mobilizations. In fact, the unions engaged in these struggles did so without any coordination among themselves.

Still, in 1993, FETAPE created a new secretariat to handle agrarian reform issues. At the time, FETAPE leaders had strong misgivings about the MST's mobilization strategy, especially the "illegality" of its land occupations. This tactic, after all, countered the federation's longstanding practice of operating within the state's legal framework, a tradition that facilitated the unions' survival and expansion under the military regime. Adding to this, federation leaders viewed the idea of trespassing on someone's private property to set up a landless camp and call for the area's redistribution as foreign and hazardous.

In other words, FETAPE's ability to associate its demands with a movement that operated outside of the union structure required more than just setting up an internal secretariat to deal with agrarian problems. Land takeovers upset the federation's customary ways, which were forged over three decades of successful engagement.²⁵ Thus, initially, FETAPE's support for the MST and trade unions involved in land occupations strived to maintain a clear separation between the landless families and plantation workers, and preserve an explicit division of labor between the two groups.²⁶

FETAPE and the MST remained close until 1995, when all federal and state government agencies in Pernambuco required that a FETAPE representative accompany any negotiation involving rural workers. This requirement, however, changed in mid-1995, following a clash between landless workers and the police. Thereafter, the MST began to negotiate directly with the federal government's land reform agency, INCRA. The end of FETAPE's mediation efforts on behalf of the MST signaled a definitive split between the two groups. From that point on, the MST and FETAPE began organizing their own land occupations and demonstrations. The MST's newfound recognition among sugarcane workers propelled a surge of land occupations in the Zona da Mata. These developments gave the movement ample exposure in the state and local news media, and wider recognition in various progressive forums. As a result, MST land occupations in Pernambuco jumped from fifteen in 1994 to seventy-three in 1999.²⁷

FETAPE's internal elections in 1996 ushered in few changes at the helm of the federation, with the exception of one position: that of the secretary for agrarian reform. By selecting a new young union leader with close connections to the MST, and familiarity with its mobilization tactics, senior FETAPE officials indicated an interest in stepping up the federation's involvement in land struggles. Soon thereafter, FETAPE and the MST embarked on an intense competition over their land occupations. Indeed, nowhere in Brazil was the rivalry between the landless movement and a rural workers federation as intense as it was in Pernambuco.

All the changes brought about by the bankrupt plantations, the rising number of unemployed sugarcane workers, and newfound competition with the MST, prompted Pernambuco's rural trade unions to adopt a new style of making demands. These transformations at the state level were soon reflected in CONTAG's national debates. The 1998 election of yet another FETAPE-trained leader to CONTAG's helm gave added force to these concerns. In fact, during his campaign, this leader promised to increase CONTAG's support for land occupations carried out by rural trade unions in various parts of Brazil.

Thus, one can conclude that transformations that took place in Pernambuco's rural workers federation, as a result of its competition with the MST, had a direct influence on the orientation of Brazil's national rural labor confederation. A number of other federations, such as the FETAEMG in Minas Gerais, FETAG-BA in Bahia, and FETAGRI-PA in Pará, have since adopted the main tactics and symbols of Brazil's struggle for agrarian reform, by engaging in land occupations and setting up landless camps with rows of black-tarp shacks and banners flying on high masts.

None of these trends led Pernambuco's unions to become an MST-like organization. Still, by joining the wave of land occupations, spurred further by the

the Brazilian Rural and Urban Workers Movement (MTRUB). Barred from holding leadership positions in their local trade union, both individuals joined an MST landless camp, where they learned the basic elements of the movement approach, and then decided to form their own movements. A similar split led to the creation of the Struggle in the Countryside Organization (OLC). This group emerged as an offshoot of FETAPE and was led by a former trade union activist who sought to prioritize the fight for land reform over the union's traditional defense of labor rights. Prior to his rise as a union leader, the OLC founder had collaborated informally with the MST. He then went on to promote the MST model within the union movement. After leaving FETAPE, the leader drew on his network of union contacts and supporters to establish a new landless organization.

Most of these landless groups were started in the late 1990s, during a surge of MST and FETAPE land occupations and the formation of various new land reform settlements. Their mobilization and recognition by the state have helped draw public attention to the problems faced by the poorest inhabitants of the Zona da Mata, a region of Brazil where the grip of its powerful landlord class has remained quite strong.

The movement approach deployed here and in other parts of the country can thus be viewed as an instrument through which impoverished people can achieve an element of social recognition. These forms of collective action have enabled many people to be treated as legitimate political subjects by state agents. All this has not only fostered their social inclusion, but provided an auspicious context in which, as Émile Durkheim writes, individual and group differences "are highlighted, made conspicuous and multiplied."³⁰ The MST's arrival to this region and mobilization for agrarian reform triggered a growing dispute over the access to public funds, which until then were an exclusive resource of the area's large plantation owners.

The Pernambuco case helps challenge the assumption of many scholars and opinion leaders that view the people involved in these landless movements as motivated solely by the desire to obtain land in order to preserve a traditional lifestyle and model of social reproduction. The situations reviewed here refute the reductionist views inherent in such observations, particularly those of José de Souza Martins who regards such people as "community and asset entrepreneurs oriented by traditional and conservative values of land, labor, family, community and religion."³¹ To the contrary, the findings presented here suggest that people's involvement in these grassroots movements have catalyzed a process that breaks with traditional patterns of behavior and social hierarchies in the Zona da Mata region. By participating in these movements, rural workers have actually cultivated ideas and dispositions that challenge their previous subordination to local landlords.

Active involvement in these social movements enables participants to take

federal government's budding interest in land redistribution, trade union leaders found an effective way to revive the rural workers movement in other parts of the country, including the Amazon region (see Ondetti, Wambergue, and Afonso, chap. 8, this volume.) The trade unions' decision to adopt elements of the MST's mobilization strategy, in a context beset by a diminished number of hired rural laborers, helped increase the unions' public visibility, while opening new venues for dialogue and negotiation with state authorities.

The links between social movements and the state are crucial in understanding how land occupations and other grassroots mobilizations have become a way of asserting citizenship rights in Brazil. The development of rights requires, after all, that they be sanctioned by the state. Land struggles in this country can no longer be confined to matters of territorial redistribution. Groups engaged in land mobilizations have also actively pursued other basic rights, by calling for, among other demands, state policies to contain the violence inflicted by rural landlords and reverse the state's historic neglect toward the rural poor by providing access to decent public health care and schools.

The Movement Approach: The Consolidation of the MST Model

Pernambuco also offers an auspicious terrain in which to examine the impact of MST land struggles and competition with rural workers unions on the rise of new forms of collective action. In early 2004 there were more than seventy organizations in Brazil engaged in MST-like mobilizations for land. Pernambuco alone accounted for fifteen of these associations.²⁸ Most of these groups were formed by former MST or trade union activists that had left their organizations for a variety of reasons. Some were older people with families to care for, who found it difficult to devote as much time to the movement as the younger MST activists, who were mostly single. Others held jobs that required considerable time investment.²⁹ Hence, with few opportunities to rise in the MST or union hierarchy, yet fully aware of the potential involved in organizing a landless group, they drew on their personal network of family, friends, and neighbors to create—with INCRA's endorsement—their own landless movements. All of these groups imitated the MST's organizational model. They designed their own flags, wore caps with their movement's logo, set up landless camps with rows of black-tarp shacks on unproductive landholdings, and staged sit-ins in public buildings. In other words, they adopted what I describe as the *movement approach*.

Drawing on their small town base, these groups became a legitimate venue for garnering state attention and fostering local participation. These movements offered an alternative space for community leaders that had been excluded from the rural workers unions; as was the case with the founders of two of these associations, the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MTBST) and

part of a process of social differentiation, through the development of new political spaces and, above all, by gaining exposure to new social values. People do not turn to these movements for lack of options, but decide to join them among other alternatives, such as migrating to the city or pursuing the same activities they had done before. If they opt to go to a landless camp, they can choose between one sponsored by the MST, the rural trade unions, or other landless movements.²² Contrary to Martins's argument, then, living in the countryside does not foreclose all available options to people involved in land struggles. These new popular organizations have facilitated the life transformation of thousands of people who consider these movements legitimate, and who, by joining their struggles, have helped transform them. Indeed, the MST is no longer what it was when it arrived in Pernambuco, and neither is the region's old structure of social domination. It is therefore senseless to argue as some scholars do that the MST has merely replaced the old patterns of dependency with a new form of subordination.

Conclusions

This chapter has offered an analysis of the MST's significance for Brazilian society and politics based on a review of its direct and indirect influence on other social movements. In doing so, it constructed an argument ground on three main processes.

First, the MST has developed a new pattern of struggle for agrarian reform in contemporary Brazil, grounded on the formation of grassroots movements and the use of direct action tactics, like occupying of rural estates and public buildings. Given its voluntary membership base, the MST does not represent the entirety of land claimants in Brazil, not even those of smaller regions like Pernambuco's Zona da Mata. Through its actions and ability to establish a novel pattern of rural mobilization, however, the MST stimulated the creation of other landless groups and propelled the rural trade unions to join the struggle for land reform.

Second, MST demands, after the early 1990s, began to encompass issues that went beyond the call for land redistribution and called for a variety of public policies in support of peasant farming. These claims produced a similar effect to the MST's struggle for the expropriation of large rural estates, in that they also extrapolated the movement's immediate interest and affected other groups experiencing similar needs. The rise of the Small Farmers Movement emblemizes this dynamic, as does the Peasant Women's Movement. The latter, in fact, drew inspiration from the groups of women formed in the landless camps and rural trade unions, as it mobilized to foster greater gender equity within these popular organizations and other societal spaces. In both cases, the MST facilitated crucial networks and opportunities to enhance the organizing skills of

people who helped create these movements, and thus ensure that the demands for adequate farm policies and gender equality would be promoted in a collective and autonomous fashion.

Third, the MST has inspired existing groups to advance their claims in a new way. The Movement of People Affected by Dams, for one, started as a regional commission set up in northern Rio Grande do Sul to gather information and petition state officials. However, as a result of its workshops with the MST and other joint activities, it gradually began to adopt a movement approach. The competition stirred between the MST and rural workers unions in the Zona da Mata had a similar impact, in that it produced a new generation of union leaders that gained stature within their organizations by employing MST tactics. These developments revitalized Pernambuco's rural trade union movement. They helped garner media attention and strengthened FETAPE's capacity to negotiate with the state, on traditional concerns over wages and retirement benefits, as well as several other new demands.

None of these developments would have taken place if the MST had acted simply as a "mediator" between preestablished groups and the state, as Martins and other scholars insist.³³ To the contrary, the MST has played an active role in forging new social perceptions and identities—grounded on categories linked to gender, peasant farming, and landlessness—which, over time, have clustered families and individuals around specific movements. It was in the MST landless camps after all that participants began to cultivate their self-image as "landless people."

These new categories, though, became effective only with the transformation of traditional patterns of state behavior, brought about through a set of popular collective actions. As a result, Brazil has seen the diffusion of what I characterize as the *movement approach*—that is, a form of collective expression grounded on a set of actions and procedures fashioned by the MST that regulate activities carried out by movement activists and, most significantly, by state agents.³⁴ Indeed, the movement approach has become so compelling that, in practice, only groups that follow and replicate its method are treated as legitimate actors by INCRA's regional authorities.

Over the last quarter of a century, the MST has become one of the most revealing examples of the fact that, in Brazil, there are no benefits to be gained by treating the concepts of state and civil society in a dichotomous manner.³⁵ By mobilizing ordinary people in tandem with public officials, this social movement has effectively changed the country's history of collective action in a profound way.

Notes

Translated from the Portuguese by Miguel Carter.

1. See Sigaud (2000) and chapter 9 in this volume.
2. This chapter is informed by research activities carried out in Rio Grande do Sul between 1994 and 1999, and 2004–05. On the broader agrarian process involved, see Tavares dos Santos (1985).
3. All of these movements, with exception of the MTST, have joined La Via Campesina, an international network of peasant associations, see Fernandes's chapter 5 in this volume.
4. According to INCRA, in 2003 seventy-two groups were involved in different land struggles across Brazil.
5. Further details on the groups involved in land struggles throughout Brazil can be found in Fernandes (tables 5.4 and 5.5, chap. 5, this volume).
6. Borges (2003).
7. On MAB's historical development, see Vainer (2009), Moraes (1996), and Navarro (1996a). On the CPT's influence in the movement's formation, see Poletto (chap. 4, this volume).
8. Guedes (2006: 19).
9. According to my research findings in Rio Grande do Sul's Ronda Alta region, the first landless camp set up at the Macali farm in 1979 included a group involved with women's issues. For information on the MMC's early history, see Stephen (1996) and Navarro (1996a).
10. See www.mmcbrasil.com.br.
11. These representatives came from the southern states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, and Paraná; the southeastern states of Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo; the mid-west state of Mato Grosso do Sul; the northeastern states of Alagoas, Bahia, Maranhão, Paraíba, and Sergipe; and the northern states of Acre, Amazonas, Roraima, and Tocantins. The only state delegation that participated in the Congress, yet declined to join the new organization was from Pernambuco, which retained the original name, MMTR.
12. Rezende (1999: 1).
13. Boschi (1987).
14. In Portuguese the term *sem-teto*—literally “roofless”—recalls the term for landless, *sem terra*.
15. The tactic of occupying buildings did not originate in Brazil, yet gained impetus in the country thanks to the MST's success in using similar strategies. On the use of building occupations as a social movement tactic in Europe, see Argiléz and López (2004).
16. Another homeless group, the National Movement to Struggle for Housing (MNLH), has been active mostly in southern Brazil.
17. I witnessed several joint activities between the MST and the homeless movement while conducting fieldwork in Pernambuco in 2002 and 2003.
18. Sigaud (2000).
19. Sigaud (1980).
20. Medeiros (1981).
21. On FETAPE's involvement in land occupations, see Rosa (2004b), which is based on a study sponsored by the Latin American Social Science Council (CLACSO) in 2003–04.
22. See the document “Seminário Regional” (1993: 40).
23. According to several union leaders I interviewed, the number of hired sugarcane workers fell from roughly 240,000, at the time of the 1980 strike, to less than 60,000 laborers in 2000.

24. The MST's first land occupation in Pernambuco took place in 1989, but ended in failure due to the lack of support from the rural trade unions and the state governor, Miguel Arraes. Though left-leaning, he viewed the occupation as an illegitimate act and ordered its eviction. MST subsequently established contact with trade union leaders from the Zona da Mata region in 1992. These meetings led to the joint organization of the first successful land occupation in Pernambuco, which targeted a large and bankrupt sugarcane plantation; see Sigaud (2000).
25. Pernambuco's main newspapers questioned FETAPE's new support for land occupations in various news articles and editorials that treated these activities as acts of political disorder.
26. Anonymous interview with a FETAPE director in Recife, September 2001.
27. Figures based on statistics provided by the MST; for further details, see Wolford (table 12.1, chap. 12, this volume).
28. Data on the groups engaged in land mobilizations in Pernambuco were provided by local INCRA officials in September 2002.
29. Additional information on these landless movements can be found in Rosa (2004a).
30. Durkheim (1995: 360).
31. Martins (2000a: 49). This chapter contests Martins's sociological interpretation of the agrarian reform debate. In it, he treats these elements of reductionism, not only as an empirical finding, but mostly as a political strategy, designed to preserve the truth status of partial theories that pretend to be universal ones. As such, Martins's (2000a) defense of an idealized view of the peasantry vis-à-vis his detractors (in various social movements, political parties, and intellectual circles) mummifies the peasantry in a way that allows him (2000b) to promote his standing as an eminent intellectual and sociologist of the "ordinary man." Here, the simpler the rural man, the truer his own theory.
32. Rosa (2004a, 2006).
33. Martins (1996: 158).
34. On the *movement approach*, see Rosa (2004a).
35. The MST has straddled both state and civil society categories since its origin. In fact, its most visible leader, João Pedro Stédile, helped to organize the first landless camps while employed by the state government of Rio Grande do Sul. More recently, since the early 1990s, the MST has regularly called on the federal government to hire more civil servants to staff INCRA and allocate greater funds for its activities.