


BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

## Migrations and Revolutions in Brazil over Two Centuries

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This essay reviews the following works:

**Before the Flood: The Itaipu Dam and the Visibility of Rural Brazil.** By Jacob Blanc. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. Pp. 320. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781478004899.

**For Land and Liberty: Black Struggles in Rural Brazil.** By Merle L. Bowen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. xxii + 248. \$99.99 hardcover. ISBN: 9781108832359.

**Agriculture and Industry in Brazil: Innovation and Competitiveness.** By Albert Fishlow and José Eustáquio Ribeiro Vieira Filho. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. Pp. xiv + 244. \$70.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780231549523.

**Migration and the Making of Industrial São Paulo.** By Paulo Fontes. Foreword by Barbara Weinstein. Translated from the Portuguese by Ned Sublette. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. Pp. xvi + 280. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822361343.

**An Economic and Demographic History of São Paulo 1850–1950.** By Francisco Vidal Luna and Herbert S. Klein. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018. Pp. xxviii + 448. \$75.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781503602007.

**Brazil's Long Revolution: Radical Achievements of the Landless Workers Movement.** By Anthony Pahnke. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018. Pp. xx + 274. \$65.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780816536030.

These six books provide us with very diverse angles and insights on the migrations of millions of Brazilians from rural to urban areas and on those who chose to remain in the countryside. They also dissect, in very different ways, the relationship between industrialization and Brazil's recent agricultural revolution. Writing from the perspectives of history, political science, and economics, these eight authors—three Brazilians and five from the United States—offer us glimpses into structural patterns as well as the experiences of the people and communities caught up in the larger forces at work. Five of the six books concentrate on the period after 1930, with the emphasis on the post-1960 decades. The exception is Francisco Vidal Luna and Herbert S. Klein's *An Economic and Demographic History of São Paulo, 1850–1950*. This volume is the second part of a trilogy, sandwiched between *Slavery and the Economy of São Paulo, 1750–1850* (2003) and *Social Change, Industrialization, and the Service Economy in São Paulo, 1950–2020* (2022). These two eminent economic historians, one from the United States and the other from Brazil, have

collaborated on many volumes over the past two decades, and they are living proof that intellectual productivity does not have to end with retirement. (Luna is in his seventies and Klein in his late eighties.)

While Luna and Klein, as well as Albert Fishlow and José Eustáquio Ribeiro Vieira Filho in their volume, lay out the larger social, economic, and political processes of migrations and revolutions in agriculture and industry, Paulo Fontes dissects the formation of class, social networks, the workplace, neighborhood, families, and local politics that migrants experienced in both formal and informal settings. He reveals the human face of the larger, structural forces. Whereas the first two books analyze these forces and the movements of labor and capital, especially from the Northeast to the Southeast and from the Southeast into the Center-West, Fontes shows us the lives the urban migrants created after they settled in the Southeast. The works of Jacob Blanc, Anthony Pahnke, and Merle Bowen focus on the lives of those rural people who chose not to migrate, and their tenacious efforts to remain on their lands.

Over the past two centuries, hundreds of millions of people left their homes and migrated across continents and oceans, and from rural to urban areas. In the century leading up to the First World War, tens of millions of Europeans crossed the Atlantic Ocean, primarily to the United States, Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina. In the past three-quarters of a century, tens of millions of rural people migrated to rapidly expanding urban areas all over Latin America. About 3 million European and East Asian migrants flowed into Brazil between 1870 and 1940, reshaping the states from São Paulo to Rio Grande do Sul. From the 1940s to the 1980s, nearly 40 million migrants from the Brazilian Northeast moved southward, especially to the state and city of São Paulo. Brazil's population expanded from 10 million inhabitants in the 1870s to 40 million by 1940, 100 million in the 1970s, and more than 210 million today.

Historically, in Europe two revolutions undergirded and fueled the great migrations from country to city and from Europe to the Americas. The first was an agricultural revolution beginning in the late seventeenth century that forced peasants off the land and through greater productivity made it possible to feed the expanding urban populations. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, an industrial revolution increasingly, and very unevenly, employed the burgeoning urban masses and transformed western Europe into the most dynamic and affluent economy to that point in human history. Brazil experienced massive migrations and the transformation of industry and agriculture, but in processes very unlike those in Europe or the United States. In Latin America, Brazil has been exceptional in its size, resource endowments, and possibilities. Despite the traditional Brazilian pessimism about unfulfilled potential (“the country of the future . . . and always will be”), the country experienced some of the highest economic growth rates in the world from 1870 to 1970. For all the flaws of industrialization, industrial growth has helped move Brazil into the ranks of the largest and most modern economies in the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Unlike the classic western European pattern, Brazil industrialized without an agricultural revolution. Centuries-old struggles over land tenure in the countryside, especially in the Northeast, accompanied urbanization and industrialization in the last half of the twentieth century. Even more uneven than western Europe's experience in the nineteenth century, as millions of country people left rural regions and flooded to mushrooming cities, vast sections of the countryside remained unproductive, and industry could not absorb the new urban migrants. Slavery complicated Brazil's labor and migration patterns. As a massive agricultural transformation turned the state of São Paulo into the greatest coffee plantation in the world after 1870, the economic elite stumbled through the importation of enslaved labor, the abolition of slavery, and the recruitment of foreign labor.

Historians and social scientists have analyzed and debated the nature, stages, and causes of Brazil's economic history for decades. The dominant narrative concentrated

on Brazil (and the rest of Latin America) as failing to keep up (or catch up) with the United States and western Europe. Modernization theories in the postwar years blamed the “backwardness” of rural society and “traditional” values as obstacles to overcome on the road to “progress” à la the North Atlantic pattern. Dependency and world systems theories placed the blame on colonialism and neocolonialism. Neoliberalism has returned to many of the themes of modernization theory. Within Brazil, a body of literature emerged in the last decades of the century attempting to explain why São Paulo had so dramatically industrialized and developed while the rest of Brazil lagged behind, especially the Northeast. Either explicitly or implicitly, industrialization and its relationship to agriculture formed the core of most theorizing and research on Brazilian economic development. Land, labor, and who controlled them dominated analyses of the countryside. Labor and capital, and who could mobilize them, dominated research on urban areas.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between industrialization and agriculture shifted dramatically after 1960. Quietly and steadily, an agricultural revolution finally began to take shape in Brazil, one that would transform Brazil’s Center-West (especially Goiás, Mato Grosso, and Mato Grosso do Sul) and produce changes across all regions. The commodities boom in the Center-West, Southeast, and South has transformed Brazil into one of the world’s great agricultural/ranching exporters. Centuries after emerging as the world’s first great sugar and then coffee plantation, Brazil continues to be the world’s largest exporter of coffee and sugar. This recent agricultural revolution has added soybeans, corn, chicken, beef, and ethanol (sugar transformed) to the mix. The fruits of the land (and the raw ores beneath it) have made Brazil unlike any other country in Latin America today (with the possible exception of Mexico). Brazil may not (yet) be the country of the future but has become one of the most important countries of the present.

Luna and Klein’s sweeping, synthetic survey provides the reader with a deep, quantitative dive into “how São Paulo changed from being a frontier province of little importance to being one of the most important agricultural and industrial regions of the world” (xxi). The historical analysis serves as an excellent backdrop for understanding the transformations and revolutions in recent decades covered in the other five books in this review.<sup>2</sup> The economic and demographic processes that made São Paulo the engine of Brazil’s economic train are at the core of Brazilian industrialization, agriculture, migrations, and massive regional inequities. In 1850, the province contained a half million inhabitants and the town around 25,000. With more than forty million inhabitants in the state today, and more than twenty million in the metropolitan area of the city, São Paulo is the richest state and the primary industrial and agricultural exporter in the country. With a gross domestic product (GDP) three times the size of Rio de Janeiro (in second place), its economy is roughly the size of Colombia or Venezuela.

Along with a wealth of quantitative data (more than 150 tables, figures, and maps), Luna and Klein admirably synthesize in concise fashion their key arguments and findings. Their summary of the causes behind São Paulo’s exceptional economic growth is worth quoting: “fertile lands close to the coast, a dynamic frontier population, a massive European immigration of nonslave labor, and an explosive coffee economy were the driving forces” (xxi). The construction of roads, railways, and port facilities (in Santos) opened up avenues for

<sup>1</sup> See Margarita Fajardo, “Capitalism, Inequality, and Development in Latin America,” *Latin American Research Review* 56, no. 3 (2021): 720–728; and Joseph Love, “An Institutional Perspective on Brazil’s Political Economy,” *Latin American Research Review* 53, no. 4 (2018): 863–869, for discussions of some of these theoretical approaches, especially with regard to Brazilian economic history. *The Oxford Handbook of the Brazilian Economy*, edited by Edmund Amann, Carlos R. Azzoni, and Werner Baer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), offers an excellent survey of the various approaches. Fajardo discusses this volume in her review essay.

<sup>2</sup> Luna and Klein have also written their own analysis of the agricultural revolution. See Herbert S. Klein and Francisco Vidal Luna, *Feeding the World: Brazil’s Transformation into a Modern Agricultural Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018). This volume is also reviewed in Fajardo’s essay.

the entry of labor and capital and the efficient export of the fruits of the land. As they show in their detailed analysis of provincial/state budgets, taxes on agricultural exports (mainly coffee) finance most of these infrastructural improvements. A very cohesive regional elite, two-thirds residing in the city of São Paulo, recognized the importance of using the mechanisms of state power to facilitate economic growth. By the 1890s, they (along with the political elite in Minas Gerais) had effectively seized control of the federal state. As Luna and Klein show, despite the elites' purported economic liberalism, they employed state intervention (at both the state and federal levels) to support first the coffee economy and then industrialization. Most notably, they employed what would later be known as Keynesian economics to prop up the coffee economy through price supports in the early twentieth century. By 1920, nearly a quarter of all cultivated land in Brazil was in the state of São Paulo (113).

The agricultural expansion created “an abundance of local capital” and the “emergence of an expanded market” that stimulated regional industrialization that had begun in the late nineteenth century (185). Coffee was at the core of these transformations, along with its backward linkages “to everything from transport and manufacturing to the development of a service sector” (220–221). Coffee income provided the means for the state of São Paulo to undertake “massive investments in infrastructure” (223) such as roads, railways, hydroelectric power, and communications networks. Luna and Klein succinctly sum up the causes for *paulista* growth: European free labor and their “increased capacity for consumption over slave laborers,” foreign revenues from coffee exports, “the willingness of the coffee barons to invest in urban and industrial projects,” external shocks that limited international trade favoring local industry, and “a growing agro-industrial integration” (301).

This middle volume of the trilogy ends in 1950, at the onset of São Paulo's massive urban and industrial growth, but the analysis makes clear the agricultural and industrial changes that prepared the way for that dramatic expansion. The opening of enormous amounts of land and the importation of European labor transformed both agriculture and industry and both developed and experienced a growing integration. Luna and Klein's book provides the setup for the work of another pair of US-Brazilian authors, both economists, who provide us with a deep quantitative foray into the agricultural revolution in Brazil over the past sixty years. Albert Fishlow, a contemporary of Herbert Klein, is another member of the first generation of *brasilianistas* who has had a long and productive career. His Brazilian collaborator, José Eustáquio Ribeiro Vieira Filho, is a much younger economist working at the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (IPEA), a highly regarded government think tank.

Fishlow and Vieira Filho also offer the reader succinct and clear analysis, although many of the equations and figures spread throughout the relatively slender volume will be accessible only to the mathematically adept. Published first in Portuguese in 2018 by IPEA, the book (as the subtitle indicates) focuses on “innovation and competitiveness.” Although the core of the analysis is on the agricultural revolution, the authors have included two short chapters on parallel examples of technological innovation that produced international competitiveness—Embraer (the world's third or fourth largest aviation manufacturer) and Petrobrás (for a time, among the top five oil companies in the world). In both cases, and with Embrapa (the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation), government investment in research and development set the stage for a decades-long unfolding of technological innovation and increasing competitiveness in the international marketplace. In effect, this book analyzes Brazil's local version of the so-called Green Revolution. Fishlow and Vieira Filho make it clear that this is an agricultural revolution and not just “a process of simply importing technology from external markets” (79). This revolution made Brazilian agriculture “a model of efficient agricultural production” (83). Agribusiness now accounts for more than one-fifth of Brazil's GDP.

The migration at the core of this agricultural revolution is not one of people from the Northeast to the Southeast but one of capital from the Southeast to the Center-West of Brazil. This is the story of the rise of highly mechanized agribusiness and may be “the biggest success story in Brazil’s recent economic history” (ix). Through the genetic modification of soybeans, lime to reduce soil acidity, “improvements in pest control, and the development of nitrogen fixation that eliminated the need for chemical nitrogen fertilizers,” the Brazilians, led by Embrapa’s research and development, opened up the vast Cerrado across central Brazil (x). This expansive tropical savannah zone—especially in Tocantins, Goiás, Mato Grosso, and Mato Grosso do Sul—has become the first global “breadbasket” in the tropics. Covering a quarter of Brazil’s surface, this biome is larger than the US Corn Belt, and nearly four times the size of France (79). Until the 1980s, Brazil was a net food importer. Today, it is one of the agro-exporting giants of the planet.

Until the last decade of the twentieth century, “the domestic market primarily drove Brazilian agriculture and livestock,” but over the past two decades the driving force has been foreign markets. Eighty percent of production remains in the domestic market, but the other 20 percent goes to more than 180 countries, most notably to the European Union, China, the United States, Japan, Russia, and Saudi Arabia (116). Brazil is a global leader in the production of coffee, sugar, oranges (and orange juice), corn, beef, and chicken. The good news for the average Brazilian consumer is that the productivity gains caused food prices to fall by 75 percent between 1990 and 2012, reducing from 50 to 20 percent the amount of a worker’s income spent on food and helping reduce poverty in Brazil (86). The bad news is that agribusiness requires little labor, concentrates wealth in the hands of a new landholding elite, and raises enormous challenges for family farmers.

Nearly 85 percent of farms in Brazil are the smallest family-run enterprises, and the inequalities in the agricultural sector have widened with the increasing technological innovation and efficiency of agribusiness (150). Fishlow and Vieira Filho emphasize that the government needs to place research in the public domain and make it accessible to family farms for the market has failed to do so. They state flatly that “transforming market-based family farming will be the main challenge for agricultural planning and policy in Brazil in the coming years” (165). As in early Brazilian industrialization, and with the example of Embraer, Petrobrás, and Embrapa, “there is a central role for the state in regulating and fostering” a macroeconomic environment that will make Brazil more inclusive and equitable (209).

The excellent work of Paulo Fontes moves us from the larger structural process to life and culture among migrants flowing from the Northeast to the Southeast. He brilliantly analyzes the world migrants from the Northeast created in an industrial neighborhood of São Paulo in the postwar decades. *Migration and the Making of Industrial São Paulo* is a “revised and modified version” of *Um Nordeste em São Paulo: Trabalhadores migrantes em São Miguel Paulista (1945–66)* (2008), which began as a doctoral dissertation in social history at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp) (xiii). This deeply researched social history responds persuasively to a literature that for decades portrayed the *nordestino* migrants as backward, apathetic, and docile country people manipulated by populist politicians and lacking class consciousness. Fontes effectively restores their agency in the creation of their own urban community, workplaces, and politics. In his carefully crafted monograph, the *bairro* of São Miguel Paulista becomes a microcosm of “the processes of industrialization, urbanization, migration, and class formation” that transformed Brazil after 1945 (2).

Barbara Weinstein’s excellent foreword places Fontes’s work in perspective. The “tidal wave” of nearly forty million Brazilians, “mainly with origins in the northeastern states,” formed a large part of what “can be considered the most transformative social phenomenon in the recent history of Latin America” (vii–viii). Fontes’s rich recreation of São Miguel Paulista between the 1940s and 1960s provides us with an emblematic community study of

the larger processes of the great migration. By 1970, “almost 70 percent of the city’s economically active population had gone through some kind of migratory experience” (20). Fontes has scoured the local press, the minutes of municipal and state assembly meetings, electoral literature, court cases, personal papers, and police archives. What especially stands out is his use of nearly one hundred oral histories, about half which he collected and the rest done by other researchers. The words and memories of the migrants bring to life their journeys, work, and community.

Fontes emphasizes that “rural northeastern migrants were not only a reflection of externally determined economic forces . . . They were also agents of their own movement and in this form, through diverse strategies, they contributed to the migratory process” (26). He seeks to redeem “the value of their experience and memory” (27). Although he makes gender a key to his analysis, male migrants outnumbered females more than two to one in the 1950s. At the heart of this *bairro* was the Nitro Química factory that flourished in the 1930s and 1940s and then began to decline in the late 1950s. Employing more than four thousand men and women, this chemical factory became a crucible forging rural migrants into industrial workers. The factory and the community were a “cradle of Northeasterners” in São Paulo. The “complex of social relations formed in the places of origin and expanded in the factory and neighborhood were frequently the basis for cohesion and solidarity and were essential for the formation of class identity” (77).

At the heart of this analysis is the creation and transformation of identities. Despite their common origins in the Northeast, the community was not completely homogeneous and harmonious. Yet the social networks, “experiences of migration, work, and life in the neighborhood and in the city created bases for common languages and identities,” most notably the idea of “northeasterness” (128). As Fontes stresses, “it was as workers that the northeasterners in São Paulo shared a language of class that reinforced their role as dignified producers of wealth, constructors of development, and citizens with rights” (130). The final chapters of the book show in detail the agency of the migrants in local politics as they pressed for greater democracy and rights as urban citizens. Fontes argues that “the workers of São Miguel constructed themselves as a fundamental political actor” (210). These men and women were drawn to the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB); even if they were not “militant cadres” they were “sympathizers” (144). The neighborhood also became a stronghold of liberation theology and ecclesiastical base communities.

Jacob Blanc’s *Before the Flood* seeks to rewrite the chronology and politics of the military regime (1964–1985) to reorient it from its urban bias and to see politics through the lens of rural people as the construction of the largest hydroelectric dam in the world (at that moment) straddling the Parana River between Brazil and Paraguay forces them to move. The flooding of 1,350 square kilometers of Brazilian and Paraguayan lands in October 1982 “was completed in a relative blink of an eye” and displaced about forty thousand people. At the core of Blanc’s study are the protests of small farmers, Indigenous peoples, and the landless to gain access to land. In the end, however, this is not a history “of water but of land” (4).

As Blanc shows, these contentious rural people on the very edge of Brazil (and stretching into Paraguay) were driven by a vision of democracy as the military regime was facing its last years in power. Blanc places the local struggles within the larger international context of the regime’s pursuit of geopolitical power and prestige. The generals managed to forge a binational treaty with Paraguay that was lopsided and would eventually transmit most of the power generated by the Itaipú Dam to the rapidly urbanizing and industrializing Southeast. Blanc emphasizes repeatedly that the pursuit of land, rights, and democracy in this southern region predated the dictatorship, and that the struggles would continue well beyond its demise. Given the national and international visibility of the building of the dam, the protests of the locals created a “battle for public opinion about the dam that served as a proxy for the clash over the legitimacy of military rule itself” (54). This

“pharaonic” example of “authoritarian industrialization” generated and even accelerated “collective action against the dictatorship” (6). Much like Fontes, Blanc highlights the agency of these rural groups as they take on the regime through creative and effective uses of the military’s own laws and agencies.

As these rural people fought for land and financial compensation, the struggle evolved into a larger one that would contribute to the formation of a national movement for access to land—the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Workers Movement or MST). Unlike those tens of millions of rural workers who flooded into cities in the decades after 1940, these small farmers fought tenaciously to stay on their land, and when flooded out, to get compensation in the form of land titles nearby. Blanc’s research is deep and personal—dozens of archives and databases in Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina; the previously unexplored archives of the Itaipú Binational Corporation; and forty-five interviews with farmers, landless peasants, Indigenous communities, politicians, labor leaders, activists, and others. Blanc, in effect, embedded within these rural communities and movements much like an anthropologist engaged in participant observation.

At the heart of Blanc’s analysis is “the dialectic of land and legitimacy” (84). Small farmers who held land titles, peasants who had no titles, and the Avá-Guaraní people experienced the displacement at Itaipú very differently. His careful analysis of each group shows both the strengths and the inequalities within the groups of protesters. In the end, the small farmers sacrificed the interests of the landless to forge their own deal. Both these groups “viewed land as *individual property*” while the Indigenous saw “land as a way of life” (emphasis in original, 126). Despite their collective struggle for a more democratic and equitable Brazil, the differing interests of these three groups “exhibited traits that perpetuated long-standing and localized forms of inequality” (85). Blanc is clear-eyed and direct about both the accomplishments and limitations of these protest movements. All three groups fought to forge a more democratic society to gain full access to the rights of citizenship. The small farmers eventually received land (although not always what they wanted), the Avá-Guaraní challenged the marginalization of Indigenous peoples in Brazil and helped redefine Indigenous rights, and the landless organized and played a key role in the formation of the MST in the 1980s.

Arising out of the struggle at Itaipú, the landless formed the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra do Oeste de Paraná (MASTRO) in 1981, which by 1984 had nearly ten thousand members. A series of land occupations and repression by authorities and gunmen brought the issue of the landless to national and international attention in the 1980s. Despite this repression, “the rural trade union movement paradoxically grew to over nine million members, making it the single largest category of organized workers in all of Brazil and one of the largest labor groups in all of Latin America” (204–205). Although Blanc places great emphasis on the “antediluvian” origins of the inequalities and resistance to antidemocratic politics, his book clearly lays out the power and impact of the social movements that emerge out of the flood at Itaipú.

Anthony Pahnke’s *Brazil’s Long Revolution* picks up the story of land struggles in the 1980s and brings it forward to the present. Like Blanc, Pahnke spent a great deal of time on the ground as an ethnographer among the rural people creating and constantly reshaping the landless movement in Brazil. In fieldwork carried out between 2009 and 2016 (and most intensively between 2009 and 2011) mainly in Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, and São Paulo, Pahnke grapples with “the ethical dilemma of whether or not to research a social movement, as well as how to treat its practices critically without being a cheerleader or a disparager” (18). A political scientist, Pahnke has constructed a theoretical analysis of the “Radical Achievements of the Landless Workers Movement,” as the book’s subtitle indicates. He focuses on the movement’s contentious relationship with the state, arising out of “a combination of legal and extralegal tactics.” Combined with “propitious external conditions,” these tactics “produce revolutionary resistance” (52). The movement’s “form

of resistance,” he asserts, “is best considered as revolutionary, particularly in the creation and development of a dual power form of organization vis-à-vis the Brazilian state” (7). Through this “revolutionary political action,” the “actors claim space, and in their representations and practices transform politics, economics, and culture” (204).

Pahnke argues that the Landless Movement in Brazil, and other transnational social movements like it, “display some of the most radical, transformational political demands and projects in both the Global North and South” (12). The movement is “the largest movement” in South America, and the MST has more than 1.5 million “members in twenty-four of Brazil’s twenty-six states” (198). Explicitly embracing Marxist thought, the Landless Movement challenges traditional property relations and the concept of individual ownership, and emphasizes the collective. The MST seeks “to create settlements where families remain with usufruct rights instead of definitive title,” removing “the ability of movement members to individualize land holdings through sale or rent” (152). They also pursue “food sovereignty” rather than “food security” to “radically change food and natural resource economies in ways that promote alternative modes of production, distribution, and circulation” (12).

Much of Pahnke’s analysis focuses on how the MST both works through the state, when it can find allies and avenues, and challenges the state through land occupations and legal recourse. The legal tactics “allow a movement to gain legitimacy and material resources” (31). While the Workers Party (PT) was in power from 2002 to 2016, the movement organized, operated, expanded, and consolidated under a government that was sympathetic to its cause. The movement used revolutionary political action “inside, outside, and through the state to construct” a viable alternative to a neoliberal order. Pahnke argues that these tactics “superseded” the state and erased “the distinction between public and private” (35).

Much of this book carefully reconstructs the origins of the MST in the 1970s, its founding in 1984, and how it emerged, most notably, in Rio Grande do Sul and Paraná. As he points out, again much like Blanc, the Landless Movement is really an umbrella term for “a collection of movements and organizations” with the MST the most prominent (48). The “movement’s revolutionary form of resistance is in the núcleos that democratize state services by challenging the institutionalization of a public/private divide.” Here is the core of his argument, that the path to power is not through “armed insurrection” but through “reappropriating public programs to claim space in ways that conflict with status quo norms and rules.” Revolution can take place, following this logic, “within liberal democracies” (51–52).

Pahnke’s fieldwork comes out most powerfully in his analysis of the MST’s programs in education, economic development, and agrarian reform. Through these programs he details the internal dynamics and structures of the movement. The ethos of the movement “privileges collectivity over plurality” and a difficult to define “mística” (58–59). He sees the creation of settlements, the influence of the ecclesiastical base communities, and “early trial and error” as the foundation of the MST’s “revolutionary mode of resistance” (63). According to one estimate, the MST has mobilized more than seven hundred thousand families for land occupations and encampments. Through a process of trial and error, the MST developed a decentralized model emphasizing participatory organization, cooperative economic production, and ways to scale up and unify across regions.

Despite Pahnke’s optimism about the MST and its methods and successes, he notes that the movement has faced growing challenges, ironically, over more than a decade of PT control of the Brazilian presidency. Throughout the 1990s, conflicts over land accelerated in Brazil and the number of people involved multiplied. The number of land occupations declined during the PT administrations even as the MST consolidated its gains and “accumulated forces.” The Lula administration, in fact, distributed less land than the administration of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002). A hostile Jair Bolsonaro administration



has altered the political conjuncture, and “public opinion has also turned against the movement” (192).

Merle Bowen’s *For Land and Liberty* concentrates on another group of Brazilians who have chosen not to migrate to cities and who have been fighting to gain recognition for their land rights—Brazilians of African descent in quilombos. While Fontes has given us a detailed analysis of those who left the land, Bowen’s country people have faced centuries of efforts to throw them off their land, and now they must mobilize to prove their historical claims to the territory they occupy. Bowen frames her work around “their protracted struggle for land, livelihood, and citizenship rights” (1). Much like Pahnke, Bowen is trained in political science but is an ethnographer who wrote an earlier book about the peasantry in Mozambique. Both works reflect her “interest in land and labor in the struggle for black freedom and self-realization in the modern world” (xvii). For Bowen, “black communities deserve land reparations for slavery and for the ongoing seizure of territory that they have legitimately occupied” (1). Land and liberty, she argues, were “at the center of the emancipation struggles throughout the Americas” (26). She seeks to counter “scholarship on land struggles and land reform” that has “emphasized class-based politics and identified black rural communities solely as peasant communities, ignoring their blackness” (2).

Bowen did exploratory work over several years in three dozen communities in five states before concentrating on eight in the state of Bahia (Iguape Valley, near Salvador) and four in São Paulo (Ribeira Valley, in the coastal region near Paraná). Bowen spent fifteen years on this study, conducted more than 150 interviews, and administered more than 400 surveys collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. All these communities have sought recognition under laws coming out of the Constitution of 1988 that offer legal status for *comunidades remanescentes*. There is no consensus on the translation of this term, which focuses on redressing the long-standing land claims of Indigenous and Afro-Brazilians. Bowen chooses to define the term as “quilombo-descended” communities, ones that originated as settlements formed by runaway slaves and free blacks in the distant past. One of her key contentions is that anthropologists and politicians have reshaped the original legal language “to create a distinct ethnocultural identity for quilombo descendants” instead of treating them “as historically marginalized black communities deserving land reform and agrarian development” (5, 7).

The Constitution of 1988 and Decree 3.912/2001 during the Cardoso administration required Afro-descendant communities to provide proof that their families had lived on the land they currently occupy since the abolition of slavery in 1888. None of the communities in Bahia that Bowen studies have yet succeeded in this process, and just six have successfully negotiated the process in São Paulo. The “constitutional pledge,” Bowen shows, has remained largely unfulfilled. As of 2016, just 238 communities had received land titles out “of the estimated 3,500 identified communities” in Brazil (99). She directly connects the struggles of these communities with those of the MST, highlighting the differences between the landless who seek access to land and the struggle of the quilombos “to resist expropriation and stay on their land” (101).

The second part of the book details the many challenges of these communities to survive, their meager means of income, and threats posed by environmental legislation and landed elites. Bowen’s survey data make clear the difficulties for the members of these communities to farm, ranch, and fish at a level sufficient to survive. Government benefits are often the difference between surviving and failing. Some of the communities have adopted practices “to produce, distribute and consume healthy food in and near their territory in an ecologically sustainable manner” (165). They have also turned to “ethnic tourism as a means to enhance rural, non-agricultural activities” (182). This allows them to diversify income “by selling their culture as well as a chance for self-determination and self-making” (182). Their control of the tourism allows them to take charge of the

representation of their own past and present. Unfortunately, this tourism has not been very successful, and Bowen criticizes state sponsors for their lack of support. In a much more muted process than the catastrophic droughts of the Northeast, the increasingly inability of these communities to make farming viable, combined with outside threats, mean they are hanging on to their land by a thread.

Blanc, Pahnke, and Bowen deeply empathize with the rural people they depict while showing us the enormous challenges facing those who have chosen not to migrate to the cities. The landless without titles, small farmers with land titles, the Indigenous, and these African-descended communities are the increasingly smaller percentage of Brazilians who have remained in the countryside in the wake of decades of mass migration to urban areas. Luna and Klein make clear the structural forces and patterns that propelled industrialization and migration, while Fishlow and Vieira Filho focus on the domestic technological innovation that has produced a true agricultural revolution in the last half century. Much of this innovation came out of Embrapa and government-sponsored research and development. As they point out, if Brazil is to confront its longstanding inequalities, especially in the countryside, the government must make these technological gains available to the farmers Blanc, Pahnke, and Bowen study. If not, the migrations from country to city will continue and the agrarian inequalities and injustices that for so long have defined Brazil will continue to hold back its development.

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