

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Charisma's Birth from the Bottom Up: Lula, ABC's Metalworkers' Strikes and the Social History of Brazilian Politics

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Abstract

If David Bell in his book *Men on Horseback* (2020) focuses on what is political charisma, how it functions, and what it means 'to write its history', this article examines how Brazil's ex-President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva ('Lula') acquired charisma during the dramatic 1978–80 metalworkers' strikes in the industrial ABC region of São Paulo, Brazil. While generating a vast literature, scholars of the ABC strikes have evaded the question of how Lula, the gifted organiser, emerged as a recognisably charismatic figure. This article explains where, when and why this happened and how a charismatic bond was forged as 100,000 stigmatised, fearful, self-doubting 'peons' came to constitute themselves as a locally articulated social actor, a group in fusion, whose boldness and creativity led to extraordinary feats of organisation and mobilisation. Arguing against conflating charisma and populism, it also establishes the utility of the theorisation of group-making advanced in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960) by Jean-Paul Sartre.

Keywords: Brazil; charisma; labour; Lula

In *Men on Horseback: The Power of Charisma in the Age of Revolution* (2020), David Bell criticises his fellow historians for neglecting the study of 'powerful charismatic individuals' and leaving the task to non-professionals including 'biographers and writers of popular history'. Unlike the massive social science literature on charisma, historians have made 'relatively little use of the concept' despite the crucial insights it can offer 'into the dynamics of leadership and the relationship between political leaders and the societies in which they operate'. In this article, I join Bell in arguing for a biographical approach to charisma and political leadership, but as part of a social history of politics, not a cultural one.¹

Written by an expert on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, Bell's 2020 transatlantic survey covers political leaders that could retrospectively be deemed

¹David A. Bell, *Men on Horseback: The Power of Charisma in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), pp. 234–5, 233, 239–40, 243.

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charismatic in six different contexts: Pasquale Paoli (Corsica), George Washington (the 13 US colonies), Napoleon Bonaparte (France), Toussaint Louverture (Saint-Domingue, now Haiti) and Simón Bolívar (Spanish South America). A critic of Marxism and French *Annales*-style social history, Bell deploys charisma as part of a cultural history of 'the role of prominent and powerful individual leaders in the historical process'. As is characteristic after the 'linguistic turn' of the 1980s, the Princeton historian focuses on representations, that is on how charisma 'took shape and operated through print media', even when produced as propaganda or written by foreign admirers or detractors who may never have set foot in Haiti or Venezuela. His declared aim is to 'look not only at such representations but also at the way the followers and admirers ... received and understood them'.²

Discussing Latin American leftist and anti-capitalist politics in 2006, British sociologist Diana Raby was concerned, like Bell, at a general reluctance to acknowledge that political leadership was 'necessary, indeed essential'. In *Democracy and Revolution*, Raby called for a hard-headed realism and insisted there were analytical and political losses for the Left when it refused to recognise 'the exceptional prominence ... of individual charismatic leaders' in two of the region's most 'highly successful' revolutionary mobilisations: Fidel Castro (1926–2016) in the Cuban Revolution and Hugo Chávez (1954–2013) during the unfolding radicalisation in Venezuela in the early 2000s. As she correctly noted, neither process 'would be what it is, indeed might not have succeeded at all, without these two extraordinary' figures who exemplified a type of 'charismatic personal leadership' often associated negatively with populism.³

Both analytically and empirically, this article takes up the concept of charisma through an in-depth examination of a specific locale, event and individual within a single nation over a three-year period: the strikes by metalworkers of the industrial ABC region of greater São Paulo, whose Vila Euclides soccer stadium rallies vaulted Lula to international prominence in 1978–80. Approaching charisma as it emerges at the grass roots, it places contemporary secret police reports, oral histories, newspaper reportage and secondary literature in dialogue with theorists from Max Weber and Émile Durkheim to Jean-Paul Sartre and Pierre Bourdieu while commenting on Ernesto Laclau.

If Bell focuses on what political charisma *is*, *how* it functions, and what it means 'to write its history',⁴ this article examines how Brazil's ex-President Lula acquired his charisma during dramatic strikes by over 100,000 workers in Latin America's largest and most modern factories. If Raby's stated concern is how the common 'people acquire a collective identity and were constituted as a political subject' through such a leader,⁵ this article provides answers to questions posed by Bell and Raby: 'How can we know what these men and women really thought and felt?'⁶

²*Ibid.*, pp. 233–5, 239–40, 15–16, 128–9, 243.

³Diana Raby, *Democracy and Revolution: Latin America and Socialism Today* (London: Pluto, 2006), pp. 227–35.

⁴Bell, *Men*, pp. 5, 238.

⁵Raby, *Democracy*, p. 233.

⁶Bell, *Men*, pp. 15–16. Bell writes that it is impossible to 'know for certain what the people of the age of revolution thought and felt' and he thus works indirectly from printed media sources which reveal what propagandists thought was most effective.

And how does such a leadership develop, and how does it relate to the movement?⁷

In its focus on charisma, this article revises understandings of the ABC strikes established in the high-quality social science studies produced in their wake. In particular, it explains why discomfited scholars evaded the question of how Lula, the gifted organiser, emerged from the strikes as a recognisably charismatic figure, and what it means to become one. By examining what happened during the mass rallies in the Vila Euclides stadium, it explains the sources of the extraordinary attention and adulation received by Lula and what they meant to the strike's heterogeneous participants as well as to outside observers. In tracing the grass-roots dynamic of these defiant mass mobilisations, it provides a model for how a charismatic bond was forged as stigmatised, fearful, self-doubting 'peons,' in a state of seriality, constituted themselves as a locally articulated social actor, a pledged group-in-fusion, whose boldness and creativity led to extraordinary feats of mobilisation that would transform the political history of Brazil.⁸

Finally, the article intervenes in the turn-of-the-century debate about populism and Venezuelan President Chávez to argue against the conflation of charisma – and the process of 'charismatisation' – with Latin American populism *tout court*. It ends by arguing that Sartre's approach to group-making in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960) has now met 'the main test' posed by Mark Poster in 1982: that its 'chief categories ... prove their worth in the concrete' through empirical studies.⁹

Becoming Charismatic

In January 1979, Lula decided to grow the beard, against his wife's wishes, for which, along with informal dress, he would become iconic.¹⁰ It was a year in which he acquired 'an almost mythical aura' as the whirlwind in ABC transformed Lula 'into a national figure with thousands of workers hanging on his every word'.¹¹ It was during these events that Lula became known for the 'charismatic command' of crowds that would be invoked to explain his meteoric political rise.¹² Three decades later, for example, Brazilian historian Lilia Schwarcz would note 'his seductive

⁷Raby, *Democracy*, p. 227.

⁸The terms 'seriality', 'the pledged group' and 'group-in-fusion' are drawn from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, vol. 1: *Theory of Practical Ensembles*, transl. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Verso, 2004 [1960]), while his method is laid out in *Search for a Method*, transl. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage, 1968 [1957]). For the best overall synthesis and an explanation of Sartre's specialised terminology, see Fredric Jameson, 'Sartre and History', in *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 206–305. For Sartre's concepts of the 'pledged group-in-fusion' and 'seriality', see notes 49 and 55.

⁹Mark Poster, *Sartre's Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 112.

¹⁰Josué Machado, 'A realidade íntima do sindicalista', *Playboy* (São Paulo), July 1979, cited in João Guizzo et al. (eds.), *Lula: Entrevistas e discursos*, 2nd edn (São Paulo: O Repórter de Guarulho, 1981), p. 206.

¹¹Margaret E. Keck, 'New Unionism in the Brazilian Transition', in Alfred Stepan (ed.), *Democratizing Brazil: Problems of Transition and Consolidation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 262 (first quote); Richard Bourne, *Lula of Brazil: The Story so Far* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), p. 47 (second quote).

¹²Keck, 'New Unionism', p. 262.

rhetoric, his command of populist language and his personal charisma', for which he was 'sometimes compared to saints and miracle-workers'.¹³

Lula's charisma would remain a commonplace in journalistic, political and academic commentary even as the actual events of 1978–80 faded from public memory. In casual use, charisma is generally taken to be something someone either has or hasn't. It is sometimes confused with media-manufactured fame and celebrity, or even with the aura that surrounds those who hold power.¹⁴ Yet the concept has had a technical, sociological sense ever since Max Weber first introduced the term, which literally means 'gift of grace', into the social sciences from historians of early Christianity.¹⁵ In an unfinished manuscript published posthumously, Weber offered the following tentative definition:

'Charisma' is the personal quality that makes an individual seem extraordinary, a quality by virtue of which supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional powers or properties are attributed to the individual: powers or properties that are not found in everyone and that are thought to be the gift of God or exemplary, rendering that individual a 'leader'.¹⁶

Yet scholars continue to disagree over the concept's 'meaning, content and potential', in large part because Weber's ruminations were 'frustratingly abstruse', often diffuse, and even contradictory.¹⁷ Thus the concept has been applied promiscuously to a bewildering array of individuals across a gamut of societies and epochs. The problem was worsened by careless readers who missed the fact that charisma, as a Weberian ideal type, is an 'analytical construct' that 'in its conceptual purity ... cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality'.¹⁸

If judged by Weber's core definition, Lula in 1978–80 certainly possessed qualities that contributed to miraculous deeds. It undoubtedly takes special talent for any union to pull off a massive, illegal strike that led, predictably – in the government-financed and controlled trade union system of Brazil in 1979 – to the ouster of the *diretoria* (executive board) of the metalworkers' union. But there is something almost magical about the political savvy demonstrated during the ensuing negotiations that ended with Labour Minister Murilo Macedo's surprising decision to return the union to the control of Lula and his *diretoria*, something that had never happened in thousands of earlier government takeovers. And when the union was taken over for a second time, in 1980, Lula pulled off another one of

¹³Lilia M. Schwarcz, 'Brazil in the Shadow of Lula', *New York Review of Books*, 19 Nov. 2010: <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2010/11/19/brazil-shadow-lula/> (last accessed 30 July 2022). Bourne, *Lula*, p. 193, dubs Lula a 'messianic figure'.

¹⁴Robert I. Rotberg, 'Charisma, Leadership, and Historiography', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 42: 3 (2012), p. 419.

¹⁵Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, ed. and transl. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), p. 342. On how the term, once secularised, came to play a major – if oft-criticised – role in the modern social sciences, see Paul Joosse, 'Becoming a God: Max Weber and the Social Construction of Charisma', *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 14: 3 (2014), pp. 266–83.

¹⁶Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, p. 374.

¹⁷Alan Bryman, *Charisma and Leadership in Organizations* (London: Sage, 1992), p. 23.

¹⁸Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1949), pp. 84–90.

'his great feats', in the recollection of union treasurer Djalma Bom. Facing a hostile external government-appointed administrator, Lula secretly approached Joaquim dos Santos Andrade, or 'Joaquimzão', the president of São Paulo's metalworkers' union, a move that surprised Djalma because Joaquimzão was hated by many as a *pelego* (sell-out). But Lula had maintained ties with this government-trusted unionist, whom he was able to convince to advocate with the labour minister for the naming of an interim committee to normalise the situation. When asked to name men in whom he had confidence, the sly Joaquimzão offered the names provided by Lula, which facilitated the efforts of the ousted leadership to regain control in the 1981 union elections.¹⁹

Lula's 'outside-the-box' intuition could thus be seen as evidence of a metaphorical 'gift of grace' and charisma. Indeed, in a 2005 interview recounting Lula's negotiations during the strikes, Djalma twice described him as 'charismatic', a term that rarely appears in worker interviews.²⁰ Yet that would be to misunderstand Weber, who insisted that charisma was neither innate nor a quality that adheres to a person, even though followers might believe it to be the case.²¹ The true source of Lula's success can be approached via Alan Bryman's clearer reformulation of the concept of charisma, which he argues is best seen as 'a particular kind of social relationship between leaders and their followers'.²² As Weber puts it, charisma is 'validated through the recognition of a personal proof', the result of which is 'voluntary dedication', 'hero worship' and 'absolute trust in the leader' and his or her mission.²³ Weber himself emphasises that charisma is proven not by an objective metric but by 'how this quality is actually judged' by those who become followers.²⁴

Lively admiration for an inspirational leader could be celebrated as evidence of healthy civic engagement. However, Weber's views of charismatic leadership would seem to many – as its use spread – to be a threat, not a boon, to democracy, even though all recognise its often transformative impact. Weber described the skewed interdependence that this type of leadership entails as follows: if those to whom the charismatic leader 'feels *sent* do not recognize him, his claim collapses', but 'if they recognize it, he is their *master*', because his claims derive not 'from the will of his followers, in the manner of an election', but rather from 'their duty to recognize his charisma'.²⁵ The

¹⁹Djalma Bom, interview, 8 March 2005, in Alexandre Fortes and Marieta de Moraes Ferreira (eds.), *Muitos caminhos, uma estrela: Memórias de militantes do PT* (São Paulo: Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2008), p. 94.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Joseph Bensman and Michael Givant, 'Charisma and Modernity: The Use and Abuse of a Concept', in Ronald M. Glassman and William H. Swatos Jr. (eds.), *Charisma, History and Social Structure* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 28–9. On the transhistorical nature of the concept, see Wolfgang Mommsen, 'Personal Conduct and Societal Change', in Sam Whimster and Scott Lash (eds.), *Max Weber, Rationality, and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2008 [1987]), pp. 45–6.

²²Bryman, *Charisma and Leadership*, pp. 41–2.

²³Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, pp. 374–5. See also Bryman, *Charisma and Leadership*, p. 42. Rotberg, 'Charisma', p. 419, aptly describes charisma as 'the inspirational component of the bond between leaders and their political and organizational followers that allows them to act as if they are genuinely inspired to maximize what they presume, or are led to believe, are their own interests'.

²⁴Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, p. 374.

²⁵Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. 3, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, transl. Ephraim Fischhoff *et al.* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), pp. 1112–13; emphasis added.

supporters of a charismatic leader were thus said to act out of blind obedience because ‘the masses are irrational and emotional’.²⁶

The antipopular tint to Weber’s ideas reflected his ambivalence as a liberal nationalist under pre-Weimar Germany’s authoritarian monarchy. Fearful of the masses when not properly guided, Weber was utterly convinced that “democratic” politics is synonymous with oligarchy’, which he meant positively as rule by an elite acting rationally according to modern legal-bureaucratic rules as opposed to traditional authority with its patrimonialism.²⁷ ‘As every experience teaches’, Weber wrote, the masses are ‘always exposed to direct, purely emotional and irrational influence’ because they lack the ‘cool and clear mind’ on which ‘successful politics, especially democratic politics depends’.²⁸ These views explain why many readers of Weber saw charismatic appeals as potentially dangerous; when faced with a charismatic leader, the masses, susceptible to unscrupulous manipulation, act out of personal loyalty, not as free and rational participants in society’s political deliberations.²⁹ In this sense, the prevailing stereotype of charisma echoes the deep fear of the appeal of demagoguery to the masses held by Brazil’s highly educated class going back to the country’s formation under a constitutional monarchy abolished only in 1889.

Taking the entire package into account, charisma in its negative sense clearly does not apply to Lula. Fundamentally, this is because the 1978–80 strike movements in which he first acquired his charisma were firmly rooted in the trade union, a highly organised, government-financed bureaucracy that exemplifies the rationality Weber believed incompatible with charismatic authority.³⁰ As an elected union president, Lula was committed to defending the material interests of those he legally represented, in the name of which he and the union leadership provided intellectually coherent educational materials designed to persuade multiple audiences of varying sophistication.³¹ Rather than imposing his will, Lula reached decisions collaboratively with his *diretoria* while relying on appropriate counsel from the highly educated, including lawyers, economists and other specialists. And finally, his rhetoric and practice were aimed at strengthening the trade union while encouraging active participation by its members. The mobilisation committee recruited to manage the 1980 strike, for example, consisted of 400 workers who provided nodes of decentralised, neighbourhood-level leadership that allowed the strike to continue after the union was taken over and its *diretoria* and other key activists jailed.³²

Throughout his career, Lula has consistently been an institutionalist – be it of the union or the political party. He never sought that more unmediated relationship

²⁶Luciano Cavalli, ‘Charisma and Twentieth-Century Politics’, in Whimster and Lash (eds.), *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity*, pp. 317, 324.

²⁷Peter Beahr, ‘The “Masses” in Weber’s Political Sociology’, *Economy and Society*, 19: 2 (1990), p. 244.

²⁸Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 245.

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 244–5; Bryman, *Charisma and Leadership*, pp. 70, 86.

³⁰Behr, ‘Masses’, pp. 244–5.

³¹Luís Flávio Rainho and Osvaldo Martines Bargas, *As lutas operárias e sindicais dos metalúrgicos de São Bernardo (1977–1970)* (São Bernardo: Associação Beneficente e Cultural dos Metalúrgicos de São Bernardo do Campo, 1983), pp. 175–246.

³²Francisco Barbosa de Macedo, ‘A greve de 1980: Redes sociais e espaço urbano na mobilização coletiva dos metalúrgicos de São Bernardo do Campo’, *Revista Mundos do Trabalho*, 3: 5 (2011), pp. 136–64.

between atomised individuals and an anointed saviour that is considered central to 'charismatic' or 'populist' leadership.³³ During the strikes Lula preached the gospel of organisation by the subaltern to advance their interests and gain a respect they were denied. What happened in 1979 was that a remarkable mobilisation led to a surprising love affair between the masses and Lula, followed by a lasting marriage between organisation and charisma. In rejecting top-down salvationism, Lula echoed the views of his US analogue Eugene V. Debs, who was prosecuted after leading a strike of 100,000 railway workers crushed by federal troops in 1894, and who became a socialist after his release. Two years before receiving 6 per cent of the national presidential vote in 1912, Debs explained emphatically:

I do not want you to follow me or anyone else; if you are looking for a Moses to lead you out of this capitalist wilderness, you will stay right where you are. I would not lead you into this promised land if I could, because if I could lead you in, someone else would lead you out. YOU MUST use your heads as well as your hands, and get yourselves out of your present condition.³⁴

1978: 'A Warning to the Big Shots'

When focusing on the union, it is easy to forget that Lula in 1978 was still unknown to the vast majority of the *categoria* (legally represented workers) outside of its unionised minority. Six months after the relatively successful 1977 wage recovery campaign, a plucky reporter from *Pasquim* approached 112 workers at three São Bernardo and Diadema factories to ask about Lula. The overwhelming majority refused to be interviewed; described as 'withdrawn, suspicious, skittish, and pre-occupied', they were likely put off by an outsider with a tape recorder. But even the small group willing to comment, mostly supporters of unionism even if not themselves union members, knew little about Lula.³⁵

Lula's name recognition within the *categoria* did, however, spike during the in-plant stoppages that began on 12 May 1978, which were, as one striker recalled, 'a warning to the big shots'.³⁶ Lula was in an early-morning meeting with his colleagues Rubens Teodoro de Arruda ('Rubão') and Devanir Ribeiro as well as Valter Barelli of the Departamento Intersindical de Estatísticas e Estudos Socioeconômicos (Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies, DIEESE) when they got a call informing them that Scania's 3,000 employees had stopped work under the leadership of their fellow union directors Severino Alves da Silva and Gilson Menezes, the latter a 25-year-old African-descended worker just elected

³³Bensman and Givant, 'Charisma', p. 28.

³⁴Stephen Marion Reynolds, 'Life of Eugene V. Debs', in Bruce Rogers (eds.), *Debs: His Life, Writings and Speeches* (Girard, KS: The Appeal to Reason, 1908), p. 71; original emphasis.

³⁵Chico Júnior, 'Operário, você conhece o Lula?', *Pasquim*, 24–31 March 1978, p. 9: <http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/124745/16297> (last accessed 30 July 2022). See also Valdo and Yara, 'Tarcísio Tadeu Garcia Pereira', Sítio Polêmico, 17 Nov. 2007, print-out of web page <http://www.sitiopolemico.com/?p=53> in possession of the author.

³⁶Interview with 'Adão', in Guilherme Gibran Pogibin, 'Memórias de metalúrgicos grevistas do ABC paulista', Master's thesis, Universidade de São Paulo, 2009, p. 90.

to the union's fiscal council.³⁷ While they were aware that a strike atmosphere was building, 'it happened even earlier than we had expected', Barelli recalled, and they wondered whether they were 'going to be ousted [*cassados*], fined, perhaps sent into exile', as had happened to so many before them.³⁸ As for the stoppages, Lula's union officially disclaimed responsibility but did nothing to impede their spread.

The initial in-plant stoppage at Scania was paralleled by work actions at Ford and Mercedes-Benz; by the end of May, the stoppages encompassed 28 firms with 62,000 workers in São Bernardo and Diadema.³⁹ Workers showed up each day and clocked in; then they would stand by their machines, silently rebuffing pressure from foremen. Though this work action was organised by skilled workers, the tactic's simplicity lowered the barrier for participation for the unskilled while avoiding police repression because it took place inside the factory. As the movement spread within and beyond ABC, it was described as a wave, a contagion, or even a contamination, upending the expectations of employers, the military regime and many sectors of the union leadership. Caught 'with their pants down', as Brazilians say, employers did not know how to react in a political atmosphere of newly proclaimed liberalisation of military rule; this confusion was only compounded when the commander of the Second Army in São Paulo, Dilermando Monteiro, declared after meeting Lula that these spontaneous actions had not been instigated by Communists or political subversives.⁴⁰

The sequence of uncoordinated stoppages in May 1978 dismayed employers and the government, who turned to the leadership of Lula's union for help in resolving the problem. The first to do so was the management of Scania, who on the fourth day of the strike invited Lula, along with Gilson and Severino – who had initiated the stoppage – and the union's lawyer, Maurício Soares, to conduct an unprecedented meeting with the firm's workers inside the factory. Charged with surveillance over and intervention in matters relating to subversion, the specialised Departamento de Ordem Política e Social (Department for Political and Social Order, DOPS) transcribed the back and forth during the 16 May meeting. The transcripts show Lula positioning himself respectfully vis-à-vis the firm while praising the workers for offering 'the country a lesson'. The union, he insisted, was only an intermediary to facilitate dialogue – no one should ever be afraid 'of conversing with anyone' – and he pledged that the formal vote, on that day, by the assembled Scania workers, was sovereign for the approval of their demands and the decision to go back to work while negotiations advanced.⁴¹

³⁷Pedro César Batista, *Gilson Menezes, o operário prefeito* (São Bernardo do Campo: BrasilGráfica Gráfica e Editora Ltda, 2004).

³⁸Valdo and Yara, 'Valter Barelli', *Sítio Polêmico*, 17 Nov. 2007, print-out of web page <http://www.sitio-polemico.com/?p=61> in possession of the author.

³⁹Lais Wendel Abramo, *O resgate da dignidade: Greve metalúrgica e subjetividade operária* (Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 1999), p. 210.

⁴⁰*Veja*, 24 May 1978, pp. 95, 69, cited in Denise Paraná, *Lula, o filho do Brasil. Edição revista e ampliada* (São Paulo: Editora Perseu Abramo, 2002), p. 438.

⁴¹'Ata da reunião realizada dia 16 de maio de 1978 no pátio interior da Saab-Scania do Brasil com todos os funcionários e mais Líderes do Sindicato', Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo, Secretaria de Segurança Pública, DOPS 50-7-341, 2218-21.

A unique glimpse into the subterranean stirrings within the *categoria* in late 1978 and early 1979 can be found in a neglected thesis by an Universidade de São Paulo (University of São Paulo, USP) psychology student who interned at a São Bernardo auto parts factory. She was told that some workers had been fired after the May stoppage although not all of them were activists, according to her informants; some had merely talked too freely about the strike. Among those interviewed was an eloquent young worker who captured the democratising transformation of consciousness well under way. 'The union provides the peon with security', he said, and when at a union meeting 'you feel freer ... In the factory you don't elect the foreman, or the leader [*líder*], or the overseer [*mestre*]; all of them are chosen by the manager [*gerente*]. In the union, you feel like a human being. The leaders of the union are elected by the peons. The President speaks in our name', which was why they took their problems to the union.⁴²

Lacking not only charisma but even name recognition, Lula the individual was responsible for neither the May 1978 stoppages nor the success of the union's aggressive pro-strike messaging in 1979. Rather, more and more workers had become receptive to strike action, frustrated in their desire to better their families by the stagnation of their salaries. One rank-and-file São Bernardo metalworker explained the situation to an interviewer in 1975 by using a metaphor he credited to a friend: 'If you take a little dog and put him in a fight with a big bulldog, there's no chance [*não tem graça*].' But, he went on, it 'is something entirely different' when 20,000 little dogs unite to confront the bulldog.⁴³

'Collective Effervescence' and Group Formation

Vila Euclides would become the iconic hub from which São Bernardo's metalworkers made history by paralysing Brazil's industrial heartland in 1979 and again in 1980. The strikes occurred after the revocation of Ato Institucional 5 (Institutional Act 5) when a radicalized military leadership, on 13 December 1968, had awarded itself extraordinary dictatorial powers in response to a rebuff by the Brazilian congress. At least 18 rallies would be held at the stadium during the 1979–80 strikes. According to the DOPS,⁴⁴ 12 of these were attended by 40,000–70,000 strikers, family members and spectators; the other six attracted turn-outs of 15,000–35,000. Lula's fame would become inextricably linked to his performances in this stadium – or, when its use was denied, at rallies held in and around São Bernardo's main Catholic church and city hall.

The rallies in Vila Euclides created a space of convergence where subterranean stirrings among workers could surface and find public expression. With the strikers escaping peremptory dispersal in 1978, a localised process of group formation could broaden and deepen over the following two years in strikes marked by

⁴²Maria do Carmo Reginato Gama de Carvalho, 'Fábrica: Aspectos psicológicos do trabalho na linha de montagem', Master's thesis, Universidade de São Paulo, 1982, pp. 76, 79.

⁴³Murilo Carvalho, *Estórias de trabalhador* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1976), p. 94.

⁴⁴DOPS's papers are held at the Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo, Secretaria de Segurança Pública.

exhilaration, fear, and even terror. By April 1980, the region would fall under military occupation with armed helicopters flying over the rallies, increasingly violent skirmishes, and hundreds of arrests, as workers tried to prevent strike breakers from reaching the factories by stopping buses.

In terms of Weber's core insight, the origin of Lula's charisma is to be found in the minds, culture and emotions of those who applauded, booed and cheered during these rallies. The audience's attention varied according to who was speaking on stage, but Lula always spoke last and was listened to attentively. The rallies were crucial to an ongoing contest over workers' loyalty and obedience between powerful employers and the union, both of whom were new to this kind of conflict. A *categoria*-wide strike, after all, would collapse unless a solid plurality of workers joined and stayed committed, and this was tested each day that the strike continued. In 1979, few among employers, the government, and even veteran trade unionists believed that the region's peons had it in them to hold out as they did for 15 days.

According to the DOPS, the strike's first Vila Euclides rally was attended by 20,000, while two subsequent rallies were each attended by 60,000, just under the 66,000 São Bernardo metalworkers listed as having been on strike in the first week. Not all those attending the rallies were strikers; family members were encouraged by the union to attend, and some non-metalworkers showed up out of curiosity or solidarity. Yet the extraordinary attendance at the rallies by strikers suggests the remarkable unity that had been achieved among Lula's constituents. Held at 10 a.m. so workers wouldn't drink beforehand, the rallies saw people trickle in and catch up with shop mates, friends, relatives and neighbours; those with cars parked in the streets around the stadium.⁴⁵ It was a welcome contrast to workers' regimented workday and a moment for the 'little people' to strut a bit after having shown gumption and won the country's undivided attention. As recalled by one worker, a migrant from Minas Gerais, when he first saw a picture of Lula amid the massive rally in a clipping from the *Folha de São Paulo* 'it gave me goosebumps. I said, "Holy shit [*puta merda*], look at that beauty! We succeeded. We've made the greatest leader in the history of the union. No one has ever brought together as many people as he has."⁴⁶

Beyond pride, the rallies also brought comfort in numbers. As Lula later observed, 'individually everyone has their fears', but by uniting repeatedly in Vila Euclides, rain or shine, 'the courage of each one' was joined to the rest, allowing workers to achieve 'what they individually understood to be impossible'.⁴⁷ It was this collective mobilisation that generated the charisma that Lula came to exercise as the commander of an army of peons. The 1979 strike represented one of those 'revolutionary or creative epochs' in which, as French sociologist Durkheim reminds us, a 'collective effervescence' can arise in which 'men [can] see more and differently ... than in normal times'; 'changes are not merely of shades and

⁴⁵Lula, interview, 17 and 26 April 2000, 'Depoimento de Luís Inácio Lula da Silva', downloaded by the author from the website *ABC de Lula!* (virtual memory centre), p. 31.

⁴⁶Interview with 'Adão', in Pogibin, 'Memórias', p. 128.

⁴⁷Lula, interviews from 1990 and 1994, in Marta Harnecker, *O sonho era possível: A história do Partido dos Trabalhadores narrada por seus protagonistas* (Havana: MEPLA, 1994), p. 57.

degrees; men become different'.⁴⁸ In São Bernardo, most of the *categoria* would come to see themselves in and through their identification with Lula as they forged a boldly audacious collective identity condensed into a powerful affirmation: We are all peons! We are all *cabra machos* [manly men]! We are all Lula!

Before this moment, the metalworkers, despite being a legally recognised social category, had not been a group in terms of mass mobilisation, collective struggle or a purposive shared identity.⁴⁹ To understand this distinction, it is helpful to turn to Bourdieu's dissatisfaction with 'realist interpretations of the construction of classes', which drew on Sartre's critique of mechanistic social theories in Marxism and mainstream sociology during the 1950s.⁵⁰ Bourdieu emphasised that 'these "classes on paper", these "theoretical classes", constructed for explanatory purposes are not "realities", groups which would exist as such'. The challenge, he went on, is to understand 'the limits (or the probabilities) of any attempt to turn theoretical classes into real classes', attempts that depend on the 'political work of group-making (whose specific logic must be analysed)'.⁵¹

Even if one granted that the destiny of the working class was inherent, in the teleological sense suggested by Marx, the class can be constructed only via politics, the embodied work done with words. Making an agglomeration of individual workers into an action group, in Bourdieu's language, is possible only if the leader's discourse 'is true, that is, adequate to things'. Only in that way can we 'creat[e] things with words'. 'In this sense', as Bourdieu puts it, 'symbolic power is a power of consecration or revelation, a power to conceal or reveal things which are already there'.⁵² As Fredric Jameson observes, glossing Sartre, 'it is not the prestige of the leaders which brings about the adoption of this or that proposed course of action [in a group-in-fusion]. Rather the leaders enjoy respect precisely to the degree to which they are able to anticipate and give voice to the unformulated thinking of the group itself'.⁵³

The creation of a collective subject had long been the goal of working-class activists and leaders; as they chatted with fellow workers in factory bathrooms, on the

⁴⁸Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, transl. Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1915), pp. 226, 210–11. Echoes of Durkheim's 'collective effervescence' can be heard in Sartre's discussion of how a group-in-fusion emerged during the storming of the Bastille as the distance that separated people disappeared. As occurred in Vila Euclides, participants had 'the feeling of producing, and being subjected to, man as a new reality ... everyone continued to see himself in the Other, but saw himself there as *himself* ... [as well as] his own future in the Other': Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, pp. 436, 354, original emphasis; Poster, *Sartre's Marxism*, p. 81.

⁴⁹In Sartre's words, ABC's metalworkers underwent the transition from 'individual praxis and ... the passive activity of the collection' to 'that of collective praxis' in a 'pledged group-in-fusion'. And he insists that converting 'human multiplicity ... into a group praxis' is never automatic: Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, pp. 318, 307.

⁵⁰Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, transl. Matthew Adamson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 118. See Sartre, *Search, passim* for his critique of prevailing social theories in the 1950s. As for 'Sartre's view of "structure" as the objectification of praxis', Jameson has noted that it was 'revived and powerfully augmented by Pierre Bourdieu' in his theory of practice in the 1970s (Jameson, 'Foreword' to Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, p. xiii). Bourdieu's contributions here are notable although his debt to *Critique* is not widely recognised.

⁵¹Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, pp. 117–18.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁵³Jameson, 'Sartre and History', p. 253.

buses, at the union, over a drink, or at the factory gate, they were engaged in ‘class-making’ praxis. The carnivalesque atmosphere during strikes – only heightened during the exhilarating Vila Euclides rallies – was particularly fruitful in allowing workers to rethink their place in the world. With work stopped in its tracks, the individual experienced a feeling of freedom. As Ford worker and trade unionist Alberto Eulálio (‘Betão’) recalled, it was thrilling to see 20,000 people in the stadium time after time, including those who would never be seen at the union’s headquarters. These non-engaged workers would show up to the rallies, perhaps with their wife, son or daughter, and everyone got to liking the movement.⁵⁴

Highly motivated individuals like Betão were the foot soldiers of the army of peons that Lula came to command during the 1979–80 strikes. As mobilisation intensified, the number of such purposeful activists grew exponentially and individuals found personal recognition and fulfilment in the *categoria*’s collective struggles. In their factories and neighbourhoods, these men and some women provided top union leaders with a read on the diversity of industrial environments; cultural, sociological and psychological understandings; and pre-existing forms of organisation – reflected in configurations of consciousness – that linked and divided potential group members who prior to the strike were collectively in a state of seriality.⁵⁵

A mass struggle on the scale of that occurring in ABC cannot be explained simply by referring to the charismatic Lula’s relation with ‘masses’ in Vila Euclides. Rather, leadership occurred from the top to the bottom by multiplying spaces of convergence and constructing ensembles of new horizontal and vertical relationships. When assemblages of grass-roots activists successfully formed, they served – to adopt a metaphor from metallurgy – much like a flux, something mixed with a metal to facilitate melting. But the complex, multi-level project of group making can be understood only by identifying its mechanisms and linkages, which are distinct from institutionally designated voices.

The actual constitution of a group-in-fusion involves connecting the consciousnesses of individuals to each other based on recognition of a linked fate and shared hope. This can occur only through concerted action, involving physical and speech acts, as the individual assumes the consequences of these acts in the presence of others – what Sartre calls the pledge or oath, the exercise of individual agency

⁵⁴ Alberto Eulálio (‘Betão’), interview, in André Luis Corrêa da Silva, ‘João Ferrador na república de São Bernardo: O impacto do “novo” movimento sindical no ABC paulista no processo de transição democrática (1977–1980)’, Master’s thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 2006, p. 301.

⁵⁵ Both logically and temporally, the initial social ensembles are serial’, Thomas Flynn notes. ‘Whatever groups appear originate in opposition to serial otherness, dispersion, impotence’: Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason*, vol. 1: *Toward An Existentialist Theory of History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 135. For Sartre, seriality is when humans come together ‘in a series’ in which each individual is other to each other as opposed to a group. Among his examples are people waiting for a bus, listening to the radio or buying in the marketplace, all of which are marked by the ‘side-by-side indifference and anonymity’ of its participants: Jameson, ‘Foreword’ to Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, p. xxvi. See also Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, vol. 2: [*The Intelligibility of History*], transl. Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 2006 [1985]), p. 459 for the definition of seriality and Jameson’s discussion thereof in ‘Sartre and History’, pp. 248–9. As Poster notes, ‘groups are constituted within series and against them’ and ‘structured by bonds of reciprocity which overcome passivity, alterity, alienation’: *Sartre’s Marxism*, p. 81.

that is the foundation of group affiliations.⁵⁶ In the case of ABC's workers, this pledge meant assuming the long-feared identity of a 'striker' and becoming one of the now (in)famous rebel 'peons of ABC'.

For Sartre, 'the conquering of individual impotence is a new unveiling of the world', in the words of philosopher Joseph Catalano. In a fused group, the freedom of each member 'has a new dimension because the other as a third is not a mere object' but a triad (self/other/group) while the mediated reciprocity within the group generates power, which in turn destroys alterity.⁵⁷ The pledge, as a form of self-imposed inertia, forms the apex of Sartre's 'social dialectic in terms of freedom-necessity in producing the "common individual" (group member as such) as the effective positive agents of history'. Because of its efficacy and its relative permanence, Sartre sees the pledged group as 'the origin of humanity' as men and women 'have through mutual solidarity overcome both the abstract isolation of individual existence and the alienation of serial man in objects and otherness'. For Sartre, the pledge emerges precisely to prevent the inevitable 'drift back into the private life of serial dispersal'.⁵⁸ In such a situation, a singular figure can help preserve a treasured sense of connectedness threatened by the pressures of an inevitable reversion to seriality among its members.

Contending with Lula's Charisma

The unprecedented images of Vila Euclides were projected worldwide by Brazilian newspapers that had recently been released from censorship as part of the new liberalising measures that included a general amnesty, the return of exiles and the ending of two-party rule. Many Brazilians were riveted by what they perceived as a veritable 'theatre of democracy', with the 33-year-old São Bernardo metalworkers' president playing the lead. The more they heard, the more they became convinced that Lula epitomised their desire for political participation and the end of military tutelage. The scruffy lathe operator seemed to personify the new in what Ricardo Kotscho dubbed the 'Republic of São Bernardo', the only free territory in a country ruled by a stifling dictatorship that many believed had long outlived its time.⁵⁹ Lula's celebrity reached such heights that the industrialist Claudio Bardella, at the end of the 1979 labour negotiations, asked Lula for an autograph on behalf of his son.⁶⁰

Unlike their more conservative elders, early- to mid-career journalists and editors guaranteed that ABC's metalworkers were not relegated to the newspapers' inside pages, which would likely have prevented the strikes from entering the social and political imaginary of the highly educated. The legendary Italian-born editor Mino Carta put Lula on a magazine cover in February 1978 and assigned Kotscho the Lula beat in 1979. 'Ah, one more bearded little USP intellectual to bug me [*encher o sacco*]', Lula gruffly responded after Kotscho explained his

⁵⁶Jameson, 'Sartre and History', pp. 254, 256.

⁵⁷Joseph S. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Critique of Dialectical Reason*, vol. 1, *Theory of Practical Ensembles* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 180, 174.

⁵⁸Flynn, *Sartre*, p. 136; Jameson, 'Sartre and History', pp. 257, 255.

⁵⁹Ricardo Kotscho, 'Essa estranha terra que fica no Brasil', *IstoÉ*, May 1979, pp. 8–12.

⁶⁰Elio Gaspari, *A ditadura acabada* (Rio de Janeiro: Intrínseca, 2016), p. 146.

assignment. By 1980 Kotscho was an expert on ABC and was invited to write about the ‘thickset, resolute and courageous’ trade unionist for the *Folha de São Paulo*’s cultural insert. As Kotscho – who would go on to be a founding member of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ Party, PT) and Lula’s spokesperson – noted in his memoir, it was easy because Lula loved to recount his life saga. Here was a man who ‘was his own hero, [someone] without idols or models’, Kotscho reflected. What most impressed the journalist was the rapport between Lula and São Bernardo’s peons, who would roar his name during the Vila Euclides rallies.⁶¹

This emblematic rendering of the strikes – epitomised in photos of Lula and the crowd – distorts our understanding of the movement as our eyes are inevitably drawn to Lula, the man on stage, which exemplifies how, in Bourdieu’s words, ‘the signified, that is, the group, is identified with the signifier, the individual, the spokesperson’.⁶² This is the ‘social magic’ at the heart of ‘the charismatic illusion in which, in extreme cases, the spokesperson can appear to himself or herself and others as *causa sui*’. As described by Bourdieu, this form of ‘political fetishism’ is what we have come to know as ‘charisma, a mysterious objective property of the person, an impalpable charm, an unnameable mystery’, but one that conceals far more than it reveals.⁶³

Personifying this social fiction, Lula came to be endowed by São Bernardo’s metalworkers ‘with full power to speak and act in the name of the group’, which lifted these workers ‘from the state of [being] separate individuals’ and ‘enabl[ed] them to act and speak’ through Lula while granting him the right ‘to speak and act as if he *were* the group made man’.⁶⁴ The heart of charismatic representation, as described by Bourdieu, is when ‘the individual who represents the group ... and expresses it verbally, names it, [and] acts and speaks in its name’ becomes its ‘concrete incarnation’ who ‘by making the group seen, by making himself seen in its place, and above all, by speaking in its place, makes it exist’.⁶⁵

Over the course of 1979, Lula’s appeal transcended the union as he came to be embraced by a healthy plurality of non-union metalworkers. The sense that he was uncommon and marvellous would be felt even by the broader public who did not necessarily support him. This is the essence of charismatisation: it enhances the power of the one so blessed, of the group in the making that bestowed it, and of the individuals and institutions tied to the blessed one. The emergence of Lula’s widely recognised charisma would also affect the calculations of employers and of the government, which increased Lula’s influence and capacity for successful manoeuvre.

⁶¹Ricardo Kotscho, ‘A terra dos peões’, *Folhetim (Folha de São Paulo)*, 11 May 1980, pp. 8–9. See also Gaspari, *A ditadura acabada*, pp. 83, 86; 97–8; Ricardo Kotscho, *Do Golpe ao Planalto: Uma Vida de Repórter* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2006), p. 97.

⁶²Pierre Bourdieu, ‘What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups’, *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 32 (1987), p. 14. Bourdieu’s role in ‘augmenting’ Sartre’s approach to class was cited by Jameson in the Foreword to *Critique*, vol. 1, p. xiii. His article is precisely about how a social class or other group is constituted out of a ‘serial collection of juxtaposed individuals’ who escape a ‘state of serial existence’ through delegation (Bourdieu, ‘What Makes a Social Class?’, pp. 14–15).

⁶³Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups’, *Theory and Society*, 14: 6 (1985), p. 740.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*; emphasis added.

⁶⁵Bourdieu, ‘What Makes a Social Class?’, p. 14.

As a practical man, the union's long-time attorney Soares saw the benefits of having someone so 'authentic' and 'full of charisma' as the leader of ABC's peons.⁶⁶ However, the primacy of charisma in Lula's appeal was more troubling for those committed to a collectivist philosophy of working-class self-emancipation. Like liberalism, Marxist traditions tend to valorise 'rational' action – coded male – over the 'spontaneous', 'emotional' and 'intuitive' – lesser, feminised spheres to be brought under the control of 'conscious' thought.⁶⁷ This explains why those who studied the ABC strikes tended to minimise the Lula phenomenon. In 1987 the Mexican labour sociologist Víctor Manuel Durand Ponte implausibly suggested that Lula's 'charisma' derived from 'the strong identification of the [union] leadership with the rank and file', which allowed the rank and file to identify with the leadership.⁶⁸ And in 1992 Ricardo Antunes, while he 'unequivocally' recognised the positive value of Lula's 'personalised and charismatic leadership', thought it fell short of offering the conscious leadership needed by the workers.⁶⁹

These issues were taken up most directly by two founding members of the PT, the sociologist Luís Flávio Rainho and his skilled metalworker collaborator Osvaldo Bargas, a then Marxist elected in 1981 as general secretary of the São Bernardo union's *diretoria*. Their 1983 book, an analytical tour de force, fully recognised the Lula phenomenon that emerged in 1979, the year he was first 'carried on the workers' shoulders and called "father" by them'. Undertaking Marxist-style criticism/self-criticism, they wrote that both workers and the *diretoria* had shown 'excessive dependence' on Lula's leadership. Rank-and-file workers, they said, came to believe that if they 'faithfully' followed Lula, 'their problems would be automatically resolved, independently of the role that is theirs to play'.⁷⁰

Having lived the strike from the inside, Rainho and Bargas even acknowledged in passing a religious dimension to the popular response when they reprinted, without comment, 'Our Father Lula', a rewrite of the Catholic prayer by a Mercedes-Benz worker.⁷¹ Along with singing the national anthem, workers often prayed the standard Catholic 'Our Father' during rallies, at one point at the prompting of a worker's wife speaking on stage. At least some hand-made banners also directly equated Jesus and Lula; one proclaimed that 'Jesus too was a worker, which is why he is on our side', and another simply stated 'First God, second Lula, and third, unity'.⁷²

When the books by Rainho and Bargas, Antunes and Durand Ponte came out in the 1980s, ABC's metalworkers were still hot topics as the PT made its first incursions into the political-electoral arena. Writing for an educated audience, these

⁶⁶Maurício Soares, 'Prefácio', in Rainho and Bargas, *As lutas operárias*, p. 7.

⁶⁷For a gendered epistemological critique of 'orthodox' Marxism see John D. French and Daniel James, 'The Travails of Doing Labor History: The Restless Wanderings of John Womack Jr.', *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, 4: 2 (2007), pp. 108–9, 112–13.

⁶⁸Víctor Manuel Durand Ponte, *Crisis y movimiento obrero en Brasil: Las huelgas metalúrgicas de 1978 a 1980* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1987), p. 215.

⁶⁹Ricardo Antunes, *A rebeldia do trabalho: O confronto operário no ABC paulistas, as greves de 1978/80* (Campinas: Editora Unicamp, 1988), pp. 59–60.

⁷⁰Rainho and Bargas, *As lutas operárias*, p. 167.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²Apesar da violência, um "pai nosso" a 60 mil vozes', *Diário Popular*, 21 March 1979, p. 6 (article in possession of author); 'Lula refuta infiltração ideológica no movimento', *Folha de São Paulo*, 18 March 1979, p. 50.

analysts were fighting the idea ‘that the working class in the region *is what it is* due exclusively to Lula’,⁷³ which suggested theories of mass manipulation. While keeping charisma at a distance, all four authors reduced Lula’s appeal to a reflection of or conduit for unspecified worker aspirations. Thus Rainho and Bargas awkwardly described the union president as the ‘son’, ‘fruit’, and ‘expression’ of the São Bernardo metalworkers’ ‘combativity, political maturation and deepening of consciousness’.⁷⁴ Another spoke of how Lula, with his ‘workers’ intuition’, had ‘faithfully synthesised and systematised the spontaneous aspirations of the masses’, which Lula, in the words of a third, ‘translated’ into an oral form ‘accessible to them’.⁷⁵ Only Durand Ponte, without elaboration, fruitfully suggested that, ‘at least in part’, Lula’s popularity might be due to workers’ identification with him: ‘seeing in him the human being’ they would like to be.⁷⁶

If asked themselves, São Bernardo’s workers would have echoed a striker from the 1970s who, years later, recalled the truth of his wife’s frequent refrain that ‘you love Lula more than you do your family’.⁷⁷ During the strike ‘Lula was all that [the workers] talked about’ in the factories, one toolmaker recalled, because they needed ‘someone who spoke more loudly, was braver [*mais peitudo*], [and] more willing to go to the mat’.⁷⁸ As another remembered, Lula thrilled the youngsters because he ‘spoke the language of the *peãozada* [class of peons], recently arrived from the North [as a migrant]’. At the peak of this enthusiasm, ‘Lula appeared like a God’, and there was ‘an enormous fanaticism within the factories. Whatever Lula ordered to be done, we did it.’⁷⁹

Durand Ponte’s insight would be developed 25 years later by a lifelong popular educator inspired by Sartre. Mauro Iasi suggested that Lula’s leadership stemmed from his ability to speak both what the workers wanted to hear and what they wished to make heard. This was possible only because of Lula’s ‘authenticity’: ‘He is not a populist leader trying to pass himself off as a suffering worker but rather a migrant worker’ who had also worked in the factory, ‘living on the same salary, speaking with the same accent, dressing in the same manner, [and] making use of the same values and expressions’. But while sharing this background with average peons, Lula also embodied what they wished they could be, the one who ‘confronts, fights, speaks, imposes himself, has confidence in himself and us’. The irony of this, Iasi underlines, is that the leader also doesn’t possess these wished-for characteristics; rather, he is the means for their expression by the group. In this way ‘a horizontal identity [is created] that permits the group to realise what a serial individual alone would see as impossible’.⁸⁰ What emerges is an asymmetrical but truly reciprocal relationship between group and leader.

⁷³Rainho and Bargas, *As lutas operárias*, p. 164; emphasis added.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

⁷⁵*Ibid.*; Antunes, *A rebeldia*, pp. 59–60 (quotes).

⁷⁶Durand Ponte, *Crisis*, p. 277.

⁷⁷Eulálio, interview, in Silva, ‘João Ferrador’, p. 300.

⁷⁸Saulo Roberto Garlipppe and Paulo Okamoto, ‘O papel do ABC no movimento sindical’, in *A CUT nas campanhas salariais de 1985* (São Paulo: CEDI, 1986?), p. 10.

⁷⁹João Raimundo, interview, 1999, in Mauro Iasi, *As metamorfoses da consciência de classe: O PT entre a negação e o consentimento* (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2006), pp. 368–9.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p. 370.

That the alleged ‘personalism’ of the rural world might explain the behaviour of ABC’s peons bothered intellectuals, whether non-manual or manual (the skilled). Could Lula, as commander, be understood as a *patrão* (boss) under the traditional patron–client system typical of the countryside? Intellectuals rejected any suggestion of such a wellspring for the ABC strikes based on a schematic stereotype about the nature of the rural patron–client system. But it is hardly far-fetched to assume that some of the *peãozada*, especially those ‘recently arrived from the North’, might have seen Lula as a good patron, one who served as an intermediary because of his ability ‘to know, interpret and manipulate the external world’. Yet the authority of such a patron, often a landowner or political boss, existed only ‘to the degree to which he participates in the universe of the community’, as anthropologist Eunice Durham had commented in reference to São Paulo’s migrants in 1973. If he met their expectations, the weak reciprocated by according respect and repaying him with loyalty, although this made them a party to his internecine battles with rival landowners or officials. Under this dyadic system of paternalistic domination, it was also not uncommon for the ‘bad’ patrons to prey on those they had pledged to protect, usually at minimal cost to themselves, given the weakness of their clients.⁸¹

Yet there is another, oft-neglected horizontal dimension of rural life that had a more direct bearing on Lula’s relationship with ABC’s peons. As Durham notes, rural communities often accord informal leadership to certain individuals who, because of ‘personal qualities’ and the ‘richness’ of their experience, had the ‘capacity to express the collective consensus’. The community solidarity behind this informal leader grew out of ‘physical proximity, personal sympathy and the shared experience of mutual assistance’.⁸² As a leader, Lula thus expressed both the rural ideal of horizontal leadership – in his capacity to produce a consensus – and aspects of the role of a patron – as mediator with the bosses above him – although he lacked the clout to offer jobs, material favours or influence with the police. Those who followed Lula were embarking on a path of struggle that pitted them, as a group, against immensely powerful enemies. Learning as the struggle unfolded, many would undergo a broadening and reconfiguration of their view of the world that intellectuals on the Left would label ‘consciousness-raising’.

However, it is a mistake to think that only rural migrants were ‘susceptible’ to Lula’s charisma, which was felt just as strongly by city-born workers and the skilled. Moreover, a significant swath of the highly educated, especially students and the vanquished student ‘revolutionaries’ of rebel year 1968, were powerfully attracted to Lula as the fulfilment of Marxist fantasies about the working class’s leading role or for his decisive personal contribution to the mass struggles that ended military rule. This could be seen at the May Day rally held in São Bernardo in 1979 that was attended by 150,000, according to the state-appointed police *delegado* in that *município*. He reported that many attendees were of ‘middle-class appearance’, including a contingent of ‘stereotypical university’ students, male and female, wearing jeans and distributing leftist newspapers. According to his report, applause met

⁸¹Eunice Ribeiro Durham, *A caminho da cidade: A vida rural e a migração para São Paulo* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1984 [1973]), pp. 90–1, 158–9.

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 74.

'all the orators', but Lula was received with a 'total and indescribable delirium'. 'The man really is a charismatic leader', he concluded breathlessly.⁸³ In a very real sense, Lula's PT, founded in 1980, would become a multi-class alliance of the generation of 1968 and the new generation of the late 1970s as they came to unite around him as an icon despite their differences.

Thus, Lula's charisma was born accompanying ABC's workers through a particular sequence of events, drawing strength from them, and helping to forge a new collective identity that took the 'leader' and the 'led' to places that they had never dreamed of nor anticipated. Coming out of this localised process, the same skills and talents – backed up by the symbolic capital and moral authority of those events – were applied by Lula as he built more ambitious instruments for popular struggle such as the militant Central Única dos Trabalhadores (Unified Workers' Central, CUT) and the PT, organisations founded metaphorically on the events in ABC, its leader and the powerful images that linked the two. These fledgling institutions on the far Left of national politics were constructed through successive events in which hundreds of thousands of other Brazilians – as in ABC – came to bond personally with Lula as a larger-than-life personality, with many but by no means all joining the PT and CUT. As hypothesised by Sartre, Lula came to occupy a dominant position within the 'institutions and organizations' that emerged as the pledged group-in-fusion saw 'in him, in his unity as a human organism ... an image of its own organic unity', now fading, in a relationship easily labelled 'charismatic' by the outside world.⁸⁴

After millions took to the streets in the widespread and surprisingly well-attended *Direitas Já* (Direct Elections Now) mobilisations of 1984, the next decisive leap was when Lula surprised the world as the PT's candidate in the 1989 presidential election, the first since 1960, which was held only four years after the military retired to the barracks following 21 years in power. While Lula barely beat out a veteran oppositionist in the first round, attracting only 15 per cent of the vote, the memorable campaign that followed saw millions more come together, across the national territory, to produce a totally unexpected outcome of 44 per cent of the national second round vote. The surprising strength of Lula's support was a galvanising development that consolidated his position – along with that of his friend Fidel Castro – as a leftist icon throughout the region. Having honed his ability to speak from the heart to millions, Lula went on to win over tens of millions more voters as he broadened his appeal on his way to assuming the presidency of a country 20 times the size of Cuba in 2003. In that capacity, Lula kicked off an entirely new era known as Latin America's 'Left Turns' or 'Pink Tide', which challenged a decade of triumphant neo-liberalism, weakened US hegemony, and undermined the neo-liberal Washington Consensus economic policies. Along with Venezuela's Chávez, elected in 1998, Lula stood at the very centre of this amazing turnabout in the region's electoral politics after the lean and discouraging 1990s, a decade in which he and his party helped rally the dispirited Latin American Left.

⁸³Letter of 1 May 1979 by Delegado de São Bernardo do Campo, in Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo, DOPS, Pasta 23, 2904.

⁸⁴Jameson, 'Sartre and History', p. 271.

Charisma, Populism and Group-Making

We opened with Bell's observation that historians tend to view talk of charisma as tautological verbiage lacking in conceptual clarity and analytical heft. During the Latin American Left Turns, for example, journalists and academics routinely referred to the presidents of Brazil and Venezuela as 'charismatic'. Whether sympathetic or hostile, they were acknowledging their popular appeal while gesturing to sustained mass followings gained through identification, emotional engagement and loyalty. In discussing leftist success and failure, Raby goes so far as to suggest that the outcome in Latin America depended – at least in part – on whether a given leader possessed charisma. 'However admirable', the martyred Chilean President Salvador Allende (1908–73) 'was singularly devoid of charisma' and the 'lack of political dynamism and charisma' of his Unidad Popular (Popular Unity) coalition contributed, in her view, to its fall in 1973. In contrast, the 'charisma and political genius of Fidel Castro' were crucial in the Cuban Revolution, while the post-1998 radicalisation in Venezuela was driven by 'the personal protagonism and charisma of Chávez', especially 'his ability to communicate' and carry the population with him in acting decisively.⁸⁵

Democracy and Revolution figured in a heated debate in the early 2000s over Chávez's leftist legitimacy, given his rhetoric and a top-down personalist leadership style many deemed 'populist'.⁸⁶ Yet Raby argued that neither Chávez nor Castro, in their political origins, had much 'to do with leftist orthodoxy' and 'a great deal to do with' mid-twentieth-century populists including Juan Perón, the point of departure for the influential interpretations advanced by the Argentine-born British academic Laclau. In contrast, Allende and his Chilean Unidad Popular coalition were 'traditional leftist parties, with a conventional Marxist ideology' which, like the Cuban Communists, lacked Fidel's charismatic sway in leading a successful transition to socialism.⁸⁷ In defending Chávez, Raby argued that a progressive or revolutionary populism existed – a category in which she included the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution – in addition to the 'reactionary' and 'dominant class' populisms so long denounced as top-down authoritarian diversions by a frustrated Left.⁸⁸

In truth, charisma was secondary in Raby's argument that political leadership was vital for the success of popular revolutionary mobilisations. It figured only to the extent that charisma had for too long been attributed to Latin American populists as a simplistic way of accounting for their surprising success at mid-century. Moreover, the elision of charisma and populism, Alan Knight noted, ignored the fact that not all the region's quintessential populists were charismatic (Brazil's Getúlio Vargas for one was not).⁸⁹ In addition, personally charismatic leaders in the region included some centrists as well as classic *caudillos*, among whom

⁸⁵Raby, *Democracy*, pp. 8, 202–3, 112, 154, 157–8, 212.

⁸⁶John D. French, 'Understanding the Politics of Latin America's Plural Lefts (Chávez/Lula): Social Democracy, Populism, and Convergence on the Path to a Post-Neoliberal World', *Third World Quarterly*, 30: 2 (2009), pp. 349–70.

⁸⁷Raby, *Democracy*, pp. 237, 233, 8, 202.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 212, 253, 237.

⁸⁹Alan Knight, 'Populism and Neo-Populism in Latin America, Especially Mexico', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 30: 2 (1998), p. 237.

Raby counted Chávez, who were not necessarily populist but could be.⁹⁰ And even populist leaders who were charismatic, such as Perón, were not reliably associated with the Left or popular interests, as Raby also acknowledged.

Democracy and Revolution was explicitly inspired by the theorisation of populism by Laclau, who famously emphasised how democratic-popular interpellations constituted the ‘people’ as an antagonistic force.⁹¹ Like Laclau, Raby neglected decades of revisionist research by Latin American social historians that had studied Peronism and Getulismo from the bottom up.⁹² However, based on my 40 years of research into the mid-twentieth-century leaders, movements, governments, culture and regimes associated with the *sui generis* political phenomenon of Latin American populism, I would agree with Raby that the Cuban Revolution was indeed the culmination of the classic populist era.⁹³

To address criticism of Chávez, Raby was willing to countenance even the characteristics of populism viewed with the greatest hostility by liberals and the Left, what I have called charisma in its negative sense. Thus, she wrote of the ‘extraordinary intensity’ of the charismatic bond, bordering ‘on the mystical’, that linked populist orators with their audiences whose reactions she describes as ‘chiliastic’. Having used a boiler plate stereotype, she nonetheless insisted that this oratorical connection was a ‘genuine dialogue’, because the leader not only expresses ‘the thoughts and will of his audience’ but ‘assimilates the “general will” ... [in] a reciprocal process’ of mutual identification.⁹⁴ While actual benefits and a heroic feat are also needed, Raby’s approach allows the leader to stand in for the masses unproblematically. And her attempt to switch the negative associations of a classic populist stereotype is done without a case study to demonstrate that what she has described has actually occurred and, if so, where, when, how and among whom. Indeed, to suggest a seamless equation between the leaders’ words and the will of their followers – given the very heterogeneity of currents of consciousness shown so clearly

⁹⁰Raby, *Democracy*, p. 253.

⁹¹Raby, *ibid.*, pp. 240–2, 249, 251 summarises Laclau’s approach; for the initial formulations which endured in his later work, see Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: NLB, 1979), pp. 107, 166, 172–3.

⁹²Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946–1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); John D. French, *The Brazilian Workers’ ABC: Class Conflicts and Alliances in Modern São Paulo* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). Our research subsequently broadened to include the gendering of class and politics and the exploration of individual subjectivity: John D. French and Daniel James (eds.), *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Daniel James, *Doña María’s Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁹³Raby’s political intuition parallels my own observation in 2006 that ‘the Cuban Revolution of 1959 represented the highpoint of the populist tide. Indeed, Fidel Castro can be seen as a culmination of many of the potentialities to be found within Latin American populism.’ Like her, I suggested that ‘his rejection of the vanguard party form for his movement ... and his exercise of personal leadership thereafter were far more closely associated with populism than with its rival, communism. Indeed, it was precisely this dimension of Castro’s leadership that made the Cuban Revolution such a potent force for change in the 1960s’: John D. French, ‘The Laboring and Middle-Class Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean: Historical Trajectories and New Research Directions’, in Jan Lucassen (ed.), *Global Labour History: A State of the Art* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 309–10.

⁹⁴Raby, *Democracy*, pp. 243–5.

for Vila Euclides – ventures down a path more likely to end in authoritarian imposition than democratic emancipation. Even in the case of ABC, marked by greater horizontality, this article has suggested at best a form of asymmetrical reciprocity while the integral subsumption of the latter into the former is impossible.

In disputing potential criticisms of Chávez, Raby asserts that betrayal is ‘virtually unthinkable’ for ‘authentic leaders’ once they have established a ‘charismatic bond with the people ... It is for this reason ... that the class origins of the individual leader are not particularly important.’⁹⁵ Putting aside her qualifiers and the chequered history of populism, Raby’s disavowal served to rebut those who would juxtapose Chávez to Lula and the PT, which she described as a ‘spontaneous “organic” leadership’ that emerged ‘from the heart’ of a mass movement. While never referring to Lula’s charisma, she described the Brazilian president as a ‘grass-roots activist’, spokesman for metalworkers, indisputable head of the PT, and a man still admired by Brazil’s workers. Disappointed at his failure to deliver ‘radical social and political change’ in the first years after his 2002 election, Lula now seemed to Raby ‘less like a Brazilian Hugo Chávez than a tropical Tony Blair (or perhaps ... a Latin Gerhard Schroeder, since he has not indulged in the same degree of neo-liberal ignorance)’.⁹⁶ What mattered most to Raby in 2006 was the populist Chávez’s political will to launch a frontal assault on power.⁹⁷ ‘Those who are truly populist’ are to be valued precisely because they ‘operate outside established institutions’, ‘threaten to subvert them’, and use the ‘dynamic force of mass mobilization’ to overwhelm and displace ‘established political parties and institutions’, thus giving populism a revolutionary as well as, I would add, a threatening reactionary potential.⁹⁸

Lula is indeed charismatic as is Chávez, but he is not a leader in the populist mould. Whether in its origin or heterogenous ideological milieu, the Lula phenomenon is best understood as classically leftist, based, as it was, on an industrial working class in modern factories that, attaining consciousness and mobilisational power, succeeded in impacting their nation’s political trajectory. While gaining and holding the presidency for 13 years, the PT’s key leader had an appeal that reached far beyond ABC, where he first acquired charisma. Closer in outlook to Allende, Lula is an institutionalist loyal to the trade union movement out of which he emerged, the political party he built, and the democratic rules established by the 1988 ‘Citizens’ Constitution’. Within the Latin American panorama, the Brazilian case is unusual precisely because his personal support and charisma (*Lulismo*) is combined with a dedication to popular and party organisation that remedies a populist weakness recognised by Raby: the ‘dependence on the person of the leader’.⁹⁹

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 245.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 243, 229, 52.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 2, 52, 15, 229. Raby is thus in line with what has recently been called an ‘ideational approach’ among political scientists who see populism ‘as a specific way of competing for and exercising political power’ through positing an antagonistic relation between the ‘pure’ or ‘common’ people and the ‘corrupt elites’ deemed to be their ‘pernicious enemies’: Kurt Weyland, ‘Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics’, *Comparative Politics*, 34: 1 (2001), pp. 11–12; Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 5–6.

⁹⁸Raby, *Democracy*, p. 243.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 245.

Raby's reaction to the Latin American Left Turns of the early 2000s remind us of the enduring equation between charisma and populism among those who study Latin America.¹⁰⁰ To seriously advance, the study of charisma must be severed from the long-standing populism debate that has introduced layers of confusion. As Bell suggested, charisma is indeed worthy of a programme of empirical research by historians with the goal of better understanding what I have called 'charismatisation' from the bottom up. How does charisma emerge within a specific sequence of events, in a particular place and time, involving flesh-and-blood individuals? How do they come together despite differences of gender, class, race-colour, religion and education? And how does it differ or what does it share across distinct milieus with different economic foundations, cultures, political structures and understanding of power? The answers will not be simple, and the search for them demands interdisciplinary cooperation as well as greater empirical rigour and conceptual clarity.

This article has forcefully argued that the metaphorical birth of charisma is a particularly fruitful starting point for a deeper understanding of crucial dimensions of Latin American and global politics. Indeed, my approach is inspired by a 1988 article by Daniel James which transformed our knowledge of Peronism by examining two days of working-class mobilisations in October 1945 that forced the release of Perón from custody and catapulted him into the presidency the following year.¹⁰¹ In both cases, charisma in politics was a by-product of mobilisation from below as individual praxis was transformed into collective praxis.

As suggested by the article's conceptual language, I have benefitted from a decades-long dialogue with Sartre's neglected masterwork entitled *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, vol. 1: *Theory of Practical Ensembles*. It is a difficult work of social theory that coined a *sui generis* vocabulary about a 'panorama of group formations' and how they emerge, function, evolve and disappear.¹⁰² Its strongest insights derive from the close attention paid to the phenomenological experience of participation as one moves from 'ephemeral groups first and then examine[d] the more basic social groups'.¹⁰³ While anchored in thinking about the French proletariat, Sartre was most interested in 'a smaller guerrilla-type unit' because he tended, like Bourdieu and unlike most Marxists, 'to preclude the idea of a social class as an actor', simply owing to its objective insertion in a given role in the capitalist production apparatus: a problem Marxism traditionally finesses with Marx's simplistic if classic formula about the transition from 'class in itself' to 'class for itself'.¹⁰⁴

The bold ambition of *Critique* was to elaborate the 'formal structures of history' through a theorisation of categories 'from the constitution of "seriality" and the

¹⁰⁰Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, p. 42 and Weyland, 'Clarifying', pp. 13–14 suggest that charisma need not be required for their definitions of populism. Yet all three nonetheless reference 'charismatic personal appeal' and the 'potency of charisma' when describing populist leadership.

¹⁰¹Daniel James, 'October 17th and 18th, 1945: Mass Protest, Peronism and the Argentine Working Class', *Journal of Social History*, 21: 3 (1988), pp. 441–61. As suggested in later observations by James, October 1945 helps us to understand subsequent transformations in the relationships as Peronism became both institutionalised and enconced in the state. Daniel James, 'Meatpackers, Peronists, and Collective Memory: A View from the South', *American Historical Review*, 102: 5 (1997), pp. 1404–12.

¹⁰²Poster, *Sartre's Marxism*, p. 101.

¹⁰³Catalano, *Commentary*, p. 168.

¹⁰⁴Jameson, 'Sartre and History', p. 255.

“fused group” to [the] disintegrative “institutionalizations” laid out in its first volume. In his book subtitled *Search for Freedom and the Challenge of History* (1979, revised 2012), István Mészáros rejected Sartre’s pan-historical claim but praised its insights into ‘a determinate phase of [bourgeois] history’. While critical, Mészáros nonetheless judged *Critique’s* first volume a ‘major achievement’ with a ‘truly remarkable ... potential for illuminating’ capitalist modernity and many ‘disparate qualities of [its] societal metabolic interchange’.¹⁰⁵ Yet the challenge posed by Mark Poster 30 years earlier remained. In *Sartre’s Marxism* (1982), he noted that ‘Sartre connects the formation of the group with material conditions ... [but] does not explain adequately why the formation takes place at a particular time’.¹⁰⁶ In this article, I provide a richly empirical totalising narrative of the concrete case of ABC’s metalworkers and Lula. While I have avoided pedantic theoretical exposition, in this article I hope to have established the worth of Sartre’s categories as well as the benefits of his approach as laid out succinctly in its precursor *Search for a Method*, incorporated into the first volume, which is the best starting point for understanding the late Sartre’s theoretical aims and methodological approach.

In his 2004 foreword to the first volume of *Critique*, Jameson noted the work’s ‘notorious stylistic difficulty’ before lamenting that Laclau and his wife Chantal Mouffe had long given it a ‘wide berth’.¹⁰⁷ This is not surprising given that their intellectual odyssey began under the influence of the rigid structuralism of the French Marxist Louis Althusser that personified what Sartre, along with E. P. Thompson, vigorously rejected.¹⁰⁸ By the 1980s, Laclau was carried into post-structuralism and post-modernism as he worked ‘a post-Marxist terrain’ whose aim, he declared in 1990, was the ‘deconstruction of the Marxist tradition with its inveterate class-based politics, its productivism, and antiquated statism’.¹⁰⁹ Operating exclusively on linguistic and discursive levels, Laclau explicitly eschewed the sociological and historical and never addressed charisma in his writings on populism; if he had, he would have had to address the dynamic created by the gap between the speaker and those spoken to.¹¹⁰

In the end, populism for Laclau emerged as ‘quite simply, a way of constructing the political’, or even the very definition of politics itself.¹¹¹ There was a weary air to his last

¹⁰⁵István Mészáros, *The Work of Sartre: Search for Freedom and the Challenge of History* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012 [1979]), p. 241.

¹⁰⁶Poster, *Sartre’s Marxism*, p. 101; Catalano, *Commentary*, p. 168; Jameson, ‘Sartre and History’, p. 253.

¹⁰⁷Jameson, ‘Foreword’ to Sartre, *Critique*, vol. 1, p. xiii. I share Jameson’s opinion that the unfinished writings of a second volume of *Critique* are less compelling, which no doubt explains Sartre’s decision to leave it unpublished during his lifetime.

¹⁰⁸Laclau, *Politics*, p. 101; Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 210–11. It is too often missed that Sartre’s rejection of structuralism and insistence on ‘lived experience’ overlapped with the approach of his contemporary British Marxist E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978); Flynn, *Sartre*, pp. 107, 72; Poster, *Sartre’s Marxism*, pp. 72–4.

¹⁰⁹Laclau, *New Reflections*, pp. 191, 205, 130, 179, 228.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 210–11; Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. ix. While fully attentive to words and their deployment, the primary mistake of a discourse as opposed to historically centred social theory lies in reducing ‘the lived signification to the simple linear statement which language gives it’ while failing to ‘respect human reality and its lived meaning’: Flynn, *Sartre*, pp. 107, 72.

¹¹¹Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, pp. xi, 117.

book, entitled *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (2014), where he described politics as the ‘locus of undecidable language games’ because ‘gone are the times when the transparency of social actors, of processes of representation, even of the presumed underlying logics of the social fabric, could be accepted unproblematically’.¹¹² Even as Laclau maintained sympathies for the Left Turns, including the Kirchners of Argentina, his writing was bereft not only of events and individual biography but also of the emotion and indignation that characterises an emancipatory vision of human praxis.

The twenty-first century has seen the rise of a new generation in Latin America, the United States and Europe convinced they can change their world. They would be well advised to ponder Sartre’s challenge to Michel Foucault and his fellow structuralists, later renamed ‘post-structuralists’, two years before May 1968 in Paris:

What Foucault offers us is ... [not an archaeology] but a geology: the series of successive levels that form our ‘ground’ ... But Foucault doesn’t tell us what would be the most interesting, namely, how each thought is constructed from these conditions or how men move from one thought to another. For that he would have to allow praxis and thus history to intervene, and that’s precisely what he refuses to do.¹¹³

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Spanish abstract

Si David Bell en su libro *Men on Horseback* (2020) se centra en lo que es el carisma político, cómo funciona y lo que significa ‘escribir su historia’, este artículo examina cómo el expresidente Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (‘Lula’) adquirió carisma durante las dramáticas huelgas de los obreros metalúrgicos entre 1978 y 1980 en la región industrial ABC de São Paulo, Brasil. Al mismo tiempo que se generó una vasta literatura, académicos de las huelgas del ABC han evadido la cuestión de cómo Lula, el talentoso organizador, surgió como una figura reconocidamente carismática. Este artículo explica dónde, cuándo y por qué esto sucedió y cómo un lazo carismático fue forjado cuando 100,000 ‘peones’ estigmatizados, temerosos e inseguros vinieron a constituirse como actor social localmente articulado, como grupo en fusión, cuya determinación y creatividad llevó a la hazaña extraordinaria de la organización y la movilización. Argumentando en contra de empalmar carisma con populismo, el artículo también establece la utilidad de la teorización sobre la conformación de grupos desarrollada en la *Crítica de la Razón Dialéctica* (1960) de Jean-Paul Sartre.

Spanish keywords: Brasil; carisma; trabajo; Lula

¹¹²Ernesto Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (London: Verso, 2014), p. 80.

¹¹³Flynn, *Sartre*, p. 324.

Portuguese abstract

Se David Bell em seu livro *Men on Horseback* (2020) enfoca o que é carisma político, como ele funciona e o que significa ‘escrever sua história’, este artigo examina como o ex-presidente do Brasil Luís Inácio Lula da Silva adquiriu carisma durante as dramáticas greves dos metalúrgicos de 1978-80 na região industrial do ABC, São Paulo, Brasil. Ao gerar uma vasta literatura, os estudiosos das greves do ABC evitaram a questão de como Lula, o talentoso organizador, emergiu como uma figura reconhecidamente carismática. Este artigo explica onde, quando e por que isso aconteceu e como foi forjado um vínculo carismático à medida que 100.000 ‘peões’ estigmatizados, medrosos e inseguros se constituíram como um ator social localmente articulado, um grupo em fusão, cuja ousadia e criatividade levaram a feitos extraordinários de organização e mobilização. Argumentando contra a fusão de carisma e populismo, também estabelece a utilidade da teorização da formação de grupos avançada na *Crítica da Razão Dialética* (1960) de Jean-Paul Sartre.

Portuguese keywords: Brasil; carisma; trabalho; Lula

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