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(review)

Travis Knoll

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***Challenging Social Inequality: The Landless Rural Workers Movement and Agrarian Reform in Brazil.* By Miguel Carter (Ed.)  
Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, p.494, \$32.95.**

In this updated English-language edition of a 2010 Universidade Estadual de São Paulo (UNESP) collection, Miguel Carter brought together the work of a wide array of social scientists, social movement figures, and development experts to document the trajectory of the Landless Rural Worker's Movement (MST) from its inception in the late 1970s through the first half of the Workers' Party (PT) rule in the 2000s. Despite occasional reference shortcuts—including a Wikipedia cite for numbers on Gandhi's legendary salt-mine march (32n) and a name-only E.P. Thompson reference (272n) when discussing Brazilian social movement attempts at creating a "peoples' history" of Brazil (252)—the volume shows disciplinary and scholarly breadth. Sources range from recorded correspondences and quantitative government and census data to journalism accounts and detailed ethnographic field notes.

Part I contextualizes the MST struggle within Brazil's persistent land inequalities. Leonilde Sérvolo de Medeiros and Ivo Poletto trace the origins of the MST within other social movements' fights for sustained rural economic justice and agrarian reform. The Catholic Church's Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) stands out given its data tracking human rights violations serves as one of the principle quantitative sources in this collection.

Miguel Carter offers global comparisons to Brazil's land situation and efforts at agrarian reform. He highlights the paradox of the MST's fame and the reality that non-MST peasant movements' actions accounted for 90 percent of land distribution (9). In one of the most substantive policy contributions in the book, Carter contends that land reform would "spur the revitalization (30)" of Brazilian small towns and reverse urbanization trends (181n, 241, 386). Guilherme Costa Delgado deftly explains the relationship between Brazil's commodity boom and the continuation of export-driven international financing from the late Cardoso administration to Lula's first administration. This relationship serves as a pillar of Miguel Carter's co-authored chapter on land struggles (237–239) and the epilogue, which critiques the PT's "great betrayal" (413) of land reform.

Part II deploys Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow's "repertoires of contention (177n, 219)" as it discusses the origins of the MST in Rio Grande do Sul, Pernambuco, and Pará, and their contributions to previous rural movements' tactics. Carter emphasizes that MST's "public activism" (152) stemmed not from ideology (173) but from the need to address a changing political situation with non-violent tactics and heavier use of public opinion and media coverage. Between 1995 and 2006 a spurt of activism produced *two-thirds* of all land settlements in the region between

1979–2006 (165). Lygia Maria Sigaud discusses how the MST—in the midst of Pernambuco’s sugar crisis (189)—joined with previously hesitant unions (an alliance that Marcelo Carvalho Rosa’s chapter traces to urban and agro-ecological social movements nationally). The groups’ “encampment method” (183,186) helped generate new precedent and identities later recognized by Brazil’s land agency INCRA (194–195, see also J.H. French 2009). As Gabriel Ondetti, Emmauel Wambergue, and José Batista Gonçalves Afonso point out in their chapter on Pará, the combination of media politics and encampments proved a valuable intellectual and strategic export which rural trade union groups employed even in regions where the MST proved organizationally weakest (212, 217).

Part III focuses on the MST’s regional limitations. Carter and Horacio Martins de Carvalho discussed the MST’s federal battle for “progressive agrarian reform” and the government’s reactive approach to mediating social conflict (232–233). Sonia Maria P. P. Bergamasco and Luiz Antonio Norder’s survey of family settlements in São Paulo state show that despite MST’s centralized leadership style, overall, landless groups’ superior delivery of services gained the trust of settlers (276, 279, 290). In contrast, the northeastern MST settlement studied by Elena Calvo-Gonzales suffered from a careerist culture among militants (309n) and resident disenchantment with the practicalities of implementing collective labor and education principles. Pernambucan settlements in Wendy Wolford’s chapter suffered through the MST’s failure to adapt their social movement ethos to the patron-client relations embraced by settlers and laborers alike.

Part IV and Carter’s epilogue address the PT’s putative land reform failure despite the party’s two decades of electoral emphasis. Sue Branford details differences between the MST-supported Arruda Sampaio agrarian reform plan and the modest plan Lula (only partially) implemented. George Mészáros links direct action tactics and a legal profession that increasingly backed land occupations as legal despite occasional PT hesitancy and rhetorical hostility (367).

As other scholars and reviewers contend, policy does not happen in a vacuum, and the PT learned early that it needed to adjust rank-and-file party expectations and did just that (Keck 1992). Where some understandably see “betrayal”, others just as easily argue that PT understandably gambled to hold its base while attempting conciliatory political reforms. Whoever turns out right, this volume—launched early in the PT’s decline—contributes greatly to post-2018 political debates and MST history writ large.

**Travis Knoll**

Department of History  
Duke University