

JORNAL DOS TRABALHADORES RURAIS **SEM TERRA**

CANUDOS NÃO SE RENDEU

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Canudos hoje

1893-1993 CEM ANOS DE LUTA PELA TERRA

| ESTUDO | ESTADOS | ESTADOS | MOVIMENTOS |
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Picture 4 This front cover of Jornal Sem Terra, MST's internal newspaper, actively interlinks "one hundred years of land struggle", by revisiting the historical Canudos community, in dialogue with the past. *Source* Jornal Sem Terra (1993, October)

Chapter 2

In Dialogue with the Past

Abstract This empirical chapter sketches the historiography of Brazil's Landless Movement. By recapturing historical events used by movement participants for contextualization, agents and activities of that context are here re-presented in historiographic terms. The analysis draws empirically on ethnographic interviews and participant observations, as well as MST-produced material, in particular the internal newspaper *Jornal Sem Terra*. Based on this empirical analysis, historical events are presented as a *prequel* to the MST story. The portrait of MST's historiography is fleshed out through aligned historical research, and chronologically presented along the Colonial, Imperial and Republican Epochs of Brazilian history. In sum, the MST prequel encompasses five centuries of insurgencies, construed as historical struggles *against* nation building, and *for* land. This overarching theme of the MST prequel then guides the movement's navigation across Brazil's uneven politico-economic topography. Thus, the critical inquiry into the MST historiography, analyzing the linkage between prequel and story, particularly explores how political subject formation is performed in dialogue with the past.

Keywords Brazilian history • Movement narrative • Historiography • MST • *Jornal Sem Terra* • Agrarian question • Nationalism • Autonomy • Land struggle

This chapter examines the historiography of Brazil's Landless Movement. By recapturing the historical events that movement participants use for contextualization, agents and activities of that context are here presented as a comprehensive extrapolation, an extended version, of the MST historiography. As discussed in the introductory chapter, these historical events were continuously mentioned throughout my field study. By repeated searches in complementary MST sources, I eventually identified ten historical events that recurrently appeared as key for the MST prequel. The empirically identified backbone of these sequenced historical events is here, in this chapter, fleshed out through aligned historical research, and presented along The Colonial, Imperial and Republican Epochs of Brazilian history. As summarized in the timeline on page 45, the historiographic agents and activities,

MST's predecessors, comprise what I call a prequel to the story of Brazil's Landless Movement.

The following chapter, like every empirical chapter in this book, is divided into three parts. The first part of the MST historiography recounts four centuries of insurgencies, construed as struggles *against* nation building. The second part continues the chronological exposé, focused on the struggle *for* land. The final part of the recounted MST historiography sketches the politico-economic topography since the 1980s, the backdrop on which the story of Brazil's Landless Movement is typically projected. The following chapter hence analyzes the linkage established between prequel and story, that is, how political subject formation is performed in dialogue with the past.

2.1 Struggles Against Nation Building

In the MST prequel, social conflict is at the center stage. The history of Brazil is depicted as a story of domination, and decisive resistance. The first part of this chapter sketches four centuries of compound resistance activities, from The Colonial Epoch to The First Republic (see timeline on page 45). In this historiography, colonization prompted the project of Brazilian nation building, a project that was, from the very start, severely resisted. Accordingly, the prequel of Brazil's Landless Movement starts with the anti-colonial defiance associated with the *quilombos*, a key reference point in the MST historiography.

2.1.1 *Quilombos in Colonial Brazil*

Historians typically point out that the colonization project, which followed the sudden European awareness of the Americas, incited rulers of Spain and Portugal to avoid war by dividing their territorial claims. In 1494, the Treaty of Tordesillas produced an imaginary vertical line that divided the Western and Eastern hemisphere between the two colonizing claimants. A few years later, thirteen Portuguese military ships reached the shore of present day Porto Seguro, Bahia. While the expedition originally set out to improve the trade route to India, the new land encountered by Commander Pedro Álvares Cabral, in April 1500, soon came to be viewed as a valuable asset by the Portuguese Crown. The first resource to be exploited was the dyeing components extracted from Brazil wood. The colony soon became known as *Terra do pau-brasil*, or simply, *Brasil*.¹

¹See Fausto (1999), pp. 6–10; Burns (1993), pp. 21–25.

Economic historians typically point out that an increasingly important motivation for colonial expansion was the quest for precious metals, which played a crucial role in the mercantile political economy that had come to dominate Europe in the early modern period.² While the Spanish Crown successfully extracted minerals west of Tordesillas Line, King Manuel I of Portugal was not as successful. The Portuguese Crown soon shifted economic activity into agriculture. According to economic historian Celso Furtado, Brazil's agrarian economy was particularly concentrated on commodity production, to answer the demand for sugar that had emerged in European markets. Besides economic prosperity, sugar production also enforced the territorial claims vis-à-vis the Spanish Crown, as plantations required permanent settling. The problem, Furtado argues, was that production of cane sugar required massive labor power. As Portuguese settlers were unsuccessful to ascribe indigenous peoples to this task, eyes were instead turned to colonial West-Africa, where Portuguese merchants already were invested in slave trade.³ As documented by historian Thomas Skidmore, a transatlantic slave trade was soon orchestrated to provide the sugar plantations with cheap labor power. The prosperous economy of colonial Brazil—African slaves producing sugar for European markets—continued to bloom until gold finally was found in the late 1600s. Slavery, however, remained a crucial institution for economic growth until late 19th century. Skidmore reports that in 1888, when slavery was legally abolished, approximately 3,650,000 slaves had been shipped into in Brazil.⁴

The MST historiography of the colonial period highlights, in particular, how people exploited in the slave economy were engaged in various forms of resistance. The most common reference point here, recurring in *Jornal Sem Terra*, in *assemblamento* naming, and in various educative situations, is the runaway slave communities known as *quilombos*.

As argued by anthropologist James Scott, the most noticeable form of resistance against colonial (slave) economies, at least that have entered available historical sources, has been the act of flight.⁵ In Brazil, as pointed out by linguistic Robert Anderson, forced plantation labor was commonly defied by permanent escape, or marronage, which had grown steadily in North-Eastern Brazil throughout the 17th century. Anderson writes that the maroon settlements that were set up in the interior backlands soon became known as *mocambos* (from the Kimbundu word for hideout, *mukambo*).⁶ Though historical documentation to enable quantification is

²See for instance the classical works of Freyre (1987 [1933]), p. 17 and Holanda (1982 [1936]), pp. 16–18.

³Furtado (1963 [1959]), pp. 10–11, 43–45.

⁴Skidmore (1999), pp. 16–22.

⁵Scott (2009), pp. 19–20.

⁶Anderson (1996), pp. 550, 558.

meager (inhabitants relied on discretion for their survival), scholars estimate that one thousand different *mocambos* were created during Brazil's Colonial Epoch.⁷

Anderson writes that towards the end of the 1500s, vivid reputations about a particular community of fugitive slaves—a maroon state known as Palmares—began to wander sugar cane plantations in North-Eastern Brazil. Over the following century, Andersson continues, Palmares steadily gained inhabitants that succeeded to exit the forced plantation labor. Palmares soon consisted of several villages, presumably inhabiting some 20,000 former slaves.⁸ Historian Stuart Schwartz argues that fugitive slaves continued to set up new communities in the Palmares region decades after the military's destruction of Palmares in 1694.⁹ Anderson's study suggests that the slave exodus became particularly strong in the 1630s, when the Dutch-Portuguese colonial war provided enhanced opportunities for flight. However, when the Portuguese military won the war, in 1654, their immediate attention turned to restore internal order of the colony.¹⁰

Over the following 40 years, numerous incursions were set out to destroy Palmares. The attacks were, however, incredibly unsuccessful due to Palmares shifting defense strategies. In his classic book on Palmares, historian Edison Carneiro writes that the Palmarinos initially repeated the resistance strategy that had created the community in the first place. They left. Soldiers that reached Palmares, after breaching the difficult surrounding terrain, constantly found the village completely empty. These repeated collective desertions were, according to Carneiro, enabled by well-placed informers that alerted inhabitants about upcoming attacks.¹¹

In the late 1670s, the military scaled up its ambitions to eliminate Palmares. Anderson writes that the inhabitants answered these intensified incursions by militarizing the community defenses. During this period, the defense of Palmares came to be particularly associated with a man known as Zumbi, a key character, as we will see, in the MST historiography. Baptized as Francisco, this mythic person first entered Palmares as a teenager in 1670, after fleeing the sugar plantation where he was born. He became known as Zumbi, war commander of Palmares. According to Anderson, Zumbi soon consolidated political power in order to make the militarized defense of Palmares more effective. The military leadership under Zumbi therefore triggered adversaries to label Palmares as a *quilombo*. While *mocambo* was the common term for maroon states, Anderson continues, *quilombo* instead stemmed from the Kimbundu word *kilombo*, a particular form of Central-African social organization for people under constant military alert. When facing increasingly aggressive invasions, the *quilombo* structure, Anderson argues, successfully

⁷See Leite (2000), p. 334.

⁸Anderson (1996), p. 551. See also Wright and Wolford (2003), p. 124.

⁹Schwartz (1992), pp. 123–124.

¹⁰Anderson (1996), p. 551. See also Burns (1993), pp. 50–54.

¹¹Carneiro (1966 [1947]), pp. 9–10.

unified peoples within, and between, the diverse maroon communities to manage both subsistence agriculture and military defense. The word *quilombo*, and not *mocambo*, therefore became the standard reference for this defiance against colonial Brazil.¹²

The *quilombo*, commonly understood in terms of Palmares imagery, is a well-used reference point for Brazilian social movements. Anthropologist Ilka Leite reports that the concept ascribes various social phenomena: referring to a particular place, people, manifestation, conflict, economic system or set of social relationships. Although particularly important for racialized communities, Leite argues, the *quilombo* legacy typically takes part in histories of defiance invoked by various social movements in Brazil.¹³

In the MST historiography, *quilombos* are recounted particularly to acknowledge contemporary anti-racist struggles, but also “those in Brazil that create alternatives to hunger, struggle for dignity, pressure for agrarian reform and for collective and individual rights”, as stated in a *Jornal Sem Terra* article from December 1994.¹⁴ The MST newspaper frequently mentions *quilombos*, either as article themes, exemplified above, or more briefly in historical overviews.¹⁵ In his influential textbook on MST history, Mitsue Morissawa recounts *quilombos* as a form of historical resistance, particularly potent under Zumbi.¹⁶ Moreover, numerous *assentamentos* in Brazil are named after Zumbi or Palmares, or containing the term *quilombo*.¹⁷ The *quilombo* reference is used by MST participants, as we will continue to see, to situate their search for autonomy in historical context. People struggling for autonomous agrarian communities are historical protagonists, while external political power, the government, denotes an antagonist position. The *quilombo*, in defiance of colonial Brazil’s political economy, is therefore an important reference point for MST’s continued struggle. And in the MST historiography, agrarian social conflicts accelerate with the intensified process of nation building in Brazil.

2.1.2 Indigenous Peoples and National Borders

In the mid-18th century, governments of Spain and Portugal redrew the political map of South America. Here, historians commonly call attention to the Treaty of Madrid, signed in 1750. The inter-governmental Treaty of Madrid was guided by

¹²Anderson (1996), pp. 558–565. See also Schmitt et al. (2002), p. 5; Leite (2000), pp. 333–334.

¹³Leite (2015), pp. 1234–1239; Leite (2000), pp. 336–342.

¹⁴*Jornal Sem Terra* (1994, December), p. 13.

¹⁵In the JST corpus (1980–2013), the word *quilombo* occurred 279 times, *Zumbi* 110, and *Palmares* 148 times.

¹⁶Morissawa (2001), pp. 64–65.

¹⁷INCRA (2014).

the *uti possedetis* principle, by which occupied territories were formalized according to the national ties of the colonizer. The treaty's geopolitical implication was that the Portuguese Crown could now claim territories west of the 1494 Tordesillas Line. As the interior of Southern Brazil had been invaded by Portuguese explorers for a century, the *uti possedetis* principle provided juridical incitement to claim these territories.¹⁸

In the drawing of national borders, it became imperative to tie indigenous peoples to Portuguese civilization. According to historian Boris Fausto, the Portuguese Crown launched a massive campaign to assimilate indigenous peoples (which simultaneously destabilized the practice of slave hunting in these regions). A significant internal obstacle to the assimilation project, Fausto continues, was the Jesuits. The activities of these Catholic missionaries faced severe re-percussions, since the Jesuits, to the Portuguese Crown, were inspiring indigenous peoples to defy the process of nation building. This threatened the very basis of the assimilation program: the creation of a territory-based political unit—a state—that could be effectively supervised by the Portuguese Crown. According to Fausto, the assimilation project were therefore complemented by direct political negotiation between the monarchs of Spain and Portugal. Under the Treaty of Madrid, the formal outcome of these interstate negotiations, territories were assigned new rulers which, again, altered the political landscape for indigenous peoples.¹⁹ And the resistance activities of these indigenous groups are, as we will see, momentous for MST's historiographic portrait over this era of Brazilian nation building.

Implications of the Treaty of Madrid were particularly felt by the Guarani people that lived around the river known to colonizers as Rio de la Plata (at the intersection of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay). As outlined by historian Magnus Mörner, Jesuit priests, hoping to incite religious conversion, began in the early 17th century to set up agrarian communities, missions, in the Guarani territories of Rio de la Plata.²⁰ Historian Barbara Ganson argues that increased displacement of the colonization project became the imperative push factor for many Guarani to join these missions, though some were also attracted by the labor revenues from prosperous agricultural production under the Jesuits. Ganson reports that when the Treaty of Madrid was signed, in 1750, some 29,000 Guarani lived in the Jesuit missions of Rio de la Plata. The treaty stipulated that seven missions, previously in Spanish territory, were now to become part of Portugal's colony.²¹ Moreover, as suggested by historians Darcy Ribeiro and Ptolomeu de Assis Brasil, the Guarani people's century long experiences of fighting Portuguese slave hunters informed their understanding of the new regime as a severe threat.²²

¹⁸See Skidmore (1999), pp. 9–10, 29; Ganson (2005), pp. 89–91; Fausto (1999), pp. 72–75; Burns (1993), pp. 55–61.

¹⁹Fausto (1999), pp. 56–58.

²⁰Mörner (1968 [1953]), pp. 30–45.

²¹Ganson (2005), pp. 50–51, 89–91. See also Saeger (1995), pp. 399–404.

²²Ribeiro (1995), pp. 92–105; Brasil (2010), p. 8.

While some decided to leave the missions for other Spanish territories, most of the Guarani people, according to Ganson, chose other resistance strategies. After years of fruitless protest letters sent to the people in power, arguing for preservation of the mission system under Spanish rule, the Guarani eventually took up arms to defend their homes. Ganson writes that in 1754, the social conflict had escalated into a full-scale war. The indigenous militia of the Guarani war was led by a key character in the MST prequel, Sepé Tiaraju. Sepé organized numerous armed attacks on the Portuguese military to prevent invasion of the missions. The magnitude of the Guarani mobilization therefore incited, Ganson concludes, the Spanish and Portuguese Crown to launch a joint military campaign to crush the troubling insurrection. A few days after Spanish troops had killed Sepé Tiaraju, in February 1756, the rebellion was finally crushed in the Battle of Caiobaté.²³

As pointed out by historian James Saeger, in a critical dissection of the Hollywood movie *THE MISSION*, the Guarani war has mainly been told from the viewpoint of the Jesuits, an accentuation that eclipses other resistance agents, thus reproducing the colonial notion of indigenous incapacity.²⁴ In the same vein, MST historiography portrays Sepé Tiaraju as a mythical incarnation of indigenous resistance, and therefore an “ancestor of the marginalized”, as stated in a *Jornal Sem Terra* article from March 2000.²⁵ Anthropologist Ceres Brum verify this political nature of the Sepé myth, through an ethnographic field study carried out in present day São Gabriel, a municipality located in the South-Eastern interior of Rio Grande do Sul. Brum reports that two and a half centuries after the death Sepé Tiaraju, the politicians of São Gabriel decided to pay homage to the legendary Guarani leader. The official festivities that took place in 2006 celebrated a geopolitical outcome ascribed to Sepé, that is, the final incorporation of Rio Grande do Sul into the Portuguese colony. But the official sanctification also legitimized the land claim of Sepé’s famous battle cry: *esta terra tem dono* (this land has owners). When landless rural workers began to occupy land in São Gabriel, Brum continues, *latifundiários* (large-scale land owners) actively used this famous catchphrase to associate land occupants with European colonizers.²⁶

In the summer of 2003, MST posed a counter-attack on the *latifundiários*, which simultaneously defended their historiography. Some 800 families organized a 68-day March—named Sepé Tiaraju—across the big *latifúndios* of the region.²⁷ The contemporary land struggle in São Gabriel thereby incited revived

²³Ganson (2005), pp. 93–108. See also Brasil (2010), pp. 107–113; Brum (2007), p. 11.

²⁴Saeger (1995), pp. 394, 405–406.

²⁵*Jornal Sem Terra* (2000, March), p. 16. The importance of Sepé Tiaraju is also reflected in assentamento naming. INCRA (2014) report that nine settlements in Brasil, three in Rio Grande do Sul, have been named after Sepé.

²⁶Brum (2007), pp. 5–8, 12.

²⁷Individual interview 12; Brum (2007), p. 12.

contentions over the meaning of Sepé. As we will see in Chap. 4, this March has become a particularly strong collective memory since one MST participant, Elton Brum, was here shot to death by the police. But before advancing on this intricate relation between past and present, between prequel and story, we must first follow the recaptured MST historiography into The Imperial Epoch of Latin American independence.

2.1.3 *Insurgencies at the Nation-State Margins*

The Enlightenment project of late 18th century's Global North (particularly manifested in the United States Declaration of Independence in 1776, and the 1789 French Revolution) allowed novel interpretations of political control over Portugal's most important colony. In Brazil, elite residents began to severely question the political authority of the Portuguese Crown. Historian Thomas Skidmore argues that Brazilian elites aspired for national independence to increase their control over the prosperous colonial economy. Nevertheless, in the Pan-American wave of national independence, starting with the slave insurrections of the Haitian revolution (1791–1804), the Brazilian independence project was supported by the Crown itself. Skidmore points out the Crown's capitulation from Napoleon's invasion of Portugal, in which the entire royal family escaped to Brazil in 1807. As it was unconventional for an Empire to govern from its colony, and since colonialism anyhow was challenged by the wave of independence that now swept the Americas, Portugal's Crown Prince Dom Pedro I, closely tied to the Brazilian elites, soon found it politically necessary to declare national independence.²⁸

On December 1, 1822, Dom Pedro was crowned Emperor of Brazil, the nation he himself had founded a few months earlier. While the royal sanctioning enabled a bloodless transition into The Imperial Epoch of Brazilian history (see timeline on page 45), the Emperor's challenge was now, according to historian Bradford Burns, to manage centralized politics over the newborn nation-state.²⁹ The 1824 constitution therefore divided Brazil into eighteen provinces, each one with a governor directly appointed by the Emperor. Skidmore refers to this power consolidation, which framed the Brazilian nation-state project in the 19th century, as an elite project. The oligarchs in power had no incentives to challenge the exploitative and racist institutions that were so fundamental to their economic prosperity. Independent Brazil therefore maintained, Skidmore argues, its economic function as primary product producer for the blooming industrialization in Western Europe.³⁰

²⁸Skidmore (1999), pp. 31–37. See also Trouillot (1995), pp. 37–40; Burns (1993), pp. 111–112.

²⁹Burns (1993), p. 124.

³⁰Skidmore (1999), pp. 39–49.

A similar argument is presented by anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, a renowned scholar of what we might call Brazilian history from below. Since Brazil's national economy was dependent on racial categorizations to legitimize political marginalization of indigenous natives and enslaved African peoples, the 'struggle' for national independence, Ribeiro argues, never involved racialized peoples on the margins of the emerging nation-state. Quite the opposite, these people often resisted the nationalist project.³¹

The years following the 1831 installation of five-year-old Dom Pedro II as Emperor (that is, during the first half of The Imperial Epoch) was marked by some of the largest uprisings in the history of Brazil. These insurgencies, performed at the social margins of the emerging nation-state, are important historical events in the prequel to Brazil's Landless Movement. My empirical analyses indicate that the most recurrent insurgencies, presented here as MST's key historiographic events from The Imperial Epoch, are the *Cabanagem* and *Balaíada* rebellions.³²

Historian Mathias Röhrig Assunção dates the spark of the *Balaíada* rebellion to December 1838, when a cattle rancher named Raimundo Gomes invaded the jail of Vila da Manga to free his imprisoned brother. The prison break was successful. When the military interfered to restore order in Vila da Manga, they faced severe attacks from Gomes and the ex-prisoners of the village jail. Röhrig Assunção writes that the conflict escalated when three thousand fugitive slaves joined the rebels, together with nearby *mocambos* under the command of the ex-slave Cosme Bento das Chagas. The rebellion continued to grow, mobilizing numerous interior inhabitants, up to the rebels' defeat in 1841. According to Röhrig Assunção, the *Balaíada* rebellion overbridged social stratification barriers; enslaved Africans left cotton plantations to join the same rebellion as cattle ranchers and their employees. Röhrig Assunção suggests that this unification, transcending the sorting mechanism of racialization, was partly enabled by a shared conviction to resist forced army recruitment.³³ The *Balaíada* rebellion thereby represented, as suggested by historian Maria Janotti, a popular response against the racist stratifications that entailed the emerging nation-state project.³⁴

³¹Ribeiro (1995), pp. 248–256.

³²Historians have documented similar rebellions in Bahia (*Sabinada*), Pernambuco (*Praieira* and *Cabanada*), and Rio Grande do Sul (*Farroupilha*). See Röhrig Assunção (1998), pp. 68, 84; Burns (1993), pp. 132, 136. These rebellions were all mentioned in *Jornal Sem Terra*, often in lists of historical land struggles, but seldom directly analyzed upon. Morissawa's history textbook (2001), pp. 67–47, similarly mention these rebellions (except *Cabanada*). The *Farroupilha* uprising was also mentioned in Individual interview 12, in order to contextualize the São Gabriel region as a historical arena of social conflict. The relatively weak historiographic role of the *Farroupilha* rebellion presumably relates to the anti-imperial feature that denotes *latifundiários* as narrative protagonists, making it less useful for the MST prequel.

³³Röhrig Assunção (1998), pp. 67–84. See also Janotti (2005), pp. 54–56.

³⁴Janotti (2005), pp. 41, 73.

A parallel defiance against nation building, also recounted in the MST historiography, took place in the Amazon Basin between 1835 and 1840. Historian Magda Ricci and anthropologist David Cleary analyze how the *Cabanagem* rebellion (fought by indigenous peoples, Portuguese-descent Brazilians and fugitive African slaves) came to result in the expulsion of the imperial government in Belém. The studies of Ricci and Cleary indicate that close trade relations between *quilombos*, indigenous groups, and other peoples of the social periphery, fueled political unification of various marginalized agents in their mutual struggle against the Brazilian state.³⁵ For anthropologist Mark Harris, and historian Boris Fausto, the *Cabanagem* rebellion illustrates how local conflicts disrupted the Empire's aim to consolidate political power over Brazil's territories.³⁶

In the MST historiography, the *Cabanagem* rebellion is typically recounted as a successful example of struggle against the state, as it led to actual political take-over in Pará.³⁷ Both the *Cabanagem* and *Balaçada* rebellions are incorporated, into the MST prequel, as historical struggles that defied barriers of social stratification and united parallel searches for political autonomy.³⁸ As we will see later on, the MST historiography recurrently links these battles for political autonomy to the generic notion of a historical struggle for land. But before we recapture the MST prequel through this particular lens, in the second part of this chapter, I will first introduce three millenarian rebellions that MST's historiography ascribes to the early Republican Epoch of Brazilian history.

2.1.4 *Rebellions Against the Republic*

In November 15, 1889, the military overthrew the Emperor of Brazil. With the republican constitution, written in 1891, Brazil became a federation in which the previous imperial provinces were politically empowered. The fall of monarchy in 1889 commenced what historians typically refer to as The Republican Epoch of Brazilian history. With the republican constitution, each Brazilian state was now allowed an elected governor with access to military force. On the national level, The Imperial Regime was replaced by electoral presidency. Historian Thomas Skidmore argues that the military coup, prompting political transition, was legitimized by the modernist amalgam of republicanism and scientific positivism.

³⁵Ricci (2007), pp. 27–30; Cleary (1998), pp. 118, 121–124.

³⁶Harris (2010), pp. 1–3; Fausto (1999), pp. 89–91.

³⁷See for instance *Jornal Sem Terra* (2010, January/February), p. 13; *Jornal Sem Terra* (2008, November/December), p. 6.

³⁸See Morissawa (2001), pp. 66–68 and *Jornal Sem Terra* (2009, May), p. 6. Apart from the written sources, historiographic significance of the *Cabanagem* and *Balaçada* rebellions is also verified by their naming of MST assentamentos, as listed in INCRA (2014).

Brazilian elites were dedicated to the positivist idea of *ordem e progresso* (order and progress), which motivated them to support the military-led transition from imperial monarchy to secular republic. The coup d'état was bloodless, Skidmore argues, since the surrendering Emperor had already lost his political legitimacy.³⁹

Other historians have analyzed how these modernist aspects of Brazil's monarchy-republic transition were contrasted against the alleged backwardness of the rural interior. The backlands of North-Eastern Brazil, *os sertões*, particularly came to embody the backward set of social relations that encumbered the nationalist vision. The political linkage in between *os sertões* was an assigned representative called *coronel*. Political scientist Victor Nunes Leal argues that this *coronelismo* system preserved backward oligarchic tendencies, as land owners continuously influenced the *coroneis*.⁴⁰ At the same time, according to historian Robert Levine, the *coronelismo* system allowed nation-state consolidation as the federal government could also control the economically powerful land owners.⁴¹ By analyzing Euclides da Cunha's classical novel *Os SERTÕES*,⁴² Levine further shows that the modern/backward dichotomy inevitably translated into an understanding of *os sertões* as backward, in contrast to the progressive coastal areas where the Brazilian nation-state was politically forged.⁴³ In the late 1800s, Levine continues, this coast-inland dichotomy developed into a political tension that required military intervention. Backwardness had to be fought in the name of progress. The ultimate provocation for the nation builders was, according to Levine, the recurrent declarations of autonomy by religious communities.⁴⁴ The agents behind these communities—the millenarian movements—are particularly important components of the MST prequel.

Historian Ralph della Cava studies one of these millenarian movements in his book *MIRACLE AT JOASEIRO*. In North-Eastern Brazil, only a few months before Brazil was declared republic, word had begun to spread about a miracle in the North-Eastern village of Juazeiro do Norte. During a communion, it was said, the wine had been transformed into actual blood—the blood of Jesus Christ—when shared by the local priest Padre Cícero. The worded miracle triggered thousands of pilgrims to descend upon Juazeiro do Norte. In the early 1890s, according to della Cava, a social movement began to grow around the mythical personality of Padre Cícero. But the initial religious orientation soon began to aggregate political

³⁹Skidmore (1999), pp. 65–92.

⁴⁰Leal (1975), pp. 19–20.

⁴¹Levine (1992), pp. 94–95.

⁴²Cunha (2010 [1902]).

⁴³Levine (1992), pp. 16–18, 65, 226–227. See also Skidmore (1999), pp. 80–81. This process clearly mirrors what postcolonial theorist Walter Mignolo (2007), pp. 463–470, calls “the darker side of modernity”; the notion that modernity itself requires a parallel notion of alleged backwardness.

⁴⁴Levine (1992), pp. 38, 217–226.

ambitions, culminating in the struggle for municipal autonomy in 1909–1910. The *Joaseiro* movement's search for political autonomy, della Cava concludes, thereby threatened The First Republic's ambition to incorporate *os sertões* into the Brazilian nation-state.⁴⁵ The MST historiography frequently brings up the leader of the *Joaseiro* movement, Padre Cícero, in *Jornal Sem Terra* articles, in *mística* themes, and *assentamento* names.⁴⁶ But the *Joaseiro* movement is first and foremost associated with an interlinked search for autonomy from the First Republic: the Canudos community.

Historian Robert Levine writes that in the late 1800s, a charismatic preacher known as Antonio Conselheiro wandered around *os sertões* to agitate against the new government. The *Conselheiro* (counselor) soon gained followers that, in 1893, set up a community village, called Belo Monte by its residents, known to the exterior as Canudos. As the community developed, Levine continues, its political implications became increasingly incompatible with the First Republic.⁴⁷ The theocracy of Belo Monte was, according to literary scholar Paulo Martins, translated into participatory decision making on the local level, while Antonio Conselheiro represented the community to the outside world. Rumors of participatory politics, and *Conselheiro's* absolute representation, threatened the *coronelismo* so fundamental to the federalism of the First Republic.⁴⁸

Canudos signaled, like Padre Cícero's community in Juazeiro do Norte, a search for autonomy that undermined the political authority of the Brazilian nation-state. Levine writes that the Brazilian military answered this threat through a series of violent attacks on the Canudos community. Between 1896 and 1897, Brazil's federal army lost the three initial invasions to Canudos militarized defenses. But in October 1897 the army mobilized a final attack that eventually destroyed Canudos. All five thousand houses in the village were, according to Levine's study, burnt to the ground. Only a fraction of the thirty thousand people living in Belo Monte survived the invasion from the Brazilian state.⁴⁹

The *Jornal Sem Terra* front cover, shown on page 28,⁵⁰ specifically pays homage to the Canudos community by quoting Euclýdes da Cunha's famous finale of *Os Sertões*, stating that "Canudos did not surrender".⁵¹ And through the MST historiography, the Canudos struggle has indeed continued. It is commonly portrayed in audio-visual presentations, and numerous *assentamentos* bear names like Antonio Conselheiro or Novo Canudos.⁵² The front cover's subtitle "1893–1993

⁴⁵Cava (1970), pp. 5–7, 31, 50–56, 107, 115–118.

⁴⁶INCRA (2014); *Jornal Sem Terra* (1991, May), p. 6; *Jornal Sem Terra* (1991, April), p. 12.

⁴⁷Levine (1992), pp. 121–125.

⁴⁸Martins (2007), pp. 13–15.

⁴⁹Levine (1992), pp. 16, 39, 170–184.

⁵⁰*Jornal Sem Terra* (1993, October), p. 1.

⁵¹Cunha (2010 [1902]), p. 507.

⁵²See *Jornal Sem Terra* (2007, April), p. 6, and INCRA (2014).

one hundred years of land struggle” actively links Canudos with contemporary resistance activities. This particular theme of the MST prequel—the historical struggle for land—also frames the historiographic portrait of yet another analogue religious movement, active in Southern Brazil.

According to Ralph della Cava, the Canudos massacre provided a valuable pretext for the Catholic Church to discredit Padre Cícero, leader of the *Joaseiro* movement, by linking him to the allegedly dangerous Antonio Conselheiro.⁵³ The Catholic Church was troubled by the socio-political implications of *millenarianism*, defined by Robert Levine as “social movements seeking massive and radical social change in accord with a predetermined divine plan.”⁵⁴ Historian Todd Diacon has pointed out that millenarianism became important for rural inhabitants, especially in Southern Brazil, since it simultaneously addressed the material and cultural experiences of the ongoing nation-state project that reshaped the Brazilian countryside in the early 1900s. In his book *MILLENARIAN VISION, CAPITALIST REALITY*, Diacon describes how the now prohibited slave labor needed acute replacement in Southern Brazil. As ex-slaves and indigenous peoples were considered incapable laborers, the Brazilian government instead encouraged immigration of European settlers, especially from Italy, Portugal and Spain. This project was particularly visible in the region known as the *Contestado* (due to the inter-state contest between Santa Catarina and Paraná), where colonization was accompanied by a vast railroad project. Diacon depicts how the tandem process of railway building and European settling was so immediate that it resulted in displacement of 150,000 farmers that lacked the proper land titles now required by law. Diacon argues that people experiencing a dramatic decrease in economic and political autonomy, due to land displacement and enhanced *coronelismo*, soon became particularly receptive, as it were, to the millenarian call.⁵⁵

In 1911, an army deserter named José Maria began to speak out against the invasive politics of the republican government. To escape the worldly evils of the First Republic, the social movement around José Maria, alike the millenarian movements before them, began to organize their own autonomous rural communities. These so-called holy cities, similar to Canudos and Joaseiro, challenged the territorial claims of the modern nation-state, thus representing an alleged backwardness that the state could never tolerate. Diacon’s study indicates that, when the military began to attack these communities, José Maria and his followers did not initially respond with force. On the contrary, the millenarian movement’s non-violent convictions remained strong, even after the killing of José Maria in October 1912. However, Diacon continues, these convictions changed radically in

⁵³Cava (1970), p. 76.

⁵⁴Levine (1992), p. 7.

⁵⁵Diacon (1991), pp. 6–8, 44–58, 91, 145–150. See also Levine (1992), p. 223; Skidmore (1999), pp. 67–73.

February 1914, when the holy city of Taquaruçu was violently raided by the military. More than one hundred children and defenseless adults were killed by machinegun fire. As the millenarian notion of an evil (secular) world had become painfully true, movement participants now found it timely to take up arms. Diacon documents how military officers were killed, station houses of the Railway Company were destroyed, and *latifúndios* and European immigration settlements were attacked. The military responded by mobilizing half of the standing Brazilian army, which soon narrowed down the area of the holy cities, until finally destroyed in late 1916.⁵⁶

The Contestado Rebellion, together with the millenarianist expressions of Canudos and Joazeiro, is a vital part of MST's historiographic recount of The Republican Epoch. *Jornal Sem Terra* recurrently links the grave state-led massacres of the holy cities to ongoing rural violence directed at MST settlements. In an article from June 1987, linking the Contestado Rebellion to ongoing violence against an *assentamento* in the Southern state of Santa Catarina, the ongoing land struggle is construed in historical terms, as "a struggle that continues".⁵⁷ The agents associated with this historical struggle for land, such as the millenarian movements, are depicted as forerunners to Brazil's Landless Movement.⁵⁸ Mitsue Morissawas history textbook, commonly used across MST's educational settings, leaves out the Joazeiro movement but expands on the Canudos and the Contestado Rebellion, recounted as "two important [messianic] movements of our history".⁵⁹ Furthermore, and quite illustrative, a *Jornal Sem Terra* article from July 1995 list Canudos and Contestado as peasant gatherings (*congressos camponeses*) preceding MST's upcoming third national gathering in 1995.⁶⁰

MST's historiographic linking to autonomy-seeking millenarian movements is also noted by anthropologist Wendy Wolford. Canudos is recurrently associated with its collective organization and effective defenses, while the Contestado Rebellion, according to Wolford, depicts a mass movement of displaced peasants.⁶¹ Moreover, the historiographic linkage between these agents and activities is also visible in the naming of *assentamentos*. Some bear names like Novo Canudos and Herança do Contestado, others are named after Antonio Conselheiro, Padre Cícero and José María.⁶² The *assentamento* names thereby reinforce historiographic recounts on an every-day basis. The historical rural communities, seeking autonomy from The First Republic, takes an active part in the prequel to the MST story.

⁵⁶Diacon (1991), pp. 2–4, 115–132, 198.

⁵⁷*Jornal Sem Terra* (1987, June), p. 5. See also *Jornal Sem Terra* (2006, April), p. 5.

⁵⁸As in *Jornal Sem Terra* (2008, February), p. 6; *Jornal Sem Terra* (2004, December/January), p. 2.

⁵⁹Morissawa (2001), p. 86.

⁶⁰*Jornal Sem Terra* (1995, July), p. 8.

⁶¹Wolford (2010), pp. 77–79.

⁶²INCRA (2014).

Given the narrative theme of the MST prequel—the decisiveness of the historical struggle for land—it becomes clearer why certain historical events are highlighted in the MST historiography, while others are not. For instance, the perhaps most abundant armed insurgency against The First Republic, the Prestes Column, is only sparsely mentioned in MST historiography although typically covered by academic historians.⁶³ The Prestes Column’s meager place in MST historiography could relate to the intra-elitist nature of this rebellion, as the dropout police and military officers, marching against the Capital, never bothered to mobilize the rural poor.⁶⁴ To qualify for the MST prequel, it seems, historical agents and activities must resemble advocacies of political and economic autonomy. And in the MST historiography, the aggregation of these historical agents, activities and advocacies, translates into a historical struggle for land. We will now follow this narrative theme more closely, continuing our chronological exposé of the MST prequel, before we, in the final part of this chapter, enter the historical era where Brazil’s Landless Movement itself becomes the narrative protagonist.

2.2 Struggles for Land

The moral, or theme, of the MST story, as we will see in Chap. 3, is that the struggle for agrarian reform is harsh, but eventually rewarding. This narrative theme is, I would argue, reinforced by the MST prequel. The plot of the prequel is the agrarian social conflict that stem from imposed separation between landless and landowners, in turn reflecting spatial dimensions of autonomy seeking. When put into sequence, emplotted as recurrent social conflict, historical struggles for land comprise an overarching theme, illustratively entitling Morissawa’s textbook *A HISTÓRIA DA LUTA PELA TERRA EO MST (The History of the Struggle for Land and the MST)*.

As we have seen exemplified in *Jornal Sem Terra*, land conflicts are traced back to the Colonial period, to the *quilombo* defiance typically embodied in Zumbi and his militarized defense of the late Palmares. Besides, the MST historiography is informed particularly by historical research that connects the colonization project to

⁶³Morissawa does not mention the Prestes Column. The March is mentioned very briefly in *Jornal Sem Terra* (2009, July), p. 13; (2009, March), p. 14. Nevertheless, INCRA (2014) lists three assentamentos named after Luis Carlos Prestes. Historian Anita Prestes, daughter to Luis Carlos, was also key note speaker at MST 25th anniversary conference, in January 2009.

⁶⁴See Skidmore (1977), pp. 229–230. The Prestes Column did, however, effectively avoid state-military repercussion through constant mobility of their own militia, famously resulting in the 25,000 km interstate march between 1924 and 1927, which interestingly enough resembles MST’s national marches in the late 1990s. For more on MST’s national march to Brasília in 1997, see Chaves (2000).

the formation of Brazil's agrarian economy. Historians typically describe that the Portuguese Crown shifted to agrarian resource exploitation when precious metals were not found in Brazil during the 16th century, while sugar cane production in North-Eastern Brazil proved increasingly profitable. As cultivation of sugar cane required large monocultures, a crucial feature of the colonial political economy was therefore to establish *latifúndios*. The *latifúndio* structure is often pointed out as key for Brazil's political economy, an argument famously elaborated by journalist Alberto Guimarães in *QUATRO SÉCULOS DE LATIFÚNDIO*.⁶⁵ This institution was, according to Wendy Wolford, later consolidated through the 1850s Land Law (*Lei das Terras*), a legal campaign intended to formalize land titles across the new-founded republic. Guided by the same *uti possedetis* principle that informed the colonial project, well-established plantations gained legal ownership while all farming outside these establishments was illegalized.⁶⁶ The subsequent social division between the *latifundiário* (land owner) and the *Sem Terra* (landless), according to sociologist José de Souza Martins, has historically generated recurring social conflict in the Brazilian countryside.⁶⁷

It is precisely this agrarian social conflict—the historical struggle for land—that emplots the prequel to the story of Brazil's Landless Movement. The MST historiography depicts land struggles as increasingly articulated in the 20th century. The grand finale of the MST prequel portrays the vast rural mobilizations of the late 1970s and early 1980s, eventually leading up to the official founding of *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST) in January 1984. These MST formative events were, in turn, preceded by the Trombas Rebellion under The Military Regime, which we will soon return to, as well as the peasant movements known as *MASTER* and *Ligas Camponêsas*.

These peasant movements emerged in the post-war period, during what political scientist Michel Duquette refers to as a democratic wave.⁶⁸ I here refer to this era as The Second Republic. As historians use rather different terms to periodize The Republican Epoch, I have chosen to simplify this presentation—illustrated in the timeline below—as a First, Second and Third Republic, intermitted by The Vargas Era (1930–1945) and The Military Regime (1964–1985).⁶⁹ I believe that these era names better reflect MST's historiographic notion of continuity across the

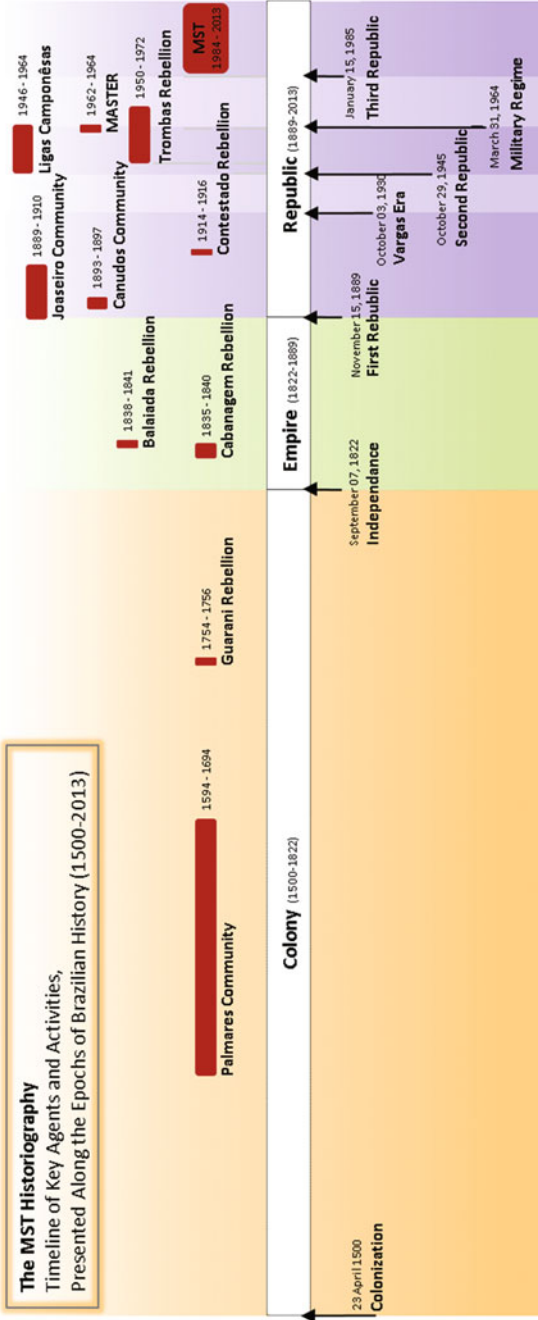
⁶⁵Guimarães (1968 [1963]), pp. 1–3. See also Burns (1993), pp. 26–27.

⁶⁶Wolford (2010), pp. 37–49.

⁶⁷Martins (1990 [1981]), pp. 21–24; Martins (1999 [1994]), p. 150.

⁶⁸Duquette (2005), pp. 36–54, refers to *Nova República* (here The Second Republic) as a first wave of democratization, and the 1980s *abertura* (The Third Republic) as the second wave of democratization.

⁶⁹This periodization is still compatible with the *República Velha* (Old Republic), *República Nova* (New Republic) and *Abertura* (opening), as informed by Fausto (1999), pp. 148–189, 237–279; Duquette (2005), pp. 36–37; Burns (1993), pp. 150, 382; Skidmore (1999).



governments of The Republican Epoch. We will return to this notion of state-continuity in the final part of this chapter. To conclude the prequel to the MST story, however, we must begin with the agents, activities and advocacies that emerged after the first fall of Getúlio Vargas' government.

The Vargas Era starts in 1930. Historian Thomas Skidmore writes that when foreign demand on coffee dramatically fell due to the Wall Street Crash, the governor of Rio Grande do Sul—Getúlio Vargas—declared a State of Emergency to cope with the national economic crisis. Historian Thomas Skidmore describes how Vargas continued to successfully consolidate state power over the following 15 years. After being elected constitutional president, Vargas first collaborated with the military to dissolve congress. The coup was executed on November 10, 1937, placing Getúlio Vargas as dictator of his so-called *Estado Novo* (New State). However, when the Second World War ended in 1945, autocratic state structure had become hopelessly unfashionable. As the Brazilian military fought The Hitler regime during the war, military generals soon began, Skidmore writes, to favor political parties' demands for presidential elections. The military eventually forced Vargas out of office and imposed public elections in December 1945.⁷⁰

Historians often point out that The Second Republic's democratic wave opened up for novel state-political organizations. One of these parties was *Partido Comunista Brasileiro*, the Communist Party, which previously had been heavily repressed for its recurring conspiracies to overthrow The Vargas Regime. When the Communist Party was legalized, Luis Carlos Prestes—leader of the Prestes Column that had marched against The First Republic—returned from his exile in Boliva to become the party's general secretary.⁷¹ In 1947, however, the Communist Party was again illegalized. Party strategists therefore started, according to historian Cliff Welch, to mobilize people in the Brazilian countryside. Welch reports that rural workers and small-scale farmers were organized under the union ULTAB (*União dos Lavradores e Trabalhadores Agrícolas do Brasil*), founded by the Communist Party in 1954.⁷² The union was quickly established across Brazil, but in the North-Eastern state of Pernambuco, the Communist Party had already initiated *Ligas Camponesas* (Peasant Leagues) in 1946. According to Welch, the *Ligas Camponesas* emphasized organizational rigor in order to build a network of elected leaders, which could then be tied to the Communist Party.⁷³

⁷⁰Skidmore (1999), pp. 108–109, 124–129. See also Burns (1993), pp. 346–358.

⁷¹Diacon (1998), pp. 409–411, 434–436; Burns (1993), pp. 337–338; Skidmore (1999), pp. 111–113.

⁷²Welch (2006), pp. 30–33.

⁷³Welch (2009), pp. 129–133.

Following Welch's argument, the *Ligas Camponêsas*' intimate relation to the Communist Party inevitably implied a resistance repertoire that sought state intervention. A similar argument has been made by historian Marcelo Carvalho Rosa, regarding the *Movimento dos Agricultores Sem Terra*—MASTER—that was active in Rio Grande do Sul during the early 1960s. Rosa points out that the MASTER leaders were often members of the Communist Party, again emphasizing political orientation towards state-led social change. At the same time, the MASTER-organized struggles for land also stimulated direct action tactics. In January 1962, a few hundred MASTER activists occupied Fazenda Sarandi, a huge and unproductive farm in Northern Rio Grande do Sul. Fazenda Sarandi was eventually expropriated, at least partly, by the Brazilian state, and this worded success soon incited, Rosa concludes, additional land occupations across Rio Grande do Sul.⁷⁴

The MST historiography obviously pays specific attention to the peasant mobilizations of both MASTER and *Ligas Camponêsas*. In *Jornal Sem Terra*, as well as in Morissawa's textbook, these movements are explicitly presented as MST's most close-related predecessors.⁷⁵ The state-oriented feature of these peasant movements also constitutes a space of experience that motivated, according to the key MST figure João Pedro Stédile, participants of MST's first national congress to declare distinct autonomy from political parties.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, in Northern Rio Grande do Sul, geographical origin of both MASTER and MST, the massive land occupations of the 1960s constitute an important space of experience:

[...] In this region, historically, the struggle for land has always been present. [...] I grew up on an *assentamento* established in 1964. Another movement that existed back then was an *acampamento* called..., a movement called MASTER, well-known when Leonel Brizola was governor. My dad was settled on Fazenda Sarandi [...] in '62 or '64, but the process actually began earlier. And afterwards came other struggles. The dictatorship hid all these processes, [...] but soon emerged a variety of movements: rural workers' unions, revolutionary left-wing groups, social movements, CPT [*Comissão Pastoral da Terra*], and then the struggles here, in our region. During the actions of Macali, Brilhante and Encruzilhada Natalino, my dad helped out. Not as an outspoken leader, but he gave support, brought food and such. And we, the children, we evolved through this process. [...] It was possible because of the occupations already taken place here. We began to organize, without really knowing about MST, the occupation of Fazenda Annoni. And from this process emerged the first national congress, in which MST was founded.⁷⁷

The above interview excerpt illustrates how the memory of MASTER is actively maintained in Northern Rio Grande do Sul. The exact year of the Sarandi expropriation is apparently not important for the interviewee, but instead the social impact of this historical event. The interviewee, a settled MST participant, depicts

⁷⁴Rosa (2009), pp. 202–207.

⁷⁵See Morissawa (2001), pp. 92–94, 123–124, and, for instance, *Jornal Sem Terra* (1984, July), p. 10; *Jornal Sem Terra* (2009, January/February). Across the *Jornal Sem Terra* corpus, *Ligas Camponêsas* is mentioned on 130 occasions, while MASTER occurs 21 times.

⁷⁶Stédile and Fernandes (1999), p. 17.

⁷⁷Focus group 15.

how MASTER paved the way for the massive land occupations occurring in the late 1970s and early 1980s, eventually resulting in the official founding of MST as a nationwide movement of landless rural workers. The word “*acampamento*” is here initially used for entitling MASTER. This anachronistic term, although quickly modified into “movement”, exposes the connection established between the MASTER’s land occupations, and the interviewee’s own experience of occupying Fazenda Annoni in the early 1980 s. This short interview excerpt thereby illustrates how historical agents and activities of the past are actively linked—as a prequel—to the MST story. Furthermore, the interviewee also introduces us to the grand finale of this prequel: the occupations of Macali, Brilhante and Encruzilhada Natalino. But before embarking on these historical events, our chronological exposé must first cover the initial years of The Military Regime. The MST historiography particularly emphasizes one resistance activity during this historical era: the rebellion occurring in the municipalities Trombas and Formoso.⁷⁸

In the book *TROMBAS: A GUERRILHA DE ZÉ PORFÍRIO*, journalist Sebastião de Barros Abreu connects the Trombas Rebellion to an aggressive land grabbing procedure in the 1950s: the *grilagem*. In the South-Central state of Goiás, Abreu reports, numerous small farmers of public lands—*posseiros*—were displaced as they lost formal entitlement to their property by the *grilagem* procedure.⁷⁹ Political scientist Paulo Ribeiro da Cunha argues that the Communist Party, which had meager support among the rural population in Goiás, responsively organized displaced *posseiros* against the *grilagem* procedure, in order to improve its political legitimacy. In 1957, the *posseiros* had taken up arms to reclaim their lands. And through the Communist Party, according to da Cunha, the armed struggle was given a face: the charismatic figure Zé Porfírio.⁸⁰ Historians point out that the escalating armed conflicts in Trombas and Formoso, along with other insurgencies affiliated with the Communist Party, became increasingly worrisome for the people in power in the early 1960s. The nation-wide peasant rebellions made Brazil, along with other Latin American countries, ‘hot zones’ in the Cold War. Historian Moniz Bandeira documents how the United States’ government encouraged, and actively supported, the military coup d’état in March 1964.⁸¹ Under The Military Regime (1964–1985), leaders of *Ligas Camponesas* and MASTER were soon exiled and imprisoned.⁸² Trombas was invaded in 1964, then a second time in 1970. And with the impris-

⁷⁸Trombas and Formoso are recounted in Morissawa (2001), p. 89, are discussed in Jornal Sem Terra (2004, March), p. 14, and have given name to several assentamentos across Brazil, as listed by INCRA (2014).

⁷⁹Abreu (1985), pp. 73–82.

⁸⁰Cunha (2007), pp. 86–88, 91.

⁸¹Bandeira (2006).

⁸²Galdino (2005), p. 132; Welch (2006), p. 39.

onment of Zé Porfirio, in 1972, The Military Regime eventually considered the peasant rebellions to be defeated.⁸³

Historians point out that the military-led government quickly launched a new Land Statute (*Estatuto da Terra*), implying progressive reforms for the landless rural population. Although the new law stated that “everyone is assured of the opportunity to access landed property”,⁸⁴ the practical implementation of this guideline was, according to Wendy Welford, massive relocation of people from Southern and North-Eastern Brazil to the Center-West and Amazon Basin.⁸⁵ Historians also point out that the political economy of The Military Regime mainly subsidized large-scale monocultures, thus paving the way for an export-oriented economy, led by large-scale agri-food companies.⁸⁶

There were however—and this particularly guides the MST historiography—cracks in The Military Regime that could be widened by resistance agents. João Pedro Stédile, MST’s most prominent spokesperson, states that the land struggle was, in particular, driven by the rural workers’ unions that were legalized under The Military Regime.⁸⁷ Historian Cliff Welch reports that this struggle was particularly organized by CONTAG (*Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura*), a reshaped prolongation of the Communist Party-incited union ULTAB. The military response to CONTAG was, according to Welch, to launch a welfare program that aimed for improved health care and retirement benefits. As this welfare program was administrated through CONTAG, Welch concludes, the state eventually gained increased control over the rural workers’ unions.⁸⁸

For João Pedro Stédile, generally considered a key figure in MST’s historical formation, the struggle for land was here carried on by a progressive fraction of the Catholic Church, the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (CPT).⁸⁹ Sociologist José de Souza Martins writes that CPT, founded in 1975, initially set out to provide legal support to field laborers. But the politically engaged priests were soon attracted by, and involved in, the organization among these rural workers.⁹⁰ As followers and developers of liberation theology, CPT assumed self-organizing potential among the landless peasantry.⁹¹ Scholars that write the history of Brazil’s Landless Movement typically point out CPT-initiated bible-study groups (*Comunidades Eclesiais de Base*) as an organizational axis for subsequent land occupations.

⁸³Cunha (2007, pp. 14–17, 280; Martins (1999 [1994]), p. 64.

⁸⁴Quoted in Panini (1990), p. 81.

⁸⁵Welford (2010), pp. 44–45.

⁸⁶Medeiros et al. (1994), pp. 24–25; Vergara-Camus (2012), pp. 1143–1145.

⁸⁷Stédile and Fernandes (1999), pp. 28–29.

⁸⁸Welch (2009), pp. 133–134, 138–139.

⁸⁹Stédile and Fernandes (1999), pp. 18–22.

⁹⁰Martins (1999 [1994]), pp. 139–140.

⁹¹An argument elaborated by theologian Leonardo Boff (1980), pp. 30–42, 57–59.

The first of these mass-occupations took place in September 1978, when hundreds of people occupied Fazenda Macali in Northern Rio Grande do Sul. According to historian Angus Wright and anthropologist Wendy Wolford, women here actively put themselves, along with children, in the front line to defend the male occupants. When the police came, officers hesitated on attacking women and children with direct violence. The occupation of Fazenda Macali was therefore left undefeated. Occupants advanced their negotiations with the state governor, who eventually legalized the land claim.⁹² Sociologist Marta Harnecker writes that when the success of the Macali occupation spread throughout the area, social mobilization ignited. Fazenda Brilhante was occupied the same year, and, a few years thereafter, Fazenda Annoni, MST's first claim as a nationwide movement.⁹³

We have now reached the finale of the MST prequel. In the early 1980s, the wave of land occupations culminated in an immense roadside encampment—commonly known as Encruzilhada Natalino—situated at a highway intersection in Northern Rio Grande do Sul. Journalists Sue Branford and Jan Rocha report how this massive *acampamento* endured for years, accommodating over ten thousand people.⁹⁴ Wright and Wolford argue that the severe police repression, led by the infamous Colonel Curió, created a need for improved organizational tactics. The *acampamento* was therefore built upon a decentralized organization structure, inspired by CPT's bible-study groups, in which small groups of people systematically shifted between various labor tasks.⁹⁵ In the fall of 1983, according to Harnecker, the state governor agreed to expropriation and eventually distributed land titles to the *acampados* of Encruzilhada Natalino.⁹⁶ When landless rural workers in other parts of Brazil learned about the Encruzilhada Natalino success, they soon decided to organize a national meeting to discuss strategies for nationwide agrarian reform.⁹⁷ The constitutional and first national congress of *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* took place in the city of Cascavel, in the Southern state of Santa Catarina, between the 21st and 24th of January, 1984.⁹⁸ Brazil's Landless Movement was born.

⁹²Wright and Wolford (2003), pp. 27–30.

⁹³Harnecker (2003 [2002]), pp. 31–33. See also Ondetti (2008), pp. 65–69.

⁹⁴Branford and Rocha (2002), p. 17.

⁹⁵Wright and Wolford (2003), pp. 38–47. The *acampados* also started a news bulletin—later known as *Jornal Sem Terra*—to share experiences with other land occupiers across Brazil, according to Individual interview 07; Morissawa (2001), p. 125.

⁹⁶Harnecker (2003 [2002]), pp. 35–37.

⁹⁷Historians have documented that this rumor actually spread chiefly via *acampados* settled in remote Brazilian states, following the state's back-fired attempt to dampen mass mobilization. See Lerrer (2008), pp. 183–190; Schreiner (2009), pp. 101–102.

⁹⁸As reported by Harnecker (2003 [2002]), p. 38.

2.3 Struggles Continued

This chapter has, up to this point, portrayed the prequel to the MST story. My empirical analysis of *Jornal Sem Terra*, Morissawa's textbook, and ethnographic sources, has identified and presented certain agents and activities that—in the MST prequel—orbit an advocacy herein construed as a historical struggle for land. The final part of this chapter aims to bridge prequel and story by following MST's historiographic chronology into the movement's own history. I refer to this historical era as a Third Republic, starting with the *Abertura* of the 1980s, via the 1990s neoliberal turn, to the Workers' Party's political dominance in the first decade of the new millennium. This time period thereby concerns the part of MST historiography where Brazil's Landless Movement becomes narrative protagonist, key agent of the struggles continued.

In the influential book *LAND, PROTEST, AND POLITICS*, political scientist Gabriel Ondetti outlines five periods of the Landless Movement in Brazil. Theoretically informed by the political opportunity perspective, Ondetti's periodization chiefly concerns the movement's impacts on the state-political arena. The five periods—Emergence (1974–1984), Growth (1985–1994), Takeoff (1995–1999), Decline (2000–2002), and Resurgence (2003–2006)—clearly captures significant changes of the political opportunity structure.⁹⁹ Albeit empirically informative, and therefore a key scholarly reference here, I believe that Ondetti's analytical focus on the state-political conjunctures risks to eclipse the MST-identified continuity between various governments. As we have seen, the MST prequel portrays historical struggles against nation building, in tandem with historical struggles for land. In the history written by MST participants—through collective narration, educative settings, and *Jornal Sem Terra* articles—the Landless Movement is recurrently linked to agents and activities from dissimilar politico-economic contexts. The historiographic dialogue with the past suggests that MST continues, and advances, the search for autonomy embodied in the struggle for land.

As we will see in subsequent chapters, MST participants do in fact depict their surrounding politico-economic context in terms of historical continuity. In the story of Brazil's Landless Movement, the struggle continues, although certain narrative components—including antagonists—change over time. But before analytically dissecting the MST story, this chapter will first conclude the historiographic exposé with a brief overview of MST and The Third Republic. Alike preceding parts of this chapter, the following historiographic events have been identified through ethnographic sources and MST-produced literature, verified and complemented through systematic searches in *Jornal Sem Terra*. The empirical analysis is here presented as a concise version of the MST's 'present time' historiography, anchored in previous historical studies on MST, Ondetti's in particular, as well as scholarly literature concerned with Brazilian contemporary history.

⁹⁹Ondetti (2008), pp. 13–19. It should be noted that Ondetti's categorization involves additional land occupying agents, besides MST.

Brazil's Landless Movement emerged in parallel with the so called political opening of Brazil: the *abertura*. Historians point out that this self-initiated governmental transition, from military regime to electoral presidency, was deliberately slow in character. As the people in power wanted transition without social tensions (*distensão*), the democratization project begun gradually, in November 1974, when the administration of General Geisel allowed oppositional parties to access national media. The only viable oppositional party, MDB (*Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*), now had novel opportunities to challenge the dominant military party (*Aliança Renovadora Nacional*).¹⁰⁰ The MDB-party became a legitimate channel for political discontent which, in turn, inspired labor unions to become increasingly confrontative. Ondetti writes that in 1978, metal workers in São Paulo begun to launch a series of strikes to protest the decreased purchase power that followed government-led inflation. The spokesperson for São Paulo's metal workers, Luiz Inácio da Silva—also known as Lula—became a central figure in the union-organized defiance, now spreading across Brazil.¹⁰¹ In 1979, according to historian Boris Fausto, more than three million workers went out on strike. The government answered the popular demands by launching the *abertura* project. The two-party system, set up after the military coup in 1964, was dissolved by the newly installed General Figueiredo in October 1979.¹⁰²

Fausto describes how the breakdown of the two-party system created severe cracks in the political legitimacy of The Military Regime, cracks that were widened by the massive union strikes. The Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*), in which the union leader Lula soon became a key figure, was born in this milieu. Together with other newly-legalized political parties, as well as social movements, the Workers' Party began promoting *abertura* advances in the form of elected presidency. Fausto writes that the political campaign known as *Diretas Já* (Direct Elections Now) gained popular support all over Brazil in the early 1980s. The campaign did not succeed—direct presidential elections were still not allowed—but the expressive public opinion did affect the upcoming voting within the Electoral College. The leader of the *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* (former MDB), Tancredo Neves, gained majority in the Electoral College and replaced the military party in January 1985. For the first time since the 1960s, the government was not run by a military-assigned president. A national constitutional assembly, publicly elected in November 1986, set out to write a new constitution for Brazil. The new constitution, Fausto concludes, went into effect in October 5, 1988, to complete the *abertura* project. And in November 1989, The Third Republic of Brazil saw its first direct presidential elections. Fernando Collor de Mello, candidate for *Partido da Reconstrução Nacional* (today's Christian Labor Party), won the elections and took office in March 1990. Half-way into his first term, Fausto reports,

¹⁰⁰See Skidmore (1999), pp. 186–187; Fausto (1999), pp. 296–297.

¹⁰¹Ondetti (2008), p. 56.

¹⁰²Fausto (1999), p. 303.

Collor de Mello stepped down due to a severe corruption scandal. His post went to Vice-president Itamar Franco, installed in April 1993.¹⁰³

Economic historians Francisco Vidal Luna and Herbert Klein demonstrate that in parallel with these (state-)political transformations, Brazil's economy was severely weakened by high inflation. In order to re-foster economic growth, after years of deep recession, Brazilian governments imposed firm economic changes. According to Luna and Klein, the state-invoked adjustment programs were closely guided by neoliberal principles of economic deregulation and fortified property rights, as formulated by the so-called Washington Consensus. This neoliberal turn motivated president Itamar Franco's Minister of Treasury—Fernando Henrique Cardoso—to launch a massive reform package to stabilize the Brazilian currency. Luna and Klein write that the core of Cardoso's substantive project, known as *Plano Real*, was to impose conversion to a new national currency. The transition went via a temporarily currency index that enabled, along with overvalued exchange rates, stable implementation of the *Real* as Brazil's new currency. Cardoso's *Plano Real* was successful; inflation dropped from nine hundred percent in 1994 to nineteen percent the following year. And only a few months after *Plano Real* was implemented, Fernando Henrique Cardoso won the presidential elections as candidate for *Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira*. In January 1995, Cardoso became the new President of Brazil.¹⁰⁴

In *Jornal Sem Terra*, Fernando Henrique Cardoso undoubtedly is the most heavily criticized representative of the Brazilian state.¹⁰⁵ The front covers of *Jornal Sem Terra* from this period bear headlines stating that Cardoso's "agrarian reform is a farce",¹⁰⁶ or that Cardoso "paralyzes agrarian reform all over Brazil".¹⁰⁷ Front cover headlines accuses the president of being "responsible for the crisis in agriculture",¹⁰⁸ for "cutting down resources to agrarian reform",¹⁰⁹ and for neglecting "drought and hunger in the North-East".¹¹⁰ *Jornal Sem Terra* accordingly documents MST's resistance activities, with front cover headlines reporting about "occupations against Cardoso's tardiness",¹¹¹ and "mobilizations against Cardoso's lies".¹¹² As I will show in Chap. 3, the antagonistic position of The Cardoso Regime, in the MST story,

¹⁰³Fausto (1999), pp. 309–319. See also Ondetti (2008), pp. 55–56.

¹⁰⁴Luna and Klein (2006), pp. 60–65. See also Skidmore (1999), pp. 223–226; Fausto (1999), pp. 320–321.

¹⁰⁵Interestingly enough, Cardoso is also a well-renowned sociologist, recognized for important contributions to the dependency school through the book *DEPENDENCY AND DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA* (1979). In possession of state power, according to MST's historiography, Cardoso instead contributed to the very capitalist expansion that he had critically analyzed as an academic scholar.

¹⁰⁶*Jornal Sem Terra* (2002, January), p. 1.

¹⁰⁷*Jornal Sem Terra* (2001, October), p. 1.

¹⁰⁸*Jornal Sem Terra* (1998, July), p. 1.

¹⁰⁹*Jornal Sem Terra* (1998, December), p. 1.

¹¹⁰*Jornal Sem Terra* (2001, July), p. 1.

¹¹¹*Jornal Sem Terra* (1995, September), p. 1.

¹¹²*Jornal Sem Terra* (1996, January/February), p. 1.

chiefly derives from its close association with the neoliberal project. According to Luna and Klein, production sectors like oil, electric power, telecommunications and costal shipping were all privatized by Cardoso to pave the way for foreign investments.¹¹³ As pointed out by political scientist Michel Duquette, a significant feature of Cardoso's economic politics was thus to accelerate the neoliberal privatization program initiated by President Collor de Mello.¹¹⁴

Furthermore, as explicitly pronounced by an interviewed MST college student, the "continuation of the neoliberal project" passed through the Collor, Franco and Cardoso administrations, and then into Lula's presidency.¹¹⁵ The interviewed MST participant depicts the state as a key implementer of neoliberal doctrines, a safeguard for neoliberal continuity into the novel political landscape of the new millennium. Social scientists similarly argue that the Worker's Party sustained state-founded support for large domestic corporations, especially in the agrarian sector, in order to strengthen Brazil's position on the inter-state arena. Fiscal incentives came to premiere export-oriented monocultures, which in turn made small farmers heavily indebted in their adjustments to the applied political economy.¹¹⁶ Ondetti points out that the Landless Movement was particularly affected since the most fundamental neoliberal doctrine—protection of private property—was directly violated by land occupants. Along with the installation of the neoliberal project, the state became increasingly uncomfortable with the growing Landless Movement.¹¹⁷

Ondetti begins this account in the mid-1990s, a period when the Cardoso government actually took successive steps towards state-invoked agrarian reform. The Landless Movement was now favored by the public media, following an intensive media coverage of two state-led massacres of MST participants. Ondetti reports that the first massacre, where police forces killed one child and eight land occupants, took place in Corumbiara, Northern Brazil, in August 1995. In the massacre of Eldorado do Carajás, on April 17, 1996, the military police opened fire into a crowd of MST participants on a road-blockade. Nineteen people were shot to death, sixty-nine were badly injured. Ondetti writes that the Cardoso administration, ultimately responsible for the state's violence, answered the popular critique by implementing the ambitious expropriation program presented during the electoral campaign. Between 1995 and 1998, state-led land expropriation therefore increased substantially, settling some 288,000 families. During Cardoso's second term in office, however, the compliant approach suddenly turned into a massive offensive against the Landless Movement.

¹¹³Luna and Klein (2006), pp. 31–33, 72–75.

¹¹⁴Duquette (2005), pp. 53–54.

¹¹⁵Focus group 02.

¹¹⁶See Kröger (2012), pp. 887, 891–892; Dauvergne and Farias (2012), pp. 906–908; Galdino (2005); Lundström (2011).

¹¹⁷Ondetti (2008), pp. 148–155. For comparable analyses, see Mészáros (2015), pp. 357–358; Pereira (2004), p. 104.

Ondetti argues that this political makeover started with the scandal of heavy police violence against indigenous groups, protesting at the 500th anniversary of Portuguese ‘discovery’ of Brazil. The embarrassed Cardoso administration blamed MST for creating an upheaval that eventually led to beating and teargassing of indigenous protesters. The president’s discontent was fueled when thirty thousand MST participants occupied public offices, all over Brazil, to demand acceleration of the state-led agrarian reform. According to Ondetti’s investigation, President Cardoso answered by attacking MST’s most central resistance activity—the land occupation. In May 2000, Ondetti reports, the Cardoso administration declared that ‘invaded’ rural properties would be ineligible for expropriation for two years, four years if occupied a second time. Individuals and organizations involved in land occupation activities would no longer receive any kind of public funding, nor land titles. The state could also ‘take back’ land already redistributed, given that family members proved to be taking part in land occupation activities. Moreover, administrative alterations required landless peoples to register at INCRA and simply wait for their land titles, which, Ondetti concludes, added to disabled mobilization for massive land occupations.¹¹⁸

The state’s criminalization of land occupations, and administrative alterations that incapacitated popular mobilizations, are important components of Cardoso’s antagonistic position in the MST story. Nevertheless, as we shall see in Chap. 3, the state is not a full-feathered antagonist in the MST story; this position is reserved for narrative characters representing the capital. Yet the associative linkage between state and capital—stemming from the state-invoked neoliberal project—seems to inform the continued skepticism against the governments of The Third Republic. In the MST historiography, the severe critique against the Cardoso administration has not at all escaped the successive regime of the Workers’ Party.

Luiz Inácio ‘Lula’ da Silva, the front figure of the late 1970s massive union strike, had been a strong candidate in the presidential elections of 1989 and 1994. Lula had lost these campaigns, first to Collor then to Cardoso, but in October 2002 he finally won the presidential elections. The Workers’ Party has held the government position since they took office in January 2003, via Lula’s re-election in 2006 and replacement by Dilma Rousseff in 2011. As we have seen, the MST historiography clearly depicts the Lula administration as a continuation of the neoliberal project. Moreover, MST participants typically link this continuity to certain social compensations: welfare programs, or “packages to the poor so they won’t revolt” as one interviewed *acampado* puts it.¹¹⁹ The key reference here is *Bolsa Família*, a part of Lula’s Zero-Hunger program aimed to provide basic material needs for economically poor households.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸Ondetti (2008), pp. 148–151, 183–188.

¹¹⁹Focus group 17.

¹²⁰*Bolsa Família* is critically discussed in Luna and Klein (2006), pp. 34–35; Fernandes (2015), pp. 140–145; Ondetti (2008), pp. 202–204.

Skepticism towards The Lula Regime seems to be deeply rooted in MST participants' collective memory. Political scientist Miguel Carter reports that MST participants understand President Lula's—and President Dilma's—political economy in terms of betrayal and broken promises.¹²¹ According to Gabriel Ondetti, drawing empirically on interviews and other MST-derived sources, this deep-rooted skepticism started already with the build-up period of Lula's presidential campaign. On route to state power, Lula officially condemned MST's occupations of governmental buildings, and actively refrained from attending the movement's national congress. After the Lula administration took office, Ondetti argues, nothing really changed in the legal and administrative framework imposed by Cardoso to repress the Landless Movement. But towards the end of his first term in office (which completes Ondetti's investigation period), Lula eventually tried to meet MST's expectations by invoking INCRA officials to temporarily bypass the legal measures that restrained land occupations.¹²²

However, during the second term of the Lula administration (2006–2010), Cardoso's repressive measures were quietly reinforced, and then maintained by Lula's successor Dilma Rousseff. At the time of my field study, in 2012–2013, MST participants were again unable to perform direct land occupations. The basic criterion for INCRA registration was verification of landlessness, meaning that the land applicant had to live on an *acampamento* (encampment). As MST participants could no longer occupy unproductive land, albeit required to live in occupation-like conditions, *acampamentos* were generally set up on roadsides of inter-state highways, the only legal space for occupation sites.¹²³ The *acampamento*, as we will see in Chap. 4, has accordingly become an important space of experience for MST participants, a distinct contrast to the state, and thus a spatial resource for the land struggle. Accordingly, MST participants typically construe the state in terms of continuity, in spite of its allegedly dissimilar administrations across The Third Republic:

The birth of the movement in '70..., '79, grew out of the Encruzilhada occupants' need to build a movement that struggled for land. That provided continuity. [...] We became well-known in '97 because of the Eldorado massacre, as a political reference. And we are a political reference. Nevertheless, today, our struggle has changed. We had hope in Lula, but now we all know that Lula... Actually, it's not only Lula, but also what made Lula's fail the agrarian reform. It's the continuation of the neoliberal project, initiated by Collor [de Mello]. It was continued by Itamar [Franco] and Fernando Henrique [Cardoso]. But it did not stop there. Willingly or not, we had to change our strategy, our practice of struggle.¹²⁴

The above excerpt derives from a focus group interview with five students at ITERRA (*Instituto Técnico de Capacitação e Pesquisa da Reforma Agrária*), a MST-college located in North-Eastern Rio Grande do Sul. When asked about the differences between the initial and contemporary MST struggle, the above

¹²¹Carter (2015b), pp. 413, 419–423.

¹²²Ondetti (2008), pp. 186–188, 206–208. See also Branford (2015), pp. 336–349.

¹²³Individual interview 14; Individual interview 06.

¹²⁴Focus group 02.

interviewee, herself raised on an *assentamento* and now in her early twenties, makes practically no distinction between the governments of The Third Republic. Albeit cautious, she depicts the Lula administration as a mere “continuation of the neoliberal project”. Her explanatory statement thereby illustrates how MST’s historiographic contextualization portrays The Third Republic as advances in state-invoked neoliberal repression. The various government administrations are understood to produce tandem unevenness and predictability of the social topography. The state is hereby, as we return to in Chap. 4, understood as a color-changing yet constantly unreliable power, from which MST participants, and their historiographic predecessors, seek autonomy. At the same time, the state is not exclusively construed as an antagonist by MST participants, but also as a persuasive and even necessary vehicle for the land struggle. By contrast, the antagonists of the MST story are instead, as we shall see in the following chapter, transformable narrative characters.

The historiographic exposé outlined in this chapter highlights what I call a dialogue with the past, that is, a linkage between prequel and story, a guiding past-present intimacy. The prequel portrays a distant space of experience, a historical context, in which the contemporary Landless Movement is situated. The prequel is entitled by the historical struggle for land, comprised by a wide range of agents and activities during five centuries of Brazilian history. And through the MST historiography, historical struggles *against* nation building, and *for* land, are continued by the nationwide movement of landless rural workers, born in the early 1980s. As the MST historiography is recurrently told in various educative settings, *Jornal Sem Terra* articles, and MST textbooks, the story of Brazil’s Landless Movement is vividly produced in dialogue with the past.

Yet this history writing, in which MST continues the historical struggle for land, also suggests an ongoing struggle. The story has an open ending. The movement narrative so becomes, as we will see, flexible. The following chapter accordingly outlines the contours and components of the MST story, in order to analyze its changes and continuities over time.

The Making of Resistance

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