agrarian history will find it especially rewarding. Some readers might take issue with Wilcox's treatment of labour relations as 'amicable' (p. 226) and his suggestion that the availability of land 'tempered' social conflict (p. 230). But his story is compelling and we should take his analysis seriously. Some of Mato Grosso's exceptionalism – floodplain ranching and divisions between cowboys and ranch hands – were also common in Colombia. More significantly, Wilcox's claim that Mato Grosso has been central to the intensification of Brazilian ranching since the 1970s is provocative but hard to demonstrate in a story that ends around 1950. For expediency, Wilcox also sidelines the politics of ranching. The connections between cattle and the 'agrarian question', however, remain important. Traditional studies of the Latin American countryside assumed that hidebound ranchers were an obstacle to national development. But if we accept Wilcox's proposition that ranchers were constrained by environmental and economic factors rather than simply backward, how does this (re)shape our understanding of the history and politics of agrarian change?

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Eve E. Buckley, *Technocrats and the Politics of Drought and Development in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), pp. xiv + 298, $29.95, pb

Eve E. Buckley's study of drought and development in northeast Brazil offers fascinating new terrain for the history of modernity, regionalism and science – the latter as both ideology and political practice. Buckley explores government initiatives from 1904 to 1964 seeking to alleviate the problems of drought in the semi-arid *sertão* region, whose inhabitants (known as *sertanejos*) have traditionally stood as symbols of backwardness in the Brazilian national imaginary. The perceived backwardness of the *sertão* and its populations serves as a central theme of the book, as the author explores the shortcomings of development projects to 'transform' *sertanejos* into modern (and thus valid) members of the polity. That these attempts not only failed, but probably exacerbated poverty in the *sertão*, shows a form of technocratic hubris and the limitations of scientists as agents for social change.

The book traces four cohorts of Brazilian technocrats. This included public health workers in the first decades of the century, who set the precedent for framing scientific approaches to solve the nation's problems; civil engineers through the 1930s, who oversaw the building of dams and roads as a means to improve infrastructure without upending the social order; agronomists in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, who articulated the *sertanejos*' vulnerability to drought as a problem of insufficient education and culture; and finally, development economists, who, in the middle decades of the century, sought to reorganise the region's economy with an emphasis on industrialisation and food security. Each of these cohorts is given its own chapter in the book, with a full chronicle of the respective government agencies and their technocrats.

By presenting a dual narrative of climate and structural inequality, Buckley makes two interwoven arguments. First, she contends that the history of *sertanejo* marginalisation is itself an environmental history. The periodic droughts in the *sertão* led to waves of *retirantes* (drought migrants) abandoning their hinterland farms and seeking refuge in cities, where the concentration of impoverished, starved – and ethnically mixed – people helped create and perpetuate notions of *sertanejos* as destitute

and savage. For Buckley, one cannot understand the problems of drought in isolation from the social and economic realities initially catalysed by the droughts themselves. But for the technocrats in Buckley's book, the focus on climate as a singular and solvable issue ignored (whether by professional choice or political necessity) the underlying connections between drought and inequality.

This brings us to the book's second argument: the inherent boundaries of technocratic development precluded the initiatives from ever achieving their intended goals. On the one hand, this is evident in the way that projects had to be designed within the power dynamics of the *sertão*. Because any structural changes (such as land redistribution) were seen as a threat to the holdings of elite politicians and local landlords, much of the work, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century, involved building reservoirs and roads. On the surface, these projects brought the promise of modernisation, yet in reality they primarily benefited the elites who controlled the lands on which infrastructure was actually built. Buckley shows how this created a 'drought industry' that served only 'to solidify existing social relations, reinforcing landowners' control over natural resources and the human beings who depended on them and thus increasing landowners' power as local patrons' (p. 224). The paradox of how development projects intended to alleviate poverty actually made life more precarious for *sertanejos*, would, on its own, constitute an important and worthy scholarly intervention.

But Buckley also goes deeper to examine the work of the technocrats themselves, and argues that their professional and ideological approaches confined them to what Michael Ervin ('The 1930 Agrarian Census in Mexico: Agronomists, Middle Politics, and the Negotiation of Data Collection', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 87: 3 (2007), pp. 537–70) has called the 'middle politics' of scientific management. Relying on extensive documentation from the federal and regional development agencies, the author presents the technocrats-cum-drought agents in a nearly impossible bind. They were tasked with designing projects that would end climate-related poverty, yet to do so without sparking any political conflict. The efforts of these drought agents were often met with resistance not only from their own superiors and local elites, but also from the *sertanejos* themselves, who did not always embrace the technocrats' proposals for farming and resource management. Buckley argues that the recalcitrance of local communities fed into the technocrats' own assumptions of *sertanejos* as 'a race apart, prone to religious fanaticism, superstition, and barbaric violence. For elite members of a profession that prided itself on rationality in all things, such perceptions must have made lowly *sertanejos* seem very foreign' (p. 84). The fact that technocrats shared in the broader stigmatisation of *sertanejos* also helps explain why they zealously clung to a belief in scientific management. This offers a poignant reflection on the professionalisation of scientific engineering: if technocrats were to acknowledge the larger structural factors that linked environmental crises and poverty, drought would then be defined in social, rather than technical terms. In such a scenario, engineers would have a smaller role in solving the problem. In the case of each of the book's four cohorts of technocrats, Buckley shows how they all framed the problem of drought in a way that only their particular profession could solve. In the end, technocratic solutions were unable to escape this feedback loop and the problems of drought in the *sertão* were, on the whole, as challenging in the 1960s as they had been at the beginning of the century.

Without criticising an historian for not including more material in their book, it is a bit surprising that the author ends her study in 1964, at precisely the moment when a self-identifying technocratic military regime seized power. Although the dictatorship's

development efforts in the northeast differed in content and scope from what Buckley analyses in her book, the choice to conclude her main analysis in 1964 seems like a missed opportunity to reflect on the multiple meanings of technocracy in Brazil, where it came to represent not only development or scientific technocracy, but geopolitical technocracy and the exercise of national security. Despite these quibbles, Buckley's study is a welcome addition and a timely parable on questions of technocratic development and the environment.

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Laura Caruso, *Embarcados: Los trabajadores marítimos y la vida a bordo: Sindicato, empresas y Estado en el puerto de Buenos Aires, 1889–1921* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Imago Mundi, 2016), pp. xxxv + 283, pb

With the turn towards Atlantic studies in recent years, scholars have increasingly examined connections across different spaces and oceans, as well as the people working the ships and ports necessary for these relationships. Much of this work focuses on the colonial and early republican eras in Latin America, with relatively little on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The change in era represents a shift towards steam, the rise of labour unions in the maritime world, and – in the case of Argentina – mass migration through the port of Buenos Aires. Laura Caruso takes on this era in *Embarcados*.

The book is split into five chapters, each of which examines a different aspect of the life and work circulating around the port of Buenos Aires. The first chapter is a broad look at work in the maritime world. Caruso details both the heterogeneity of work across different types of ships, national affiliation of workers, and the mixing of cosmopolitan experiences with nationalist politics. Importantly, Caruso details the specifics of work on board ships, a 'thick description' (p. xxx), complete with a chart showing which workers belonged to which section of the ship (p. 14). For some, this might read as unnecessary. But for Caruso the labour process is central in understanding how and why maritime workers organised the ways they did at certain times. Part of this work process, and the conflict and solidarity created on board, was the creation of what Caruso calls the 'FOM family' (Federación Obrera Marítima, Maritime Workers' Federation). Rather than challenging gender ideologies, the FOM family 'reaffirm[ed] a traditional model of domesticity' (p. 46).

In the second chapter Caruso focuses on the history of the Mihanovich shipping company, based in large part on the archive of the company. Mihanovich dominated the shipping industry in early twentieth-century Argentina, with ten times as much capital as the next largest company at the beginning of World War I, and modern and efficient boats compared to those of their rivals (pp. 51, 53). The company used their size and power to win favourable laws from regimes not only in Argentina, but also in neighbouring Uruguay and Paraguay. In Paraguay they even lent the state money.

Chapters 3 and 4 form a 32-year history of maritime-worker organising in Buenos Aires, from 1889 to 1921. The density of research, in different archives and through a variety of sources, shines in these two chapters. These chapters – and the book as a whole – also show that Caruso is keenly attuned to the maritime world. From an initial strike by crewmembers in 1889, pushing back the standard periodisation of