

Critical Dialogue

Brazil's Long Revolution: Radical Achievements of the Landless Workers Movement. By Anthony Pahnke. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2018. 304p. \$65.00 cloth.
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Anthony Pahnke's *Brazil's Long Revolution* is an excellent example of Marxist and critical theory applied to social movement studies. Its main argument is that the Brazilian landless peasants' movement is a "movement of revolutionary resistance" because it builds a dual power vis-a-vis the state.

Understanding the literature that sustains the theoretical background of Pahnke's case study is crucial to appreciating this definition that he proposes. It is built on an original combination of the ideas of Vladimir Lenin, Antonio Negri, Enrique Dussel, and Carl Schmitt with the aim of understanding what Pahnke calls the landless workers movement of Brazil. Lenin's classical idea of "dual power," defined as the construction of alternative institutions that are gradually building a different status quo, is combined with Negri's and Dussel's discussions of "constituent power" and "constitutive power" as the originary power of the multitude (Negri) or people (Dussel) from which institutional power derives. In addition, Pahnke introduces Schmitt's classic friend/enemy dichotomy into the theoretical discussion as the essential distinction of politics, combined with the partisan argument in which Schmitt presents his idea of disputing the sovereignty of the state by an irregular force.

With this conceptualization in mind, Pahnke argues that the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST) is a movement of revolutionary resistance because it has constituted an alternative institutionality in the lands that it occupies, representing a people's foundational action of a different order. This is achieved through "revolutionary resistance," understood "as the mutually exclusive claim to space and the effort to transform political, economic, and cultural relations in a way that erases the distinction between institutionalized public and private power" (p. 200).

Empirically, to prove his point, the author goes through a detailed analysis of the MST and also makes

some brief references to other social movement organizations, such as the *Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens*, the *Movimento dos Pequenos Agricultores*, the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra*, and the *Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura* (CONTAG) union. The main focus is to show the groups' shared origins (not applicable to the CONTAG), and the MST's tactical repertoire and its interaction with the state at the national and subnational level (mainly in Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul).

The author argues that defining the MST as a peasant movement eliminates its revolutionary character, reducing it to a subsistence movement. However, I think his claim is not accurate in conceptual and historical terms. Conceptually, one is a sociological definition of the social actors mobilized, and the other is a political definition of the strategic goals of these same social actors. Historically, there are several cases of revolutionary peasants' movements across history, and Marxism has provided important contributions in theory and practice to their analysis from Mao Zedong, José Carlos Mariátegui, and Eric Hobsbawm, among many others.

Moreover, even though Pahnke recognizes the influence of Bernardo Mançano Fernandes's concept of "socio-territorial movements" in understanding the MST's claim for space, he does not get involved in the discussions of critical geographers that would have helped link his efforts to conceptualize the MST into a well-established debate on the topic. Instead, the author correctly identifies three central gaps in the social movement literature: the lack of a fruitful dialogue between the mainstream social movement literature and Marxist studies, the concomitant underdeveloped political economy of social movements, and the lack of contextualization for tactical choices in social movement studies.

Although his theoretical approach offers a possible solution to the first two gaps in the literature, the third point deserves to be explored a bit further. Pahnke proposes the creation of an intermediate category between legal and illegal to classify types of tactics: the "extralegal" ones. In Pahnke's own words, "I define extralegal political action as neither legal nor illegal practices, but a form of collective action that appears similar to illegal conduct, but that lacks clear statutory guidelines for punishment and/or approval" (p. 7). This

definition synthesizes the notion of “irregularity” in Schmitt with Lenin’s strategic argument concerning the need to combine types of tactics to achieve revolution. It has an important strength in acknowledging the historical construction of tactics—that is, the tactics are a result of conscious learning processes—as well as the possibilities of addressing certain social grievances in the present time.

The critical appropriation of tactics from the past is achieved in the MST through the conscious study of past struggles; contact among generations of activists, such as with the Peasant Leagues; and the influence of dynamics that are coming from alternative paths—for example, the military *agrovillas*—showing the modularity of repertoires and their sedimentation across time. I fully agree with this argument, finding in my own research on the MST and other movements very similar results. However, the subsequent analysis of this phenomenon is static, so it is unclear how the interesting extralegal tactics empirically develop in the sense the author correctly theorizes. The issue seems to be that he decided on an approach rooted in methodological individualism regarding the construction of the tactical repertoire. A relational approach would have been more appropriate, either by following Charles Tilly’s tradition or a class analysis approach.

Concretely, Pahnke observes the revolutionary resistance of the MST in two key dimensions: (1) the regular resistance to the penetration of the state into specific spaces in Brazil where the MST has organized a cooperative community with its own educational and agricultural models, and (2) the performance of a combination of legal, illegal, and mainly extralegal tactics that constitute defiance to the current legal order while pushing the boundaries of the status quo.

Concerning the organization, Pahnke shows how the grassroots *núcleos* result from a combination of inspirations: the locally based *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* and the Communist Party’s democratic centralism. Even though not analyzed in comparative terms, this organizational characteristic is typical of most popular movements that have been struggling against capitalism or neoliberalism in Latin America. Concerning education, he masterfully presents a very interesting organizational model that complements Paulo Freire’s pedagogical approach as used by the MST. The “ascending and descending democracy” model used to teach in the MST schools provides different collective ways of participating in decision making.

With this approach Pahnke discusses the applicability to the MST of the traditional theories of revolution: those of Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, Hannah Arendt, and Jeff Goodwin. For Pahnke, revolution is not a matter of taking the state and constituting a new government and regime, but rather of disputing the existing state in specific territories for the organization of a portion of society in a different fashion. This would imply pushing the boundaries of what is legally allowed and, mainly,

what is not even typified as illegal by the current legal codes. This would lead to a rupture with the current order by creating a situation of dual power at a specific territorial site where the MST is occupying land and building a community that works with an ethos different from that of the dominant society. In other words, it is the extralegal nature of the MST’s revolutionary political action that can lead to the construction of dual power.

In this way, Pahnke presents a seemingly situationist/autonomist understanding of revolution. Even if not explicit, this view appears present across the whole empirical analysis. A question that arises is thus, Would Pahnke consider the MST a revolutionary movement in general macrohistorical analysis terms too? Is the MST pushing for dual power at the national level as well or only at the local level?

The puzzle that this excellent book poses implicitly is that the goal of a movement and the relational outcome it achieves across time are not necessarily the same. Pahnke argues convincingly that the intra-movement dynamics of organization, education, and production are revolutionary in the constitution of counterhegemonic socioeconomic and cultural practices for the MST’s members. However, external to the MST, the dynamics of interaction with different Brazilian governments do not show any relational revolutionary dynamic. They rather seem to be bridging-with-the-state outward dynamics in the quest for improving the lives of the mobilized communities. Thus, considering the centrality the MST gives to education and alternative ways of organizing, why was the movement not defined in Gramscian terms as a counterhegemonic (revolutionary) movement?

The book closes with comparisons of the MST with the Cuban revolution and with the struggles against slavery and indigenous oppression in the United States. Both comparisons stretch the comparability of the MST too far. In methodological terms, a movement, a revolution, and different social dynamics of subaltern groups are not the same kind of phenomena.

Beyond these questions and critiques, *Brazil’s Long Revolution* is a fantastic book. Pahnke’s refined theoretical edifice and solid empirical analysis engage the reader in a crucial debate about one of the main social movements in the contemporary world.

Response to Federico M. Rossi’s review of *Brazil’s Long Revolution: Radical Achievements of the Landless Workers Movement*

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— Anthony Pahnke

Federico Rossi’s comments on my book are insightful. Some of his remarks made me think more about certain themes, and others brought to my attention issues that I

had only marginally considered. I thank him for taking the time to carefully read my work.

Concerning the issue Rossi raises regarding my theorization of tactics—namely, the historical trajectory of how I discuss extralegality—I am unsure whether my argument tends toward methodological individualism. In tracing such tactics' development over time, I show how social movement leaders and members interacted with their respective historical contexts. I make the same argument with respect to certain forms of the landless movement's institutional structure, as Rossi also notes. Yet, for my argument to show signs of methodological individualism, I would have had to rely less on historical analysis. I make this point in my discussion of neoliberalism (chap. 4), where I place the landless movement in comparative perspective with other Brazilian movements, showing how tactical adaptation took place within the context of changing economic conditions.

Still I see Rossi's point; I understand how one reading of my argument seemingly privileges the choices of key individuals in the development of the landless movement. That I may have erred on the side of agency at times was due to the lively comments and stories I heard from lifelong landless activists. In my book, I tried to straddle not only different literatures (critical, Marxist, and social movement theories) but also different ways of writing about social movements. By that, I mean performing the difficult task of capturing the energy of movements *in* movement while also subjecting their actions to critical analysis to understand their successes, challenges, and failures.

However briefly, Rossi also draws attention to my conclusion where I attempt to make the landless movement speak to movements in the United States. On the one hand, I agree that this effort stretched the analysis. After all, Brazil—and the country's economic, political, and historical dynamics—cannot be simply mapped onto the United States. Of course, I knew this as I was writing that section of the book, and I consciously stretched my analysis of the Brazilian case into a foreign context. One reason for this is that some people are already making such intellectual moves, not so much in strictly academic ways but in popular social movement circles. Exchanges take place between US activists and their counterparts in Brazil: members of movements have for years visited landless encampments, settlements, and schools to learn about what is happening in these spaces. They do not write books, but instead hope to acquire lessons to take home and to implement. My conclusion is an attempt to consider that initiative, uncovering past rural movements in the United States to connect them in a way that perhaps lets us understand the trajectory of contemporary struggles. In this fashion, my conclusion is really an opening or, in other words, a provocation that is incomplete. Where US movements in fact go, as well as whether the landless

movement can help show them along the way, will be determined in the course of conflict.

The Poor's Struggle for Political Incorporation: The Piquetero Movement in Argentina. By Federico M. Rossi.

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Federico M. Rossi's *The Poor's Struggle for Political Incorporation: The Piquetero Movement in Argentina* is an ambitious, creative, and significant piece of scholarship, particularly because of its theoretical and empirical contributions. Theoretically, Rossi makes a number of important interventions. He argues that the development of the Piquetero movement should be understood in light of the seminal 1991 work by the Colliers on state–society relations in Latin America, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*. Whereas the Colliers sought to analyze the dynamics concerning how labor movements across the region affected different countries' political institutions in the first half of the twentieth century, Rossi singles out Argentina to analyze the effects of neoliberal structural reform or what he calls “disincorporation.” Enter the Piqueteros: the Argentine movement of unemployed workers named after their signature tactic, the roadblock or picket (*el piquete*). Rossi details the effects of their struggle on public policy, and more importantly, on the workers' reincorporation into political society after experiencing the aftermath of economic reform. In addition to the attention given to Argentina, the last chapter applies some of the work's insights to the study of contentious politics in Brazil and Bolivia.

In his work, Rossi improves some central concepts in social movement theory. Of note is Charles Tilly's notion of repertoires of contention, which Rossi expands in his theorization of “repertoire of strategies” and “stock of legacies.” In deploying these concepts, Rossi attempts to incorporate how past lessons and organizational involvement affect social movement decision-making processes. Specifically concerning the “repertoire of strategy,” Rossi highlights how social movements engage not only in public displays of contention but also in not-so-public informal negotiations with elites to achieve their goals. His attention to conceptual development marks an advance in social movement studies in seriously building history into the study of contentious politics.

Another valuable theoretical intervention is Rossi's distinction between horizontal and vertical opportunity structures. Here, he joins the many scholars of contentious politics who recognize the contributions of Sidney Tarrow,

Charles Tilly, and Doug McAdam concerning the importance of external, non-movement incentives, yet who also see the need for corrections to their approach. Without dismissing the notion of political opportunity, Rossi notes that scholars of contention need to pay attention to divisions among elites at different levels in a polity. For instance, concerning horizontal opportunities, he focuses on elites who wield the same relative institutional power within a particular policy area. Vertical opportunities differ, even though the policy area may be the same, but division may exist between actors who occupy different positions within a state's institutional hierarchy. For example, at various times in the book, we see how different Piquetero social movement organizations (SMOs) mobilized successfully with mayors instead of governors or presidents concerning unemployment policy. This theoretical innovation will help scholars who study contention, especially in federal systems.

The book also is an achievement for empirical reasons. Having lived in Argentina during some of the main contentious moments in 2002 and 2004 that were mentioned in the book, I found the discussion gripping. What was so fascinating was the degree of detail Rossi spends on each Piquetero SMO. Rossi details the historical development and challenges of each Piquetero organization, which initially numbered 16 (p. 23). Yet, as he notes later in the book, some of these groups splintered off from one another as others demobilized. It is no wonder that the appendix of the book is a flow chart of the many Piquetero organizations' trajectories. At various points in the book, we find tables with clear summaries of differences among the Piqueteros, for instance, concerning electoral strategy (p. 185) and how to confront government (p. 203). Stylistically, such signposts help the reader remember "who's who" in the movement.

Rossi's research also places the Piquetero movement into discussions concerning the nature of left-wing politics during the period that has become known as the "Pink Tide." Usually marked with the 1999 election of the late president of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, the 2000s and 2010s were marked by a left-wing political shift throughout the region. Complementing Castañeda's attempt to demarcate "good" and "bad" leftist governments and Sader's generalization that what unifies the region's leftist turn was a general sense of anti-neoliberalism, Rossi likewise provides a way to understand the historical period through his focus on neoliberal disincorporation and then the subsequent social movement-led efforts at reincorporation. At a historical moment when it appears that the "Pink Tide" has ebbed, Rossi's book offers perspective to think about the impact of leftist movements and parties over the last 20 years.

Rossi's study also raises many provocative questions about the Piqueteros specifically and social movement theory broadly. The Piqueteros' extreme fragmentation is

especially intriguing for at least two reasons. First, there is the ideological separation among the different SMOs. This division is rooted in twentieth-century Marxist debates, for instance, between Maoists, Leninists, Guevarists, and Trotskyists. Such rivalries raise some questions concerning identity. Given that identity is central to a social movement, it appears that the Piquetero movement lacks one that can be considered either stable or singular. What instead unifies them is a tactic: the roadblock. This is not so much a critique as an honest question: What is the role of identity within the movement? To follow up, can we really define a movement simply by its use of a tactic? Should we also call the demonstrators in the 2000s who blocked roads in Bolivia "Piqueteros" because of their use of the roadblock?

This point on identity also led me to wonder about the size of the many SMOs. How many regular members know the difference between a Guevarist and a Leninist? This made me curious about how many "piqueteros" there are—not in terms of organizations but of actual participating members. Is fragmentation more of an issue between movement entrepreneurs than with the movement's base?

Rossi's work raises two other questions: one concerning territory and the other with respect to co-optation. Territory is central to his argument, given that Rossi believes the Piquetero movement is indicative of a new form of social movement that is rooted in a sense of territorial control. Early in the book, he claims that, as opposed to past labor movements, movements that emerged in the aftermath of neoliberal restructuring "dispute the physical control of space, be it a municipality, province, or portion of land" (p. 13). Territory itself, accordingly, becomes a new "political cleavage." This is quite a provocative claim, especially because the literature on revolutions also notes the centrality of territorial control. Yet, as Rossi's argument unfolds, I did not see such territorial disputes presented. Rather, although territory is important, its control is not. The various Piquetero SMOs, as Rossi documents, fought over the distribution of unemployment benefits. Yet, in these conflicts, control was sought over decision-making practices and resources within a particular policy domain, not over who has authority in a certain space. If territorial struggles were present, then we would expect to find Piquetero groups adopting a kind of paramilitary style of organization. Yet, they do not. If territorial control were central to the movement, then the Piqueteros would have made a serious, real attempt to take power as the 2001–2002 crisis was at its worst. However, and as Rossi notes, the Piqueteros at this crucial moment in Argentine history were absent because of their fear of repression (p. 165). The book documents how the governments of Néstor and then Cristina Kirchner brought activists into certain policy-making circles while also distributing benefits. This

appears more like an effort to build a governing coalition to remain in power than a territorial dispute for control.

The other remaining question is, Were the Piqueteros co-opted by the Kirchners' governments? Early on in the book, the reader is told that the trajectory of the Piquetero movement cannot be explained through co-optation (p. 24). At a few points, however, Rossi notes how some movement leaders were co-opted into the governing coalition and then their respective SMOs demobilized (pp. 204, 211). Still, the problem seems larger. Basically, after reading the book, it seems to me that the Piquetero movement was led by the government, serving its interests after 2001, rather than the other way around. Whether it was the strategic aim of the Duhalde and then the Kirchner governments to divide the movement, creating in- and out-groups (p. 178) or selectively placing a few movement leaders into decision-making positions in government but always subordinate to non-Piquetero officials (pp. 201–202), it appears that the movement as a whole was made to serve certain political interests. That the movement was divided intentionally and then became further splintered seems a standard “divide and conquer” strategy used by elites to keep oppressed people oppressed. Moreover, many of the accomplishments that Rossi takes as resulting from Piquetero mobilization (pp. 238–41), including reducing unemployment or reindustrialization, could be seen as resulting instead from governmental initiatives (such as ending the convertibility plan). The other, potentially more clear-cut achievements of the movement, such as placing leaders into government or creating the largest unemployment subsidy program in Latin America, could be read alternatively as governmental initiatives designed specifically to demobilize disgruntled social actors.

If this is in any way correct, I wonder whether Rossi's understanding of reincorporation is simply a new form of co-optation. If his study is intended to speak to movements outside Argentina, then were developments in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, and other countries where the Left took power the same? This leads me to my final question: If the Piqueteros are in fact a paradigmatic case of mobilization in the aftermath of neoliberal restructuring, then is the “Pink Tide” simply a story of how marginalized groups were drawn into governing coalitions that did little to change dominant economic and political dynamics throughout the region?

Response to Anthony Pahnke's review of *The Poor's Struggle for Political Incorporation: The Piquetero Movement in Argentina*

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— Federico M. Rossi

I am very grateful for Anthony Pahnke's thoughtful review of my book.

The Piquetero movement's repertoire of strategies (p. 38) exceed the picket (pp. 40–41) and their identity is not constituted by this mode of protesting. The Piqueteros are a network of multiple social movement organizations (SMOs) that form a movement because they share an “us” built by their common grievances and lived experiences in the poorer neighborhoods of Argentina that establish a solidarity bond among informal members. This networked definition (p. 21, n.23) denotes that fragmentation is constitutive of movements, because they are not one actor, but a multiplicity of actors. The specific divisions of the Piqueteros are partially based on ideological differences, reinforced by strong personalized leaderships in highly vertical SMOs. For the movement's base, sometimes these divisions are irrelevant (fluidity in movement activism is typical), whereas on many other occasions they are crucial because the hegemony of one SMO in a specific territory might imply the impossibility of another SMO mobilizing there.

Territorialization of politics defines spatially specific disputes for other than territorial purposes, very rarely being for the authority over a specific territory. I conceive it as a dispute that has moved central conflicts in society from a neocorporatist articulation for the resolution of conflicts that are functionally defined to a holistic conflict constituted by the multiplicity of dimensions that organize the living experience of the popular sectors in their space of habitation. Thus, territorialization does not mean revolutionary action per se. It could imply a revolutionary territorial strategy, such as *foquismo*, but it could also mean a dispute over the access to state resources among political groups or a dispute among criminal networks, religious groups, and the police in a neighborhood. That is why I call it a different type of cleavage, which does not institute a new regime type, but rather a diverse type of conflict and—institutionally—a different interest-intermediation regime.

The second wave of incorporation emerged as the partially unintended result of the dynamics between elites, the mobilized poor people, and movement leaders. In this sense, we need to differentiate between waves of incorporation as macro-processes and other micro-dynamics such as co-optation. The relational approach I propose intends to avoid giving excessive agency to state elites while introducing movements' strategic action. The state elites were trying to divide and conquer, demobilize, and legitimately respond to the social claims posed by the Piqueteros. However, to see in elites a unified and shared strategy is not historically accurate; they improvise to the same degree as they plan, guided by a stock of legacies (p. 42) that condition their action as much as enable them to choose what to do. This same process applies to the Piqueteros (or any movement). This means that actors perform rationally, but not rationalistically.

The first wave of the 1930s to the 1950s was, like the second wave of the 1990s to the 2010s I studied,

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a reformist process within capitalism to pacify the claims for social transformation of the mobilized poor people, producing an expansion of the sociopolitical arena through incorporation of new legitimate actors. No revolution happened in either wave, but instead social and political rights were expanded, and many policing techniques and social policies were created—directly or indirectly—as a result

of the struggle of the organized popular sectors. Without the disruptive posing of a “social question” by the Piqueteros (as the labor movement had done before in the first wave), none of the transformations I studied would have had happened (p. 238). This dynamic occurred also in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela, with national-specific paths within a regional struggle for reincorporation (pp. 251–52).