

**“Brazilian Cordiality and Peasant Mobilization,
Before, During, and After Military Rule”**

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“É a segunda vez que o Sr. José Rainha Júnior e Sr. Roosevelt Roque dos Santos compareceram para debater no Canal Rural e estamos muito grato por sua presença e por seu comportamento tão civilizado aqui.”

-- Fábio Pannuncio, Canal Rural (3 December 1996)

At one point in the televised debate, the landless-militant José Rainha Júnior turned away from the camera and looked directly at the landed-militant Roosevelt Roque dos Santos. They were talking about guns and civil disobedience in the conflict-ridden region of São Paulo state called the Pontal do Paranapanema and they were talking over one other for the first and only time in their two-hour long debate. Roosevelt claims the guns are used for self-defense, Rainha proclaims that there is no justification for violence. Roosevelt, a cattle rancher, equates the use of guns in self-defense with the land occupations practiced by Rainha’s organization, the Landless Laborers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra-MST). “É violência para nós defender contra a violência do MST,” says Roosevelt. He calls them both “attitudes medievais.” Rainha, a rural worker turned organizer, seems to not believe what he is hearing, his eyes shoot daggers at Roosevelt, president of the reactionary landlord political organization, the Rural Democratic Union (União Democrática Rural-UDR). But Rainha holds his tongue, turns back to face the camera and in a very calm voice, he says, “Não concordo com qualquer violência que poderia acabar com uma vida, a vida é a mais sagrada coisa que temos. Então,” Rainha continues, “também não estou de acordo com violência defensiva.” It was December, 1996: the MST was a household name and polls demonstrated vast and broad support for agrarian reform and deep skepticism about Roosevelt and the UDR. Something had changed in Brazilian society.¹

The change I wish to examine in this paper is that in the relationship between the landless and the landed in Brazil, between the Rainhas and the Roosevelts, especially how the relationship was affected by the military regime that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985. So, the role of the state in relation to these groups is also in focus here.² These relationships have attracted a good bit of attention in recent years due, I think, to the increased class consciousness of the landless. They or their agents have persuaded the majority that agrarian reform can reverse the process of immiseration suffered by most Brazilians in the context of worldwide capitalist expansion. A relationship once thought to be almost a thing of nature, characterized by a certain familial cordiality, reinforced by an authoritarian state, has come to have a critical, conflict-ridden presence on the world stage. The very act of presenting Rainha and Roosevelt as equals in a debate on national television indicated a dramatic change in a relationship traditionally characterized by deference. The two men, passionate class proponents, presented their views in a nearly dispassionate discussion. For the viewing public they were the image of modern TV men, controlling their tempers and working to persuade the audience to support their side. They practiced good manners, careful to not alienate viewers. They were, as the moderator commented, models of civility.

The contrast of cordial and civilized behavior in the representation of Brazilian national character offers some important keys to understanding changing relationships. The popular historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda coined the idea of the “homem cordial” in his brief but dense 1937 book on the Portuguese antecedents to Brazilian character, *Raízes do Brasil*. Responding to critics with a 1947 revised edition, Holanda defined the term with greater precision and depth:

A contribuição brasileira para a civilização será de cordialidade – daremos ao mundo o ‘homem cordial.’ A lhanza no trato, a hospitalidade, a generosidade...representam...um traço definido do caráter brasileiro, na medida...em que permanece ativa e fecunda a influência ancestral dos padrões de convívio humano, informados no meio rural e patriarcal. Seria engano supor que essas virtudes possam significar ‘boas maneiras,’ civilidade. São antes de tudo expressões legítimas de um fundo emotivo extremamente rico e transbordante.³

Holanda described cordiality as a behavioral trait arising from agrarian traditions, from the patriarchal families that dominated Portugal and Brazil into the 20th century.

Cordiality comes “do *coração* ... da esfera do íntimo, do familiar, do privado,” Holanda wrote. For this reason, one can be equally as cordial toward an enemy as a friend, in hate or in love. For Holanda, this cultural trait influenced modern life by making nepotism in government appointments socially acceptable, for example. But Holanda’s main concern was to explain the dialectic between growing urbanization and the persistence of this rural inheritance. Civilization was bound to dilute cordiality, he assumed. Manners were part of civilization and cordiality was “justamente o contrário da polidez.” With a fondness for the social, a desire to see the world as an extension of the family, interaction with other people stimulated the cordial man to deal with others affectionately; civilized man, on the other hand, studied good manners to find a way to tolerate society. The book, now in its umpteenth printing, attracted new admirers in the 1990s when intellectuals used the idea of cordiality to help explain Brazil’s redemocratization process. In 2003, famed Cinema Novo director Nelson Pereira dos Santos reaffirmed the relevance of the term in his hagiographic film about Holanda, also called *Raízes do Brasil*. Debating on

TV in 1996, the landless Rainha and the landed Roosevelt showed good manners but little love for one another.⁴

Cordiality masks the social relations of patriarchy, a term which disguises class relations in the apparel of fathers and sons, wives and daughters. Dictatorships that persevere often include elements of familial social relations under the stern father model. The Brazilian military regime incorporated some features of cordiality but, in the countryside, the bureaucratic-authoritarian model of capitalist development strained class relations and brought a cold-hearted barbarity at worst, confusion at best. The sons and daughters of the patria, whose Brazilian *raízes* were uprooted by the military regime's "painful modernization" policies counted in the millions.⁵ The rural exodus flooded the cities as new machines replaced workers on old estates and new estates displaced peasant farms on an expanding agricultural frontier. Resistance to change meant confrontation with private and state violence. These developments intensified processes of change underway since the 1930s. Drifting to the towns and cities, the rural working classes found care in churches, unions, and some social service agencies. These institutions provided temporary relief but not the kind of support promised by the cordial man. In this space, social movements like the MST arose, eclectically intermingling ideas and tactics from a rich past of rural labor mobilization, slogans and geographical spread from the União dos Lavradores e Trabalhadores Agrícolas do Brasil (ULTAB), the value of negotiation and member services like the Sindicatos de Trabalhadores Rurais (STR), and compassionate commitment to liberation from progressive Christianity.⁶

To demonstrate how military rule helped give birth to the MST by failing to adequately incorporate the concept of the "homem cordial," this paper analyzes three

moments in the relationship between landless and landed in the state of São Paulo. While the rural population reported by the census shrunk from about 55 percent in 1960 to around 30 percent in 2000, paulista links to the countryside remained strong. Nearly every extended family had a country cottage (*rancho* or *sítio*), every neighborhood had a weekly farmers' market (*feira*); at lunchtime, public and private concerns still closed for up-to two hours, nearly every school closed to let students eat a hot meal at home, in the ideal case, from abundant quantities of freshly picked vegetables, beans and rice, and a country hen. These rural traditions were cherished in Brazil as was cordial behavior. He who does not behave cordially is quickly dismissed as poorly-educated, uncultured (*mal-educado*). Given the rural roots of this behavioral ideal, the most interesting place to analyze this conflict is in the countryside where, since at least the late 1940s, the "labouring poor" have been challenging the "gentry." The public realm – "the street" – is the open field, the land where peasants either pleaded for cordiality, rejected it as insincere or manipulated it to survive. This paper examines rural conflicts in the much disputed Pontal do Paranapanema region of the state of São Paulo between 1945 and 1999 to consider how the landless-landed relationship changed in the last half of the 20th century.

**"O que o povo brasileiro precisa é de chicote e não de democracia."
-- Sheriff Roque Calabrese (Santo Anastácio, June 1946).**

With these words, reported in the Communist press, Sheriff Roque Calabrese indicated how difficult it would be to construct civil society in the Pontal do Paranapanema, a region located in the far northwestern portion of São Paulo state. The Pontal remains one of Brazil's most conflict-ridden regions to the present day. Sheriff

Calabrese made his statement in the context of repressing the Santo Anastácio Liga Camponesa – one of hundreds of “peasant leagues” established by the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB) to mobilize small farmers and rural workers in the aftermath of World War II. The leagues responded, in part, to a new set of social and political rights established in law by the recently ousted regime of Getúlio Vargas. The leagues helped many peasants register to vote and swelled the ranks of the PCB. They also acted as representative class organizations, seeking to help members appeal for government assistance in questions related to land rents, farm production and income. The PCB saw the leagues as a means to enhance the party’s political clout while empowering the landless, an unrepresented, generally neglected segment of Brazilian society. The leagues also served as a pressure group to help PCB delegates argue the agrarian question in the 1946 Constituent Assembly. They can help us understand the relationship between the landless, the landed, and the state before the military regime. For Sheriff Calabrese, representative of landed interests, the league obviously represented at threat to the proper order of this relationship.⁷

The Pontal was still a frontier region of São Paulo in the 1940s. This westernmost “point” of the state forms a natural triangle, bounded by the rivers Paraná and Paranapanema, which mark state boundaries between São Paulo, Mato Grosso do Sul and Paraná. A high plain, the rains collect and gradually drain through rolling hills to the flatlands and flood plane along the river banks and eventually feed the Atlantic Ocean via the Rio de la Plata. Starting in the mid-1800s, rival *coroneis* claimed title to the region. They used the process called *grilagem*^{*} and influence over clergy and politicians to make

* A grilo is a grasshopper. They emit a tobacco brown liquid that can discolor paper, making it appear older than it actually is.

historic claims to the land. They started land colonization and development companies to attract immigrants, developed settlements, and sold land titles that appeared legitimate but actually were false. The questioning of false land claims was as constant as the quick turnover of falsified titles. In 1932, for example, the state agricultural secretary emitted a public notice saying it was “perigosa a aquisição de terras na Alta Sorocabana.” All the same, the area under Brazilian control, as opposed to that of the indigenous nations that occupied the area into the 20th century, slowly expanded, despite the questioned titles. A train line reached the settlement of Presidente Prudente in 1917 and the banks of the Rio Paraná at the port of Presidente Epitácio in 1922. The 1940 census showed that over 275,000 people lived in the Alta Sorocabana region, 81 percent in rural areas. This meant that the colonization companies succeeded in attracting immigrants and that many others, hearing about the questionable ownership of the land, had adventured there in hopes of obtaining some for themselves. Although virgin Atlantic forest covered much of the region into the 1950s, the arriving migrants were encouraged to cut down the trees to mill and sell the wood and create farms and pastures. They did so at a fantastic rate. By 1975, using hand tools, only a small portion of forest remained around a peculiar land formation known as the Morro do Diabo, today the region’s only surviving protected ecological reserve.⁸

Established as an incorporated municipality in 1925, Santo Anastácio had long been an important settlement in the Pontal. A tributary gained the saint’s name in May 1769 when a Portuguese troop stumbled upon it and a vila gradually took root there. It became the region’s second incorporated municipality in 1925. As the train tracks were constructed to the Paraná river⁹, Santo Anastácio became the setting of a busy train yard

and hundreds of Spanish and Italian immigrants came to live and work in the area. This gave the backlands town a surprisingly cosmopolitan feel and created a fertile base for PCB organizing.¹⁰ While Ligas Camponesas were also established in the Pontal towns of Presidente Prudente and Presidente Bernardes, the landless-landed relationship in Santo Anastácio seemed to produce more conflict. In a 1945 report, the migrant worker João Rayo Crespo appealed to the state labor department and local judicial authorities to demand the fulfillment of contractual terms by landlord Manoel Ortega, apparently without success.¹¹ Josè Alves Portela, who migrated to Santa Anastácio from Sergipe in the northwest to work as a cotton sharecropper, also complained about exploitation when the commodities market collapsed after World War II and his landlord forced him, nevertheless, to pay his full land rent.¹² Stories of brutalities perpetrated against the landless by landlord enforcers like the jagunços Juventino Nunes and Zé Mineiro were legendary in the region.¹³ These and other stories cause one to wonder what had happened to the agrarian world of cordiality Holanda defended at this very time.

The Peasant League established in Santo Anastácio in April, 1946, responded to a wealth of problems among the landless. More than 200 “camponeses, em sua maioria arrendatários, sitiantes, meeiros, e terceiros” attended the meeting, according to the story that appeared in the PCB-daily *Notícias de Hoje*. The league was to serve “orientar a luta dos trabalhadores em busca de melhoria das condições de vida dos trabalhadores da terra.” Antônio Valero Valdeviesso, whose biography remains obscure, gave a “clara exposição” on the theme and read the statutes. Those present “democratically elected” the league’s board of directors, with Nestor Vera becoming president and another eleven officers and substitutes named in the report. Various speakers addressed the issues that would animate

the league: demands for lower land rents, road maintenance, schools, and clinics. In other words, the landless found much at fault in the landed's sense of responsibility toward the broader community. Rents were too high, roads abandoned, the health and education of their children left to chance.¹⁴

At another meeting later in the month, the directors prepared a petition to send to state secretary of agriculture Francisco Malta Cardoso, a planter and lawyer with a history of involvement in efforts to address rural social questions. Cardoso and fellow militant landlord João Carlos Fairbanks—a Presidente Prudente lawyer considered by Leite to be the Pontal's "defensor permanente de possuidores de títulos de posse ou de domínio"—had participated in drafting recommendations for rural social legislation at the Social Rights Conference held at the behest of Getúlio Vargas in 1941. There, they had represented rural society in terms that feed Holanda's ideas about the "cordial man." For Cardoso and Fairbanks, plantations were "formed through the great solidarity of economic interest and intimate contact between boss and worker. Fairbanks suggested that the landless often had more cash on hand than the landed. Cardoso described the landless and landed as "companheiros de trabalho." For Fairbanks, the condition of being landless was only a temporary stage on the road to being landed. "It has to be understood as a provisional situation," he commented, "a preparatory and provisional status on the road to landowner." Landless and landed had "convergent and complementary interests" and formed, in the words of a third colleague, the "clã fazendeiro," the agrarian family Holanda saw as fundamental to Brazil's heritage.¹⁵

At least 150 landless peasants disagreed with these three men. That is how many trusted the new democracy following the fall of the Estado Novo dictatorship enough to

sign their names to the Santa Anastácio league petition. “Os latifúndios devem ser divididos gratuitamente aos que querem plantar,” the petition begins. “Os nossos produtos não valem nada, mas o que consumimos custa-nos os olhos da cara,” it went on. “Sem terra, sem direitos, nossos filhos sofrem de maleita, amarelão, tuberculose, raquitismo, frio e fome,” the petitioners complained. “Por este pequeno relatório vimos a presença de V. Excia para relatar-lhe a atual situação precária que há anos vamos passando,” the document began. In addition to the demand for radical agrarian reform, the appeal for policies that would help them retain more profits from their production in order to care for their children, the petition criticized the landed for charging rents for poor lands, rents often higher than the land’s sale price. The result was not only a super-exploitation of the landless but a tendency for them to abandon the countryside and move to the cities in search of “melhores condições de existência.” A final clause supports the need for the peasants, as well as rural wage workers, to have their own representative organizations.¹⁶ The Communist press documented further Santo Anastácio peasants dissent in May when the director of the Cooperativa Agrícola Mista de Santo Anastácio denounced the precarious condition of the more than 800 peasant-family co-op members. He supported the need for the league given the “miserável...vida que os meeiros e arrendatários levam... porque o rendimento do seu trabalho vai todo parar nas mãos do latifundiário”.¹⁷ If the relationship between the landed and the landless can be compared to a family or clan it was superbly dysfunctional in 1946.

The state responded to the pleas of these uppity children by cracking down on the Santo Anastácio peasant league in June 1946. The size of the organization must have been too much for the landed’s private militias to handle. Even the region’s greatest

landlord, the coronel Alfredo Marcondes Cabral, infamously quoted as believing that “terra empapada de sangue é terra boa,” did not have the forces to cripple such a movement.¹⁸ Indeed, the timing of the June 1946 crack down links Sheriff Calabrese’s action to local interests by isolating it from larger trends. The Cold War-influenced decision to suppress the PCB and shut-down front organizations like the peasant leagues would wait nearly a year, until May 1947, to be put into place. League president Nestor Vera protested the action in telegrams to President Eurico Gaspar Dutra and the heads of each of the political parties participating in the Constituent Assembly. “A polícia local fechou a Liga Camponesa,” Vera wrote, “apreendendo seus arquivos e impedindo o direito de organização aos pacíficos trabalhadores do campo”.¹⁹ Vera put the sheriff, an authority beholden to the local power structure, in the central role. Calabrese had warned them to formalize the founding of the league, so Vera had the founding statutes published in the *Diário Oficial* and filed the papers with the local notary. But his moves to strength the league only seemed to make it more threatening to the landed. “As justas reivindicações [dos camponeses] em torno dos problemas mais sentidos do nosso camponês fortaleciam sua estrutura,” Vera told a *Notícias de Hoje* reporter, “devendo ser, este o motivo principal que levou a polícia e demais autoridades a determinar o seu fechamento”.²⁰ What happened in the Pontal reveals truths about the relationship between the landless and the landed and the incapacity of either the landed or the state to treat the landless with respect. As Calabrese said, it was a whipping not democracy that the peasants needed. The implied violence of his attitude reflects the arousal of heartfelt hatred toward those who denied the landed their claimed superiority, who dared not to defer to these malignant father figures. This was the ugly side of cordiality.

“Capangas do fazendeiro percorrem a área, intimidando os posseiros e ameaçando suas famílias, acompanhados de policiais que, segundo os posseiros, estariam sendo pagos por Justino para ‘legalizarem’ as ameaças.”

-- Landless rural workers Néelson de Almeida Alves and Silvério da Silva (Santa Rita do Pontal, 1 October 1977).

Although the government suppressed the peasant leagues and the PCB, the party maintained clandestine activities among the landless throughout the 1950s. In many regions of the country, Communists and Catholics confronted one another in the classic Cold War battle for the hearts and minds of the rural poor as change in the world political economy disrupted rural social relations. The church had the deepest roots in the countryside and the “Red menace” stimulated a greater engagement with the day-to-day concerns of the landless. In October, 1961, in preparation for a national rural labor conference in November, the CNBB established a rural labor organizing arm called the Agrarian Front. In the Pontal, lay Catholic activist José Rotta, a small farmer and merchant, established a rural labor association that very month. At the beginning of 1962, the renowned PCB peasant agitator Jôfre Correa Netto moved to Presidente Prudente to join Vera, Portella, and Dr. Guerra in founding a rival association. These activities, and the presence of a cooperative federal labor minister – the Christian Democrat Franco Montoro -- inspired the Catholic faithful, like the small-farmer João Altino Cremonezi and his family, to join Rotta in forming the Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais de Presidente Prudente in October, 1962. Rotta became the union’s first president, a position Cremonezi assumed a decade later.²¹

Despite the Church’s advantage, no faction of the rural labor movement had established a consistent track record with the landless when the military took power in April, 1964. The conspirators ousted President João Goulart and his administration with

the intention of ridding the country of Communism through carrot and stick tactics. Supported by the landed, the military moved quickly to suppress PCB-aligned unions. The remaining Church-linked unions easily elected Rotta president of the state federation of rural labor unions (FATAESP), a post Portella had recently been forced to flee. The same scenario unfolded at the national level, when the surviving Catholic unions supported Rotta in becoming president of the confederation of agricultural laborers (CONTAG), a state-sanctioned organization dominated by pragmatic PCB-militants like Nestor Vera from its founding at the end of 1963. With power in hand, the new Church-supported landless leadership marketed the policy of the new federal administration, one of leading the country through a “white revolution” of fundamental reform. Castelo Branco, the general turned president, maintained the rural labor union structure and supported passage of the Estatuto da Terra, a land reform law that had long been in debate. He bragged that the new “revolutionary government” would bring about radical reforms without the agitation and instability caused by Goulart’s efforts. The regime altered article 10 of the 1946 Constitution to allow a more flexible payment mechanism via government titles rather than cash, facilitating land expropriation.²² In other words, when the military came to power, it sent a mixed message. On the one hand, it closed hundreds of rural labor unions and imprisoned known militants, Communists, progressive Catholics, and socialists like the peasant league leader Francisco Julião. On the other, the regime backed policies that promised representation for the landless as well as land distribution. The disappearance of the Communists, the uplifting of Catholic conformists and the promise of controlled reform must have created hope that this new patriarch would treat the landless cordially.

To the contrary, as numerous studies have shown, the military regime pursued an agrarian development policy most aptly described as “doloroso,” especially from the perspective of the landless.²³ The new elite, which looked very much like the old elite in olive drab, supported radical change that benefited an incipient agro-industrialization process. These policies both intensified production and extended the agricultural frontier. The former involved mechanization that deskilled agricultural production and reduced the number of stable, full time workers needed to produce commodities, increasing the instability and insecurity of rural work. The latter generated another phase of enclosure and land concentration that threw millions of peasants into a flooded labor market.²⁴ This interpretation is confirmed by examination of land disputes in the Pontal. A case in point is that of the Gleba Santa Rita, located just north of the Paranapanema river in the municipality of Teodoro Sampaio, which was born in February, 1964.

The story of the Gleba Santa Rita begins in 1954 with a land scheme orchestrated by the powerful São Paulo politician Adhemar de Barros. In collusion with the Sorocabana Railroad and the Camargo-Correia construction company, he used insider information to help political associates buy land in the Pontal that promised to explode in value with the construction of a new track called the Dourados branch. One of the beneficiaries was Justino de Andrade, then mayor of Presidente Bernardes. Andrade created a colonization company and anticipated building a town called Santa Rita do Pontal, subdividing the 10,000 hectare area among migrants, profiting from the train traffic, lumber production, and farm produce.²⁵

Although Barros won election as governor during the 1950s and 1960s, Andrade’s dream remained unrealized. The train line was never built and Andrade’s town rose and

fell, never hosting more than two dozen houses. In fact, the land should never have been sold to him by the Sulamericana land company as it, like the vast majority of Pontal land, belonged to the state not the grileiros who claimed title to it. Despite repeated warnings about the dubious legality of land titles in the region, Andrade acted as though the land was his and to make something of it he depended on a classic land development scheme. In 1967, he let about 1,000 hectares of Santa Rita's forested land to a cotton-gin and trucking-company owner from Martinópolis named Francisco Pereira Telles. In turn, Telles sublet the land to some 400 families in 1968. The details of these arrangements were typically murky. Andrade later claimed that Telles was to return the land converted into cattle pasture within three years. Telles claimed that land was not Andrade's to rent, that he had gotten the permits to clear the forest, attracted the families, and organized the production of cotton farming, doing everything by the book, as defined in the Land Statute of 1964. In 1978 newspaper article, Andrade essentially corroborated Telles' version, complaining that while he received almost nothing, Telles had gained shares of the cotton produced and encouraged the tenants to defy him by telling them the land belonged to the state.²⁶

The accumulation of wealth from the Gleba Santa Rita proceeded primitively, a coarseness reflected in the landless-landed relationship. While Telles, technically, was himself a renter, his status as a significant property owner is unquestioned, although he does not seem to have been landed in the same way as Andrade. Such intermediaries were an essential part of the expanding agricultural frontier in Brazil. They applied their capital and organizational skills to the first stages of converting virgin land into a commodity. Adequate records have not yet emerged to document the entire process.

Telles claimed to the press that he spent Cz\$ 365,000 to develop the land he rented from Andrade. Andrade told the papers that he had gained nothing that, in fact, it was the landless families who were getting rich since they did not pay rent after Telles abandoned them in 1972 and he frequently sued Telles for damages, never winning the question, largely due to the questionable legality of his title.²⁷

Telles defended himself in the press, wrapping himself in the law and blaming Andrade for his own misfortunes.

Telles diz que fez tudo conforme o Estatuto da Terra e que além de sementes e defensivos, fornecia [os lavradores] até assistência médica e hospitalar. Mas, quando acabaram com o desmatamento, ele falou, “deixei de dar emprego às 400 famílias no Pontal por um questão social e aquele pessoal começou passar fome. Embora que seja, não me sinto responsável porque as famílias que eu coloquei, mais da metade daqueles que me consideravam, saíram da gleba, com o término do contrato. Mas Justino deveria manter melhor vigilância em sua propriedade, para impedir a invasão de outras famílias”.²⁸

Despite the traditional form of the labor process – tearing out a native forest with hand tools, a grueling job to say the least – the relation between landed and less is governed by modern criteria. There’s the Land Statute the armed forces proudly described as a revolutionary achievement of their regime. There’s the provision of seeds and health care. There’s the contract to clear the trees and open the fields. Job done, relationship done. The landless needed to move on, though perhaps some chose not to go. Others may have trespassed, but both suffered due to their own accord. In other words, the landed characterized themselves as victims, explained how they selflessly gave of themselves so

that the landless might benefit, and claimed innocence about the primitive accumulation process.

The history of the 400 landless families begins, in all but one case, with their resistance against savage capitalism. Their resistance testifies to a contrasting perspective on the supposed cordiality of their relationship with the landed and the state. They entered the scene in silence, accepting without apparent question the offer to clear the forest and plant cotton for shares. Only when this arrangement ended and they were asked to leave the land and join the insecure agricultural labor market, the media finally captured their voices for the public record. The one exception was a posseiro named Jenival who was interviewed by the Rio-based writer Antônio Callado in November, 1984. Callado then visited the region, hired by the São Paulo energy company (CESP), to write about state's agrarian reform projects there. The subtitle of Callado's book – “ensaio sobre a reforma agrária brasileira, a qual nunca foi feita” – did not help CESP marketing. In meeting, Jenival on the Gleba Santa Rita, Callado discovered a curious fact: this landless family had been living in the same house for 17 years. “Para um lavrador brasileiro,” Callado wrote, “ele é uma pessoa de uma vida extraordinariamente estável”.²⁹ In 1975, in an event that also defied the spin of Andrade and Telles, thirty-three landless families walked 65 kilometers from Santa Rita to Teodoro Sampaio and disrupted the peace of the town with their demands for help. “Com o solo preparado, mas sem sementes, que não podem comprar face à impossibilidade de obterem financiamentos bancários, os posseiros dirigiram-se a Prefeitura. Diante das recusas em atendê-los, eles se revoltaram, tentando conseguir à força ao menos alimentos.” At least a portion of these allegedly well-treated families were starving to death; to keep the peace, the mayor

eventually arranged to feed them a meal at the Hotel Comercial, while the military police sent reinforcements to defend public order.³⁰

The military police learned to know the Santa Rita landless almost as well as anyone during the 1970s. Between 1973 and 1980, they joined Andrade's jagunços and other authorities four times to fulfill expulsion orders from judicial authorities. The worst cases occurred in 1973 and 1974 when they forced 63 families from land they had cleared and made productive. To make the action stick, they burned down the peasants' houses and sheds, tore up their crops, and killed their livestock.³¹ In 1977, jagunços poisoned some wells and livestock died. At the time, two of the landless gave the press the impression that "Capangas do fazendeiro percorrem a area, intimidando os posseiros e ameaçando suas familias, acompanhados de policiais que, segundo os posseiros, estariam sendo pagos por Justino para 'legalizarem' as ameaças".³² In 1982, jagunços randomly shot at them and in 1984, cattle were stampeded into their crops. For thirteen years, the families lived under intense pressure, with new threats of violent expulsion regularly directed at them, hopes of permanence shattered again and again. The majority of the original families slowly gave up but reinforcements arrived as displaced rural laborers sought stability and opportunity on this ill-fated land. Through expulsion actions, court orders, the intervention of state governors, death threats, and the organization of vigilante violence, the landless hung on. In 1979, Andrade was 70-years-old, blind in one eye, barely able to speak but "não está disposto a ceder. E seus advogados também não, pois segundo eles os lavradores são intrusos".³³ Seven years later, in August, 1986, he had to give up. Brazil's first civilian president, José Sarney, expropriated the land using the 1964 Land Statute, bringing to something of a just close this tragic story.

The resilience of the landless in the face of such intense and prolonged pressure seems to defy the logic of the military era. With histories from this same period such as that of the military's total, if frustrated, occupation of the Araguaia river basin in order to exterminate a small guerrilla hideaway and facilitate the development of commercial agriculture, it would have been more consistent had the security apparatus eliminated the Gleba Santa Rita landless within a few days. But the military could not rule by violence alone. Machiavelli, Gramsci, Arendt, Skocpol, and other theorists of state-power help us understand the necessity of consent for the longevity of even the most brutal regime. For even as the hard-liners deepened their grip on the regime and intensified the repression, they found ways to win the hearts and minds of the working class.

The early 70s were good years economically for Brazil. The so-called "economic miracle" of the "rising cake" provided a basis for the popularity of President Emilio Garrastazú Médici (1969-74), despite a concomitant investment in repression. In a 1997 interview, Workers' Party (PT) leader Luís Inácio Lula da Silva analyzed the Médici period. "Hoje a gente pode dizer que foi por conta da dívida externa, milagre brasileiro e tal, mas o dado concreto é que, naquela época, se tivesse eleições diretas, o Médici ganhava. E foi no auge da repressão política mesmo, o que a gente chama de período mais duro do governo militar. A popularidade do Médici no meio da classe trabalhadora era muito grande. Ora, por que? Porque era uma época de pleno emprego." The popularity of the regime extended to the countryside. In his study of Brazilian citizenship, the historian José Murilo de Carvalho comments that "[o] eleitorado rural os apoiou em todas as eleições." This tendency can not be dismissed as a byproduct of rural

conservatism or the manipulation of voters by powerful rural bosses. Such support was rational when one considers that Médici approved the most sweeping reform in history of Brazilian rural social relations, the PRORURAL law of May, 1971. This law for the first time extended retirement benefits to rural workers and small farmers, eventually becoming one of the largest rural social programs in the world. Through the Fundo de Assistência Rural (FUNRURAL), the law helped rural communities establish health care facilities and other social services. The military empowered the rural labor unions to administer these programs, stimulating a boom in rural labor union formation around the country³⁴

The growth of the rural labor union movement, with its Church connections and state-sponsored social assistance services, provided the “lhaneza no trato” of military rule in the countryside. For Holanda, this was the essence of cordiality and the concept helps us examine how coercion and consent worked in the Brazilian countryside. In the specific case of the Santa Rita landless, it is important to note that problems erupted with the landed in the same year the Teodoro Sampaio rural labor union was founded, 1973. According to Divanil José Cruz, who ran the union with his father José Ferreira Cruz until the 1990s, it was Mayor José Natalicio dos Santos who initiated the union’s founding. Teodoro Sampaio was only about ten years old and had no medical services, he explained. Taking advantage of FUNRURAL financing, Teodoro Sampaio could gain a clinic, with a doctor and dentist. The Cruzes had been involved with a rural union in Paraná before moving to the Pontal. A priest there had impressed upon these farmers the need to be involved in the union movement. In Teodoro Sampaio, their efforts paid off. It was not long before the union had around 1,500 paying members and – along with the

Church – it quickly became one of the town’s chief social institutions. Cruz, confirming Lula’s impression, became a member of the pro-regime party, ARENA, and expressed nostalgia for military rule due to the support rural unions then received.³⁵

Carvalho argues, like many critics, that FUNRURAL helped co-opt the rural labor movement. “Às tarefas de assistência agora a eles atribuída, contribuiu muito para reduzir sua combatividade política e gerou dividendos políticos para os governos militares.” The sociologist Claudnei Coletti was harsher in his criticism of union officers like Cruz. “O assistencialismo transformou-se, assim, em poderoso instrumento de controle político-social nas mãos dos governantes, permitindo a expansão do peleguismo no movimento sindical.” Both concede that positive results were possible. The case of Teodoro Sampaio confirms Carvalho’s suspicion that some towns had medical services due solely to the union’s administration of the FUNRURAL. Coletti says that a combative union leadership could convert the FUNRURAL into a base for organizing greater negotiating power for rural labor. Analysts like Regina Novaes and Biorn Maybury-Lewis emphasized these positive aspects of the military’s strategy and sought to understand “the politics of the possible.” It is in this same vein that the Santa Rita conflict is best understood for, without considering the role of the Teodoro Sampaio union objectively, it is difficult to understand the resilience of the landless.³⁶

In August 1973, eighty military police fulfilled the first judicial expulsion order without interference. In January, another sixteen families were forcefully removed but further action by the police was contained by Zelmo Denari, the recently appointed regional state prosecutor (subprocurador). Born in Presidente Bernardes in 1935, Denari was the son of a large landholder. Guerra, the Communist physician, was the family

doctor and Denari was impressed by the spirited debates he and his father had as he grew up. He claims the Guerra children as his best friends and credits the Guerra family for shaping his value-system. In the late 1950s, Denari left the area to attend college and make his career in São Paulo. When he returned, he found that his role as defender of São Paulo state's interests had the potential of placing him in conflict with the landed. To do his job well, meant resurrecting the disputed title claims and the expulsion of the Santa Rita landless challenged both his vocation and his values. The presence and participation of Bishop José Gonçalves da Costa helped him turn the tide. The bishop declaimed the police action and treatment of the landless as "inhumane," drawing attention to their plight. Denari entered the fray, contending that the land did not belong to Andrade and that the landless should be allowed to stay until proper ownership was established. This act, and Denari's consistent struggle to prove the land belonged to the state, proved crucial. The decompression of Gen. Ernesto Geisel's administration had begun but Denari reported that he received threats from police and landlords, causing enough fear to make him loose control of his bladder in his sleep.³⁷

In 1975, the press began to cover the Santa Rita dispute and until about 1985, the Teodoro Sampaio rural union appears as a regular advocate for the landless. It appeared first as a provider of social assistance, a relief agency of sorts, expected to help the landless survive once expelled from the land. From the perspective of the regime, and critics of *assistencialismo*, this should have been the beginning and end of the union's involvement. The papers quoted Divanil as complaining that the union did not have enough resources to deal with so many displaced families. He complained that membership dropped with end of the planting season and that workers did not make

enough to afford dues. This, in and of itself, was a harsh criticism of the regime.

Reporters were directed to document rural labor conditions. The “boia-fria” Antônio Albano dos Santos was quoted as saying, “Enquanto estão na terra, mesmo a falta de credito junto aos fornecedores, a impossibilidade de obterem financiamentos bancarios e a desnutrição e até as mortes por falta de remedios não são motivos para queixas por parte dos lavradores. Eles aceitam tudo normalmente porque qualquer protesto pode significar a dispensa.”³⁸ Ten years later, such stories would be common fare but this one exposed a fissure as yet unrecognized in image of the “economic miracle.” The Cruzes regularly exploited the attention attracted by the Santa Rita land struggle to expose rural distress and document their efforts to address problems. The union reportedly worked with the mayor and church to create shelters and raise money to feed and clothe the landless kicked off the Santa Rita lands.

These two roles – as relief agency and propagandist – were consistent throughout the period. Two other roles were also typical of the Teodoro Sampaio rural labor union. One was as interlocutor, the other as legal advocate. These roles as an intermediary put the union in the press as representative of the landless before executive and judicial authorities. These were classic union jobs, and clearly the regime accepted these functions. As interlocutor, José Ferreira Cruz in particular appeared to be ready, willing and able to lobby executive authorities on behalf of the landless. To facilitate this work, he also wore the hat of an organizer, to help attract attention to the cause of the landless and give him more bargaining power with the authorities.³⁹ During the time, he helped organize several rallies and he spoke privately with three governors, helping to buy more time from each. In 1977, he spoke with State Intervenor Paulo Egydio Martins when he

visited nearby Andradina. “Uma coisa posso garantir,” Egydio said after the interview, “tocar em vocês, ninguém vai tocar. Isso eu garanto”.⁴⁰ In April, 1979, Cruz spoke with Paulo Maluf, the military’s new intervenor, and publicity surrounding the appeal apparently forced Maluf to stop another expulsion action later that month. arguing for the permanencia dos posseiros “‘a fim de impedir injustiças e o caos social’ através de desapropriação”.⁴¹ In 1983, Cruz organized a caravan of Santa Rita landless to go to the state capital to appeal to São Paulo’s first elected governor since the golpe, Franco Montoro, the former labor minister who had helped found dozens of rural labor unions aligned with the Church. In 1984, Montoro expropriated the land and ordered it distributed among the landless, a job Denari was to manage.⁴² In the the world of the cordial man, it was as if Cruz were the older brother of siblings about to be dispossessed. In a last ditch effort, he appeals to the patriarch for benevolence. The patriarch consents, demonstrating his kindness to the world. The system functions in a way that confirms power relations and preserves the social order. For the Santa Rita landless, however, it seems to produce results long sought.

While Cruz worked on the patriarch, lawyers worked on the courts. From the Common Law perspective, the Brazilian judicial system appears to be extremely dysfunctional but it provided a means of addressing grievances that also bought time for the landless.⁴³ The Teodoro Sampaio union did not have its own lawyer until 1980.⁴⁴ In 1977, CONTAG and FETAESP lawyers advised Cruz on the legal rights of the landless. In 1979, Cruz revealed his frustration with the legal strategy, suggesting that “já estivessem quase esgotados os meios legais capazes de beneficia-los”.⁴⁵ But the following year, the attorney Emidio Severino da Silva started to work for the union. He

joined Zelmo Denari and his assistant attorney Gilberto Lima in their judicial appeals. In contradistinction to Cruz's belief, the courts were an essential battleground in the land struggle since a key issue was the legal status of Pontal lands. While everything else was going on, judges in various jurisdictions and at various levels worked to resolve the question of the land's rightful ownership. Justino de Andrade's lawyers defended his title tooth and nail while the state prosecutor in particular fought to demonstrate that the land properly belonged to the state. The labor movement joined the state's case but also used the courts to defend the rights of the landless under the land statute, the rural labor statute, and other laws that gave them leverage. Under the land statute, for example, landless contracted as the Santa Rita tenants were had rights to permanence on the land until the end of the harvest season. They also had rights to be compensated for the structures they built so the police were accused of violating the law when they destroyed their property. The complexity of the Brazilian judicial system allowed lawyers to seek out sympathetic judges to issue last minute stays. These cases disrupted the easy application of class power on the part of the landed and their allies in the military and helped extend the stay of the landless until the end of the regime. It was only then, with expropriation decreed by civilian president José Sarney in August, 1986, that the landless of Santa Rita do Pontal became landed, reversing the social order.⁴⁶

In evaluating the landless-landed relationship during military rule, the Santa Rita case reveals a remarkable lack of order in what was billed to be disciplined regime. Only the first expulsion of the landless fits expectations for a dictatorship. In that August 1973 incident, the military police violently forced out 47 families and destroyed their property. From then on, state authorities seemed to have many masters, one little more

commanding than the other. Whatever political clout Andrade had in the 1950s, seemed lost by the mid-1970s. With some justification, he saw himself as a victim since other *grileiros* in the Pontal, such as the family of his old benefactor Adhemar de Barros, were not being bothered.⁴⁷ In fact, other suspect landlords in the Pontal – and other regions of the county – were being bothered, and in quite similar ways. Each case has to be researched to reveal the reasons. Based on Andrade’s case, it would seem that the dubious status of the land titles, the activism of the state prosecutor, the diligence of the union and the press, and the discourse of transition toward democracy all conspired against the old landed class.

But other factors have to be taken into consideration. Some ambivalence about the nature of capitalist development in the region may have contributed to the apparent cross-purposes of authorities. Plans were underway in the 1970s to take advantage of the region’s river system and proximity to major population centers to build dams and energy generation stations. The state energy corporation (CESP) increased investments in the Pontal and needed to attract workers to build the power plants. Farming was more compatible than cattle ranching with this model. Growing towns like Teodoro Sampaio were divided about the change – some liked the idea of concentrated wealth implied by cattle ranching, others saw benefit in the increased population implied by farming. Mayor Natalicio dos Santos favored land distribution and demographic growth but chief rival Walter Ventura Ferreira charged that “trabalhadores rurais nada sabem fazer, além de lavrar manualmente a terra”.⁴⁸ Indeed, statistically speaking, the landed gained the upper hand. Between 1970 and 1978, Teodoro Sampaio lost 78 percent of its rural properties. The number of minifundio, farms with less than 20 hectares, dropped by 1,659 properties,

from 1,862 to 203. On the other hand, only two new mega properties with more than 10,000 hectares appeared during this period and the number of farms between 20 and 100 hectares grew by 20 percent. Leite connected the dramatic decline in minifundio to the end of the lumber cycle, as nearly all the remaining lumber mills closed in the 1970s with the disappearance of the forest reserve. The lumbermen, many of whom lived on small garden plots without title, were left without work and forced to migrate away. The result was a decline in cultivated area of nearly 10,000 hectares during the period. In 1979, the state planning department issued a development plan that confirmed CESP's intentions and added a sugarcane alcohol mill (an innovative fuel important to the military's development project), promising further land concentration with the expansion of sugarcane cultivation in some 15,000 hectares.⁴⁹

Despite the counter-example offered by the Santa Rita case, the military era ended poorly for the landless of the Pontal. The Teodoro Sampaio rural labor union, state-sanctioned to defend their interests, had done much for them both within and beyond the politics of the possible. In coalition with other individuals and institutions, the union had helped make their dreams of land possession a reality. But the opposition had been fierce and the experience of insecurity sustained and overwhelming. This was a family ruled by a malignant patriarch whose good-hearted, hard-working older brother managed a few acts of kindness against the odds. Outside the advocacy of the Cruzes, it is very hard to find in the government's actions evidence of the Brazilian contribution to civilization, cordiality. State leaders, responding to pressure, conceded ground, demonstrated "hospitalidade, a generosidade" and a little of the "influência ancestral dos padrões de convívio humano, informados no meio rural e patriarcal." But one would be hard-pressed

to see in their actions “um fundo emotivo extremamente rico e transbordante.” Doubts about the existence of cordiality in the military-era relationship between landless-landed-state are definitively removed by the statistical reality cited above. Land concentration was the wave of the future, all kindness aside.

Uma das saídas para a crise econômica é fazer a REFORMA AGRÁRIA, pois criará milhões de empregos...por isso, reivindicamos...UMA POLÍTICA AGRÁRIA QUE FAVOREÇA O PEQUENO PRODUTOR, OU ENTÃO SEREMOS OBRIGADOS A OCUPAR ESSAS TERRAS PARA PODERMOS SUSTENTAR NOSSOS FILHOS E CONTINUARMOS SOBREVIVENDO. (emphasis in original) -- Carta do Movimento dos Sem Terras do Oeste de São Paulo (Andradina, 4 June 1983).

Before military rule ended and President Sarney expropriated the Gleba Santa Rita, two new organizations began to participate in the conflict. These were the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) and the Movimento dos Sem Terras do Oeste de São Paulo. The CPT, an agency of the Catholic Church, sanctioned by the Brazilian council of bishops (CNBB) in 1975, was the first of the two to participate. As described above, the regional Church became involved in the Santa Rita struggle through the manifestations of Bishop José. But the hierarchy transferred the bishop to Rio de Janeiro in 1974 and his replacement, the far more conservative Bishop Antônio Agostinho Marochi, was no friend of liberation theology. His priests were permitted to provide traditional services of relief and comfort to their flock, whether landless or landed, but little more. As pressure built toward another expulsion in 1977, for example, the newspaper reported that Teodoro Sampaio’s priest was ready “oferecer ajuda aos posseiros se o despejo for executado”.⁵⁰ This situation changed for a brief period in the early 1980s after the São Paulo state chapter of the CPT was established. Father José Domingo Bragheto of the Jardinópolis diocese became coordinator but he rarely managed to penetrate Bishop Agostinho’s turf. In 1982,

the FETAESP publication *Realidade Rural* reported Bragheto's "solidariedade aos posseiros" and revealed that he had recently visited the landless of Teodoro Sampaio. An unidentified priest from the diocese was quoted as saying, "a Igreja, consciente de que sua vocação e seu papel se realizam em favor dos pobres, não pode deixar de tão grave problema, como é o da terra na região do Pontal do Paranapanema." In the name of the CPT, Bragheto wrote letters denouncing the landless's plight and calling for land reform.⁵¹ In 1983, Teodoro new priest, José Antônio de Lima, told the press that the CPT was not active in his parish.⁵² The militant Bragheto was forced to resign in 1986 and in 1989 Bishop Agostinho helped influence the CNBB to create rules requiring the CPT to gain a bishop's permission before operating within his diocese. The landed liked Dom Agostinho, the UDR's Roosevelt Roque dos Santos told me in a 2004 interview I met with padre Junandir at his church in the center of the town of 20,000 people at 9 am. I am making these notes at his house where we met on the church grounds as I wait for to lunch with him. The church is Igreja São José, matriz. He told me that he was appointed by the new bishop, Dom José, who took over from the conservative Dom Antonio Agostinho Marochi, c. 2002, to initiate CPT activities in the region about two and a half years ago -- 2001. He also serves as one of eight members on the state CPT council. He is responsible for finances, so he receives requests from the various regional CPTs. He told me that the CPT was not formally activated here because the long time bishop, Dom Agostinho, was conservative. Nevertheless, there were always sympathetic priests and the CEBS that independently gave support to rural workers. Some of the older participants are Padre João Pereira, who was in Mirante for several years and now is the priest in Pres Bernardes; Pe. José Antônio, who was in Teodoro and now has the Nossa

Senhora Mae da Igreja church in Presidente Prudente; Padre Mauro who is still in Primavera; and Padre Naves who was in Rancheria but now is in São Paulo. He gave me their numbers.

There was another period, during the 1990s, when CPTs in various regions supported lay militants in the region. He did not know of Luis Barone but he gave me the number for João Mendes Barreto, who is being reactivated.

Junandir was born in 1971 in Teodoro Sampaio and his parents were rural workers. He was one of eight siblings. He spent his youth studying and working in TS. Meanwhile, his father and brother participated in the movements that resulted in creating a settlement 15 de Novembro in 1985. His dad and mom live on a lot of 7.5 alq. They had agriculture but are not retired and take care of some cows. He participated in the CEBs as a youth and in 1991 he started seminary school, graduating in 1998. He remembers his experience with reforma agraria during the 1980s as watching videos about the subject while in Teodoro! Since 1999, he has been a priest at various parochias in the Pontal region, ending up in Alvares Machado.

Finally, he passed some documents along to, saying they had been kept by Dom Agostinho so he could follow the MST and CPT and keep it out! He commented on Rainha, saying: "Está desgastou como liderança na região. Não sabia como liderar com o poder que caiu em cima dele. Para os velhos militantes sem terra na região, não tem mais importância."⁵³

The history of the Movimento dos Sem Terras in the Pontal directly reflects the limitations experienced by both the CPT and the STR in the region. While cultural and structural parameters like the bishop and corporatism restricted the militancy of the latter

institutions, the former suffered few such hobbles. It can be argued that Dom Agostinho merely reflected the fairly traditional conservative culture of the rural Church in limiting the activism of his priests. Some, such as fathers José Antônio and João Pereira, slyly worked around him but the CPT itself only came to have an institutional existence in the Pontal after Dom Agostinho retired in 2003. The structural nature of the CPT – as an agency of the Church, its legitimacy naturally demanded such basics as office space and telephone privileges – made its effectiveness dependent upon the diocesan hierarchy. What I want to note here is that the landless did not find in the Church the cordial face of the patriarch or the big brother they needed to help them contend with the landed and the military state.

The first basis of support for the Movimento dos Sem Terras in the northwestern São Paulo came from a former priest, the Frenchman René Parren and his Brazilian wife Lúcia, who lived in Andradina, a city located to the southeast of the Pontal. Inspired by Liberation Theology, Parren became frustrated with the church hierarchy and so engaged in the temporal world that he lost his vocation. The object of his engagement was to be found in a land struggle that resulted in the creation of a land reform settlement in Andradina known as the Fazenda Primavera. This was the launching pad for establishing the landless movement in the region. Pontal lands, with their questionable legal status and militant residents, proved fertile soil for the movement's expansion in the 1980s. Parren and movement activists from Andradina first turned to the Teodoro rural labor union to build an alliance to help the Santa Rita landless. In April, 1983, the movement and the union presented a petition to Governor Montoro signed by 4,000 landless workers from the northwest interested in obtaining land in the state. In June, the movement submitted a

follow-up letter threatening land occupations if the governor failed to act quickly by expropriating and distributing land to the landless. “Uma das saídas para a crise econômica,” read the letter, “é fazer a REFORMA AGRÁRIA, pois criará milhões de empregos...por isso, reivindicamos...UMA POLÍTICA AGRÁRIA QUE FAVOREÇA O PEQUENO PRODUTOR, OU ENTÃO SEREMOS OBRIGADOS A OCUPAR ESSAS TERRAS PARA PODERMOS SUSTENTAR NOSSOS FILHOS E CONTINUARMOS SOBREVIVENDO.” A handwritten note on the letter, signed by Parren, explains that he took advantage of a gubernatorial visit to the Pontal to organize a caravan of rural workers to deliver the letter to Montoro and agriculture secretary José Gomes da Silva in Presidente Epitácio.⁵⁴

The strategy of appealing to the governor and organizing caravans of landless workers to increase the pressure and personalize the appeal were tactics José Ferreira Cruz and the Teodoro union already tried. Some analysts criticize the unions as old social movements for just these sorts of tactics as well as for depending on letter writing – for being “sindicatos de correspondência”.⁵⁵ The Movimento’s letter celebrated the labor movement’s 1979 national congress which had confirmed agrarian reform as a central demand. Indeed, for nearly two decades CONTAG’s word of order was “Reforma agrária: terra para quem nela trabalha.” As we have seen, the language of union appeals also used the desperate situation of rural workers and the landless to morally challenge the state, protested the economic crisis suffered by the class, and presented agrarian reform as a key solution to Brazil’s political and economic challenges. The distinction between the old and new representatives of the landless lay in their relationship to the law. The unions were part of the corporatist state structure and depended significantly on

the skilled use of existing procedures and processes, all observed within the law, even if radically interpreted at times. The Movimento's letter to Montoro expressed an ultimatum based on the movement's willingness to violate the law. If the governor were to delay in implementing policies favoring small farmers, they wrote (and in capital letters!), they would be obliged to occupy – to take – the lands in question to feed their children and persevere. This new tactic was different from what the unions had, could, or would practice and it would remain a defining characteristic of the MST that grew out of the Movimento dos Sem Terras and other regional groups from around the nation in January, 1984.

The first land occupation in the Pontal started on November 15, 1983 when several hundred landless crossed the fence line onto Teodoro Sampaio property owned by the Camargo Correia conglomerate. The Movimento did not initiate this action but it and the CPT celebrated and tried to build off it. The union worked with the Church to help the families and negotiate a solution with the state. The occupation, which grew with the arrival of thousands of landless workers from Paraná and other states, helped pressure to finally expropriate and distribute lands in the municipality. Following Montoro's expropriation ceremony in March, Cruz commented after the expropriation that now some 8,000 landless would become landed: "o contingente de lavradores a espera de terra em Teodoro Sampaio atinge hoje, 5 mil pessoas. Somando-se aos outros 3 mil trabalhadores voltantes, temos hoje 8 mil pessoas felizes".⁵⁶ But the courts overturned Montoro's action in May, 1985 and the MST took the law into the hands of the landless: they occupied Santa Rita in solidarity with the families already there.⁵⁷ Cruz suffered death threats from the newly forming UDR, despite his lack of connection to the

occupation. He then condemned the invasion and reported, in the name of the federal agrarian reform agency (INCRA), that the Pontal would not be accepting applications for land from Paraná and other out of state immigrants.⁵⁸ The pattern of distinction between the two groups, one functioning within the law, one functioning outside the law, was confirmed.

The law had always been important to the rural labor movement. Lindolfo Silva, the national head of PCB rural labor organizing in the 1950s and CONTAG's first president, noted the power of promising rural workers that "isso aí é da lei." "Peasants and rural workers were men who put a lot of faith in the law," he commented during a 1988 interview. "They were educated that way. What's outside the law, scares them." This was an intriguing conclusion when one considers literature about how Brazilian culture tends to denigrate the law in favor of personalism and considers the growth of the MST at the time of Silva's interview.⁵⁹ The quote reflects the modernist faith and progressive historical vision of the PCB. By the 1980s, however, many rural workers had experienced the poverty of progress and the long saga of the Santa Rita landless demonstrates the limiting qualities of the law more than any emancipating quality. The landed consistently got the upper hand in the judicial process, the landless lost again and again, their occasional victories proving almost Pyrrhic.

Cordiality was the term used by Holanda, and analyzed by so many others, to understand the personalistic nature of Brazilian public life during the transition to democracy following dictatorship and military rule. Cruz certainly used personalism in making his appeals to governors and presidents. He was bound by a system intentionally defined by legal parameters, parameters that, under military rule, became linked to

another Brazilian expression: “for my friends the world, for my enemies the law” rather than the definition of emancipation defined by Lindolfo Silva. The MST, a movement defined by the landless themselves, saw the law as oppressive and decided to challenge it with a discourse of moral supremacy. Was it moral – was it cordial – to accept a social order that allowed thousands if not millions to work hard all their lives for absolutely no gain, comfort, or security? They also used the nation’s highest law – the Constitution – to challenge judicial and executive actions. Television moments like that of Rainha’s with Roosevelt Roque dos Santos demonstrated to the modern world, the world of rules and law, the movement’s capacity for poise and civility. By sticking to these strategies, blending the cordial with the civil, the movement proved its resilience overtime and gained clout and authority through its plucky independence. Its coordinator became, I think, the realization of the *homem cordial* for many landless and landless turned landed small farmer. It initiated a new stage in their relationship with the landed and the state has been forced to contend with both in different ways. This new player has become one of the world’s largest peasant organizations and its links to traditional cultural forms like patriarchy warrant further scrutiny.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Notícias - Canal Rural, Producer, Noticiarios da TV sobre o MST 00-12 1996MST.996.V0015 (Canal Rural).
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- ³ Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Raízes do Brasil, 26 (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995), 146-7.
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