Migration & the Making of Industrial São Paulo

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Foreword by Barbara Weinstein

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FOREWORD / BARBARA WEINSTEIN

The immigrant alighting on American shores to take up residence in Brazil or Argentina or the United States has long received a warm welcome from historians and social scientists. Typically figured as hardworking and forward-looking, those migrating from Europe across the Atlantic have been depicted as audacious, socially mobile, and prepared for modern political participation, whether in its liberal or left-wing variants. By contrast, the internal migrant arriving in the large urban area via third-class railroad cars or rickety flatbed trucks has not enjoyed an enthusiastic reception from the scholarly community.[1] Those flocking to the major Latin American cities from the countryside have been judged considerably less well prepared for the demands of "modern" urban life, and the first wave of social science research on internal migration associated them with a distorted modernity characterized by hyper-urbanization and populist demagoguery. In many ways, this massive movement of millions of rural and small-town dwellers to the larger metropolitan areas, from the 1930s to the 1970s, can be considered the most transformative social phenomenon in the recent history of Latin America, and in Brazil it produced, among other consequences, the most important labor leader and most beloved politician in the nation's history, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Yet it took many decades before scholars began to shift away from their largely negative assessment of the participants in this great migration and what their actions and decisions meant for Latin American society. Even as more and more research demonstrated that claims about the internal migrants' stubborn traditionalism or political naiveté were little better than stereotypes, one could still perceive in the academy, especially among those who studied labor movements in Latin America, a certain nostalgia for the European immigrants, with their supposedly acute sense of solidarity, aptitude for labor militancy, and immunity to the blandishments of mainstream politicians.

So even now, when serious scholars would no longer think to describe internal migrants as "docile workers" or "co-opted clients," we are very fortunate to have a study of the single largest internal migration—the tidal wave of Brazilians, mainly with origins in the northeastern states, who moved to the burgeoning industrial center of São Paulo in the middle decades of the twentieth century—widely available to students of Latin American labor, politics, and urban life. Paulo Fontes has emerged as a central figure in the cohort of Brazilian labor historians whose publications are transforming our view of politics and social life in this period.[2] *Migration and the Making of Industrial São Paulo* is an extraordinary work of historical research and interpretation that replaces earlier scholars' "common sense" about northeastern migrants, not with an opposite, celebratory portrait of social struggle and political militancy, but with a nuanced depiction of the many different challenges faced and difficult choices made by the members of the community he studied and the way in which their largely *nordestino* origins influenced how they were treated and how they viewed themselves.

The place that Fontes decided to study—São Miguel Paulista, a peripheral precinct of the state capital—was an especially fortuitous choice because the district, dominated by the Nitro Química factory complex in the period in question, drew an unusually large influx of transplanted Brazilians (mainly from the Nordeste [Northeast], but also from the central state of Minas Gerais and the interior of São Paulo) to a locale that already included a small coterie of middle-class and upper-class families, as well as workers who were native *paulistanos* (i.e., residents of the capital). São Miguel could almost be regarded as a "company town," but one embedded in urban São Paulo. As such, it has the virtue of providing us insight into a specific, and perhaps singular, community while enabling us to reconsider a whole range of earlier assumptions about nordestinos based on either overly aggregated statistics or excessively isolated case studies.

The early chapters of *Migration and the Making of Industrial São Paulo* explore the shared experiences that produced a particular nordestino identity among the migrants in this community, starting with the ordeal of traveling 1,500 miles or more to their destination. Indeed, the migrant family precariously perched on a *pau-de-arara* (flatbed truck) has become one of the defining symbols of the journey from the Nordeste (although many migrants traveled at least part of the way by riverboat or train). New arrivals would typically tap into a network of already settled friends or relatives to find a place to live and later draw on a culture of reciprocal labor (*mutirão*) when building a more permanent home. Then there was the encounter with pau-

listano prejudice against the growing population of nordestinos, often referred to as *baianos*—in this context, a racialized term that linked all northeasterners, regardless of place of origin, to Brazil's most "African" state—or, as some paulistanos liked to facetiously remark, "From Minas up, it's all Bahia." These slights and hardships reinforced a sense of their common northeastern origins among the new residents of São Miguel, although Fontes is quick to note that in some contexts affiliation with a particular northeastern locale might take precedence over a broader collective sense of nordestino identity. Similarly, nordestino workers in the Nitro Química plant could draw on shared notions of masculinity and manly dignity in confrontations with foremen, but appeals to masculinity could also trigger conflicts between workers or among residents and feed stereotypes that exaggerated nordestinos' proclivity for violent behavior.

Although Fontes carefully identifies the fault lines within São Miguel and does justice to the heterogeneity of the local nordestino population, his discussion of labor struggles and political activism demonstrates that residents regularly and often successfully coalesced around certain class- and community-based concerns and that their identity as nordestinos served as a source of unity and empathy rather than as an impediment to labor militancy. According to the author, "The friendships and the complex of social relations formed in the places of origin and expanded in the factory and the neighborhood were frequently the basis for the elaboration of cohesion and solidarity. They were essential for the formation of a class identity." Thus, the workers at Nitro Química—overwhelmingly of northeastern origin—were among the most unified and assertive of the adherents to the famous Strike of 400,000 in 1957. As Herbert Gutman argued several decades ago about immigrants and labor militancy in the United States, ethno-cultural practices unrelated to the industrial order can be quickly invested with new meanings that may solidify class identities.[3] Or as one Nordeste-born official of the Chemical Workers Union bluntly put it, "The Bahians . . . believed in me because I also drank *cachaça*, danced *forró*, raised hell."

Sporadic episodes of labor protest did much to shape the culture and character of São Miguel, but even more formative were the ongoing struggles to secure the most basic urban services from the municipal administration. Residents recall arriving home covered in dust or mud from long walks on unpaved roads, made even more hazardous at night by the lack of street lighting. Severely inadequate bus and train service deterred many workers from seeking employment elsewhere, despite the difficult and dangerous working conditions in the Nitro Química plant, because it could mean enduring

a commute of two hours or more. Therefore, community residents consistently supported candidates for political office, such as Adhemar de Barros and Jânio Quadros, who seemed most likely to deliver on promises of better services. Here one might, at first glance, conclude that this is a familiar story of politically immature clients looking to populist political bosses (especially the unsavory Adhemar, who would later support the military coup) to attend to their needs. But the vigorous social movements that took the form of neighborhood associations campaigning for lighting, paving, sanitation, running water, schools, and sports facilities indicate that residents of São Miguel also viewed this as a process that had to come from below. Indeed, the plethora of clubs and organizations that constituted the dense civic life of this community should be a revelation for anyone who doubts the associational aptitudes of rural migrants. Perhaps even more striking were the local election results during periods in which the Brazilian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Brasileiro; PCB) could legally run candidates. Repeatedly, São Miguel Paulista was among the districts of São Paulo that gave the PCB its highest vote totals. While we cannot abstract from electoral statistics what voting for communists meant to individual voters in São Miguel, such evidence certainly throws into question the idea that nordestinos ignored class-based political appeals in favor of top-down promises from mainstream politicians.

Any appreciation of *Migration and the Making of Industrial São Paulo* would be incomplete without due acknowledgment of the exhaustive and imaginative research that made the book possible. For his evidence Fontes mined the periodical press (including Nitro Química's internal newsletter), minutes of municipal council and state assembly meetings, electoral bulletins, criminal proceedings, institutional archives, personal papers, even diplomatic correspondence regarding major strikes and communist activity in São Paulo. However, two types of sources particularly stand out as imparting depth and texture to his narrative. One is the material consulted in the Departamento de Ordem Político e Social (DOPS) files housed in the Public Archive of the State of São Paulo, which have only been available to researchers since the 1990s. The *prontuários* (records) from São Miguel contain information on everything from a boardinghouse whose female owner had been accused of rent gouging and the employment trajectory of a former machine assistant to the visit by Luís Carlos Prestes, secretary-general of the PCB, to São Miguel in 1947 and the frequency of threats and violence at political rallies. Not only do these reports provide a wealth of detail that might not be available from other sources, but they also offer fascinating insight into how information was gathered, worded, and delivered to police authorities.

Even more crucial to the way Fontes is able to capture the voices and experiences of the nordestinos who populate this historical landscape is the rich collection of nearly one hundred oral histories at his disposal, forty of them from his own interviews and the rest collected by other scholars. To be sure, using oral sources for social and political history is not startlingly new, but it *is* rare for a historian to be able to draw on so many different accounts and perspectives. Fontes also offers a beautiful example of how print and oral sources can be layered to illuminate the workings of memory—in this case, the nearly universal claim that São Miguel in the immediate postwar decades was a tight-knit community where one could walk alone at night and not worry about being robbed or assaulted and "where nobody even knew what the word 'rape' meant." Yet the newspapers from those years are replete with reporting about robberies, armed attacks, and homicides. Clearly, São Miguel was never the crime-free zone that Fontes's interviewees remember. But compared with the skyrocketing rates of violent crime that have become the norm in the area since the 1980s, one can imagine that those postwar decades seemed peaceable indeed.

For historians there are few processes of more obvious consequence than the massive movement of human beings, whether forced, voluntary, or a mixture of the two. The transatlantic slave trade, widely recognized as one of history's great human tragedies, has been subjected to every form of historical scrutiny. The wave of European immigration to the Americas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has produced a vast and sophisticated historiography. But the migration of millions from the countryside (or from smaller cities) to major metropolitan areas, a process that virtually reshaped Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century and made it the most urbanized region of the world, is only beginning to get the careful consideration from historians that it deserves. For anyone seeking a better understanding of what this migration meant—for the migrants themselves and for the new worlds they helped create—*Migration and the Making of Industrial São Paulo* is the perfect place to start.

New York City

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NORTH

NORTHEAST

WEST CENTRAL

SOUTHEAST

São Paulo

SOUTH

MAP 2. São Miguel Paulista Area in the Early 1950s

Labels on map:

N

Tietê River

Tietê River

CENTRAL DO BRASIL RAILWAY

CIDADE
NITRO QUÍMICA

**Nitro Química
Industrial Plant**

JARDIM
MATARAZZO

JARDIM PAULISTANO

VILA NITRO QUÍMICA

São Paulo–Rio de Janeiro Road

VILA CURUÇA

VILA
AMERICANA

VILA
PARANAGUA

VILA
JUREMA

VILA
ROSÁRIO

Itaquera Road

Lajeado Road

PARQUE
IPIRANGA

FIGUEIRA
FARM

VILA
ITAQUERUNA

You leave your home / You think you'll go to heaven
The dream comes crashing down / And you land in São Miguel.
—EDVALDO SANTANA, "Streets of São Miguel," 2000

Beginning in the 1940s, São Paulo underwent an extraordinary urban and industrial expansion unlike anything else in the world at that time. The city's rapid economic development posed innumerable challenges to its workers, in terms of both workplace issues and living conditions. Issues of infrastructure—transportation, sanitation, paving, education, health facilities, and so on—emerged as acute problems, as did real estate speculation, and the labor market was transformed by accelerating industrialization and the growth and diversification of the service sector. These phenomena intruded directly into workers' lives, along with high prices, competition, and internal divisions within the working class. Meanwhile, massive migration from rural areas (particularly from the Nordeste [Northeast], Minas Gerais, and the interior of the state of São Paulo) profoundly altered the social composition of the urban working class, resulting in fundamental political and cultural changes.

The period from 1945 to 1964 was marked by new models of political interaction, generally characterized by the term "populism," which established specific relations of conflict and reciprocity between workers and the state within a dynamic system of alliances and disputes.[1] In the context of São Paulo, this phenomenon resulted not only in *trabalhismo getulista*,[2] but also in the emergence of political forces linked to the figures of Adhemar de Barros and Jânio Quadros. In addition, the communist left was active and relatively strong at various moments during this period, although it was clandestine for much of the time.

Workers expressed and confronted their challenges during this period by means of a series of strategies. Their social networks, usually rooted in informal relationships among family, friends, countrymen, and community members, were fundamental not only to the process of migration from rural areas to the city, but also to dealing with problems of urban life and dilemmas at work. These networks were the grounding for the creation of a wave of popular associations, and, more broadly, for much of the political action taken by São Paulo's popular classes at that time.

Unions formed one axis of the workers' strength, but workers' resources were not limited to unions, nor were workers' efforts restricted to confronting industrialists. Quite the contrary: recreational, educational, charitable, ethnic, mutual, cooperative, religious, artistic, cultural, and neighborhood associations formed a complex, heterogeneous range of organizations that clearly announced the formation of a multifaceted group with diverse community values. Despite the variety of these associations, it is possible to find common spaces of speech and action among many of them, particularly at such critical times as the so-called Strike of 400,000 in 1957.[3]

This book analyzes the experience of the period 1945–66 in the São Paulo *bairro* (neighborhood) of São Miguel Paulista, where the processes of industrialization, urbanization, migration, and class formation presented a particularly intricate cross-section of relationships. São Miguel Paulista was formerly a small, isolated village on the outskirts of São Paulo, but its face was altered radically in the late 1930s, when Nitro Química (commonly called "Nitro" by its workers and by residents of São Miguel) set up a large factory there that made artificial fibers and chemical products. Nitro Química subsequently became one of Brazil's largest companies, decisively influencing the development and social life of São Miguel in the process.

The Nitro workforce was mostly composed of rural migrants, especially *nordestinos* (northeasterners), who came to live in the area around the factory and in various newly built workers' settlements. An active process of real

estate subdivision made São Miguel into one of São Paulo's fastest-growing districts and one of the best examples of the city's peripheral expansion, while its strong migrant presence gave it a reputation as one of the first strongholds of northeasterners in the city.

Nitro Química's management system combined paternalism and nationalism with an extensive system of benefits. While this model contained elements present in corporate ideology and in the Brazilian state's national-developmentalist ideology of the time, it also had a system of tight control and repression, which often relied on the state's police apparatus. Despite this repression, workers in São Miguel Paulista developed a strong sense of community and class identity, mobilizing at times around local organizations—notably, the Chemical Workers Union. The poor condition of the neighborhood's urban infrastructure, which was contrary to many migrants' expectations for the capital city, created a space for the activation of various political currents that sought to relate to this new contingent of workers. While the Brazilian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Brasileiro; PCB) was quite successful in this regard, other political currents that emerged in the late 1940s and 1950s were connected to the two most prominent São Paulo political figures of the time: Adhemar de Barros and Jânio Quadros.[4]

The study of the Northeastern migrant laborers who came to São Miguel Paulista in waves over a period of nearly fifty years provides a platform from which to question and problematize previous academic arguments that have privileged the "rural origins of the Brazilian proletariat" as the explanation for its alleged apathy and lack of class-consciousness. It also provides a way to understand relationships among regional characteristics, migration, and working-class culture.

My narrative analyzes the history of workers in São Miguel beginning in 1945, when Getúlio Vargas's dictatorial Estado Novo (New State) fell, the country democratized, and Nitro Química emerged from the Second World War as one of Brazil's strongest companies. It ends in 1966, with the crisis-driven dismissal of nearly a third of Nitro Química's employees, profoundly altering the relationship between company and community and symbolizing the end of the era in which São Miguel was practically an industrial city contained within São Paulo.

While the factory constituted a fundamental space for the creation of a working-class identity, the neighborhood also played a central role in creating a strong sense of community that interacted with that identity. Through the study of São Miguel Paulista and Nitro Química, then, this book seeks to deepen the analysis of relations between the spheres of work and community.

Class, Community, and Neighborhoods

Social historians have diversified their analyses of workers' lives in recent decades. While the organized labor movement is still an important object of study, so are the multiple dimensions of class experience, and everyday working-class culture, gender, family, leisure, and sociability among workers have all become relevant to scholarly works on the history of labor.[5]

Unions, political parties, strikes, labor relations, labor procedures within firms—these basic themes make up the "nucleus of the discipline," to use Daniel James's term.[6] But it has been some time since labor historians confined their studies to these topics. For many, the challenge has been to develop an approach that incorporates them into the broader perspective of working-class experience.

My trajectory in undertaking the present study has followed this development in labor historiography. In *Trabalhadores e cidadãos* (Workers and Citizens), I sought to connect the Nitro workers' history with that of the company, tracing the development of a strong factory culture and a militant political and union tradition amid the fissures and ambiguities of the system of corporate domination.[7] Thus the workers' union and its struggles, particularly the big strike of 1957, were highlighted in that work.

From that study, it seemed clear to me that there was a need to advance the understanding of workers' social history in the hope of deepening the understanding of their relationships, both during the migration process and in their everyday urban experience. My attention was drawn in particular to the strong sense of community that developed in São Miguel Paulista. In this work, my emphasis has shifted from factory and union struggles to migration, the neighborhood, and social relations.

By connecting these overlapping perspectives, I hope to arrive at a more complex analysis of the lived working-class experience. I am trying to grasp some of the fundamental changes that occurred in Brazil during the second half of the twentieth century—industrialization, urbanization, the new post-war political context, and rural-urban migration—from the perspective of how people acted on (or were involved in) these processes in their everyday lives. In stressing the importance of everyday reality to the process of class formation, I have taken care not to depoliticize it but, instead, to demonstrate its vital importance in building social networks and a public space where workers could construct identities and fight for rights.[8]

This book investigates the social networks created by workers, first during the migration process and subsequently in the workplace and at home in São

Paulo. It also attempts to understand how these same workers affected the process of urbanization to become key political actors in the life of the city, often linking community organizations with union- and working-class-based political parties and establishing tense reciprocal relationships with political leaders. This study, then, seeks to contribute to a more multifaceted understanding of the political experience of the working class in those years. At the same time, by emphasizing the importance of internal migrations in the process of formation of the working class, I hope to stimulate a more comprehensive analysis of the history of Brazilian labor by integrating the currently disjunctive studies of international and national migration.[9]

My research into São Miguel's history reveals a defiant articulation by local workers of a specific notion of community, associated in turn with a strong class identity. Accordingly, one of the goals of this book is to improve understanding of the concept of community and its possible relation to the idea of class.

In recent years, many historians have sought to study communities not only as places but as sets of social relations. This approach has helped me understand links, networks, and relationships among workers, as well as their collective action. Many of these studies have emphasized community life and workers' ties to their cities and neighborhoods, from which they derive assistance and mutual aid, collective solidarity, and common culture. Since all of this is central to the formation and the experience of the working class, its study, then, is necessary for all those interested in analyzing "life beyond work."[10]

Critics have pointed out problems in the indiscriminate use by labor historians of the concept of "community." Many studies have presented unity and solidarity among workers not as the result of a deliberate, historically constructed human effort but as a consequence of community, a kind of "ecological factor" that explains class-consciousness.[11] More recently, however, sociologists and historians have emphasized the importance of space to the process of class formation.[12] In this approach, a space, like a social network, comes to be seen as a base, a "habitat," where collective action is created. In this conceptualization, space is not only a locus where class formation occurs; it is part of the process.

The process of class formation thus has a double dynamic. It "involves the construction of far-reaching social relations, connecting members of the class through different places"—by means of unions and political parties, for example. But it also requires "the construction of dense connections that allowed the construction of identities of solidarity and community over time

and in the absence of formal organization. In this sense, the class could be 'extracted' from the 'community' and from personal relationships that lead to social solidarity."[13]

Analyzing neighborhoods and geographical spaces as communities only makes sense, therefore, when in a given context its residents hold a common understanding and share a language. Such language can, in certain circumstances, overlap with a language of class and with other notions of community, such as those based on place of residence, place of work, and a common ethnic or migrant background. That, in my opinion, is what happened in São Miguel Paulista. Neighborhoods do not just turn into communities by themselves; social networks constructed and articulated by residents create them, and space is an important component of these social networks.

Historians, geographers, urbanists, and social scientists in different national situations have been highlighting the relationships between urban space and the working class. These scholars emphasize that spatial organization not only affects workers, influencing decisively their access to material and symbolic resources while framing social networks and experiences; it is also affected by them.[14]

This emphasis on urban space is one of the concerns of recent historiographical studies of Brazilian labor.[15] In addition to the traditional aspects of the inner world of the workplace and the processes and relationships of work, these new studies ask fundamental questions for a more comprehensive understanding of class formation in Brazil. Treading a similar path, this book seeks to understand, by means of a specific study, the formation of class in its relationship with a number of complex social and political processes. The broad framework of this study will thus include the connections between migrants and their social networks; connections between workplace and neighborhood; issues of urbanization; the local and national political scene; family and gender relations; the vicissitudes of economic development and the job market; and organizational experiences both formal and informal.

Rural Origin, Workers, and Politics

The analysis of rural migrations and their interaction with the formation of the Brazilian working class also has a history. Between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s, a number of sociological studies probed the intense transformations the country underwent beginning in the 1930s, and especially after the Second World War.[16]

Buoyed by the notion of modernization, these analyses systematized in academic language the then contemporary vision of a supposed structural division in Brazil between rural "backwardness" and urban "progress."[17] Migration was thereby seen as the passage of archaic societies and cultures to the cities, which were understood to be spaces of industrial development and modernity, so that migrants would traverse "literally in a few days several epochs of socioeconomic evolution."[18]

According to this line of thought, the possibilities opened up by urbanization and industrialization represented a more advanced stage of development and, possibly, upward social and economic mobility. Migrants were seen as "fleeing the timid, unassisted, hopeless condition of the rural areas" and heading "to São Paulo, in order to progress, to *enjoy civilization*."[19]

Although, as the Brazilian sociologist Eder Sader has stated, migration was viewed optimistically as a higher stage in the lives of those thousands who moved to the cities, the image of the migrant was a negative one.[20] In Sader's vision, the first generations of migrants, mostly employed at unskilled jobs in modern factories and urban service sectors, were still permeated by traditional culture, owing to their recent rural origin. Inexperienced in the urban industrial world, they adjusted precariously to this new reality and did not identify with their condition as laborers, in a kind of "adaptive apathy."[21]

In this view, domestic migrant workers were seen as non-bearers of class tradition and as such were contrasted with the proletariat that existed before the great wave of internal migration, particularly before 1930. At that time, during the early stages of Brazilian industrialization, the working class was primarily composed of European immigrants, who brought class experience from their countries of origin and quickly organized a radical and militant resistance to the bosses and to the state.[22] In this analysis, the supposed persistence of traditional forms of conduct by migrants implied an absence of patterns of collective action and class solidarity. Unions and other class-based organizations would thus be alien to the experience of these workers or, at best, would be understood on an individual basis and as organs for welfare assistance. The new migrant workers, considered politically passive and apathetic, originated in an agrarian environment of paternalistic domination that "brought with it an attitude of submission by persons belonging to the lower layers in the presence of members of the upper strata, in which humility and respect are the characteristic feature."[23] They could, therefore, be easily manipulated by the discourse and action of charismatic populist politicians.

This view was widely shared. During the peak moment of urban and rural worker mobilizations in the period before the military coup of 1964, for example, a communist activist wrote that there would surely be "a natural relaxation of the class struggle" because the working class in São Paulo had "received in its ranks men and women coming from the most backward regions and the most deprived sectors, such as the countryside."[24]

This binary approach to modernization theory, which opposed a traditional subsistence sector to a modern industrial one, came under heavy criticism when internal migration became a widely studied subject in government institutions and universities in the late 1960s and 1970s, but further research and systematization is still needed to analyze how the formation of the Brazilian working class was influenced by the migration process.[25] Although studies by labor sociologists of the 1950s and 1960s have been rightly criticized for several of their theoretical assumptions and conclusions, they have the undeniable merit of trying to understand the impact of migration and the supposed cultural traditions of migrants on the proletariat of São Paulo, something rarely mentioned in subsequent studies.

In his sophisticated analysis of populism, Francisco Weffort sought to overcome the limitations of structurally oriented explanations for social and political relations in the period 1945–64, emphasizing instead the role of political actors. According to Weffort, the "endorsement of populist movements by the popular classes . . . cannot be explained by the 'absence' of urban experience or of class, but precisely by a particular kind of experience rooted in the very conditions of social formation of these [Latin American] countries."[26] Although such a statement suggests a privileging of the young working class of the period as having agency in the social and political process, and although Weffort even states that populism was the result of an alliance of classes, he does not make sufficient inquiry in this direction, as Angela de Castro Gomes has pointed out.[27]

Although Weffort's proposed interpretative model for the populist period at times affirms the ambiguity of the "manipulation" of workers by populist leaders, it in fact emphasizes the prospect of their co-optation by the state.[28] Weffort's study inspired a number of works in the 1970s and 1980s that, despite his observations on working-class action and self-organization, tended to incorporate the master narratives of a manipulative state and demagogic leaders co-opting the working masses as an explanatory paradigm of social life and national politics between 1930 and 1964. This widely disseminated explanation turned the period itself into an adjective; many began to call it the "populist era" or "populist republic."

This perspective began to be heavily criticized in the mid-1980s, as newer studies rejected the notions of workers' political passivity and of manipulation and co-optation by an all-powerful state and sought instead to emphasize an active role for workers and to overcome the widely disseminated dichotomy of autonomy versus heteronomy. Understanding workers as historical actors who make choices within a given field of pressures and counter-pressures has been one of the central objectives of historians looking into the social history of the working class between 1930 and 1964.[29]

Within this field, approaches and focuses have been developed that offer a reasonably diversified vision. John French, for example, seeks to deepen the brief Weffortian insight of a poly-classist alliance as an explanatory axis for relations among workers, state, middle classes, and bourgeoisie during that period. Although such alliances were made among unequal actors in terms of socio-political weight, they could not exist without a constantly shifting balance of negotiations and reciprocities. For French, there existed a composite "populist political system that influenced the behavior of all participants."[30]

Other historians, however, have repeatedly rejected populism as an operational concept for the analysis of social and political relations in Brazil during that period.[31] These scholars highlight the conceptual imprecision and pejorative tone that stuck to the notion of populism, making the term "elastic and somewhat ahistorical, so that it now explains everything—and as happens in these cases, it explains very little." More important, they argue that the term "populism" should be rejected, along with its "obscuring effect," because it is permeated by notions of massive state control over, and manipulation of, the "masses" and by a notion of co-optation that excludes any possibility of reciprocal relationship and thus empties its historical subjects.[32]

With differences of emphasis, Gomes, Jorge Ferreira, and Daniel Aarão Reis Filho propose the notion of *trabalhismo* (laborism) as a way to think about relations between the state and the working class during that period. Gomes speaks of a "laborist pact," which sought "to emphasize the relation between unequal actors, but in which there is not an all-powerful State." Ferreira affirms the importance of a "laborist project," whose institutional expression was the Brazilian Workers' Party (Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro; PTB), "the most popular organization during the post-'45 democratic experience, which in 1964 became the largest labor group in the country's political spectrum." Based on a relationship in which the state and the working class "identified common interests," the laborist project "expressed a class-consciousness" on the part of the workers and collaborated primarily for the establishment of a "collective identity" among them.[33] In addition, Reis considers populism to

be a political and academic "invention" that, after the coup of 1964, served to hide the "laborist tradition," which was characterized by a "program that was nationalist, statist, and popular."[34]

This current debate expresses great dissatisfaction with the paradigm of populism as formulated by Weffort and his followers and seeks instead a new conceptual framework that will take into account the complex political and social dynamics of Brazilian workers' experiences during most of the twentieth century. It seems to me insufficient to replace concepts of populism with those of laborism in any of their versions. As Alexandre Fortes observed in a recent work, "Apart from the risk of replacing the stigma with the apology when we change 'populism' for 'laborism,' we might be keeping, or even deepening, the mistake of trying to explain different elements of the same historical moment in a single word."[35] An isolated emphasis on the laborist aspect of political and social relations obscures other core dimensions of workers' experience during that period, repositioning class analysis as exclusively focused on labor relations and unions. However, the urban dimension was a vital aspect of workers' lives, particularly in cities with large industrial expansion, and it seems to me impossible to understand the political relationships of the time without taking it into account and connecting it to essential questions of labor and union relations.

The political life of São Paulo—the most industrialized state in the country, with the largest working class—is incomprehensible using laborism as an absolute explanatory key. The most popular political leaders, Adhemar de Barros and Jânio Quadros, built their careers outside laborism, although they flirted with it. Especially in the case of Quadros, their recognition of the problems of rapid urban growth was central to their careers; the highly unequal distribution of the fruit of the city's intense development stimulated a host of popular demands that served as a platform for these politicians' emergence and consolidation as leaders. (Moreover, in spite of the popularity of Getúlio Vargas among the working class, his PTB was weak in São Paulo and extremely divided.) Apart from labor rights and labor relations, which were always present in the political and social agenda of São Paulo, an analysis of political relations from the 1930s through the 1960s needs to consider workers' demands for better living conditions, respectability, dignity, and the right to "progress," as understood by workers at that time.

Hence, in this book I am interested in exploring social networks created by workers both during the migration process and subsequently in their workplaces and homes in São Miguel and in understanding how these same

workers acted on the process of urbanization to become key political actors in the life of the city. Moreover, such research will also bring forward elements important to understanding key aspects of working-class culture. In this way, my aim is to contribute to a more multifaceted understanding of the political and social experience of the working class in those years.

Sources and Chapters

This book was drawn from a wide range of sources. My previous research had already provided access to a series of business documents from Nitro Química—in particular, the complete collection of *Nitro Journal*, the company newsletter of the 1950s. In addition, the archives of the social and political police, the Departamento de Ordem Político e Social (DOPS), and of the Chemical Workers Union of São Paulo had an important role in this research, along with interviews with former union leaders and Nitro workers.[36]

The enormous DOPS collection at the Public Archive of the State of São Paulo has continued to be one of the principal references for this study. The investigative zeal of governors, businessmen, and political police bequeathed us an impressive array of documents about the most varied aspects of the workers' life. Obviously, many of these documents discuss political and union organizations and protests, demonstrations, and strikes, but it is also possible to extract from them a rich collection of material about the daily life of the neighborhoods and the factory, as well as about community and cultural organizations.[37]

In the library of the Municipal Council of São Paulo, I consulted the minutes of the council meetings, which gave me valuable access to the speeches and debates of the councilmen, and examined books, newspapers, and documents of the *prefeitura* (Mayor's Office) about city neighborhoods. Neighborhood newspapers, union bulletins, party organs, and "mainstream" press were all fundamental for this work, and were principally consulted at the São Paulo state archivel at the Arquivo Edgard Leuenroth (Edgard Leuenroth Archive; AEL) at the State University of Campinas (Universidade Estadual de Campinas; UNICAMP), at the Mário de Andrade Library in São Paulo; the National Library in Rio de Janeiro; and at the Documentation Center Archive (Centro de Documentação e Memória; CEDEM) at São Paulo State University (Universidade Estadual Paulista; UNESP).

In addition to the newspapers, I was able to find in the CEDEM collection interesting documents from the Brazilian Communist Party and the collection of

the researcher Fabio Munhoz, a rich source for those interested in the strikes and union actions of the late 1950s and early 1960s, particularly the so-called Strike of 400,000 in 1957.[38]

At the São Paulo Regional Electoral Court I had access to electoral bulletins from the 1940s through the 1960s, which allowed a more accurate assessment of voting trends in São Miguel. I consulted the speeches of state legislators in the library and in the São Paulo State Legislative Assembly Documentation Center.

In the United Kingdom and the United States, I worked in the archives of the Public Record Office in London and in the National Archives in Washington, DC, respectively, which gave me access to reports on politics, the labor movement, and the social and economic transformation of Brazil as seen by diplomats and foreign travelers.

An extensive bibliography served as a base for the writing of this work. The UNICAMP, University of São Paulo (Universidade São Paulo; USP), Mário de Andrade, National, Roberto Simonsen (Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo), and University of Manchester libraries were essential and allowed me access to an extensive range of books and journals.[39] Also important was the library of the Center for Migration Studies (Centro Estudos de Migration; CEM), where I examined the most comprehensive collection of works on internal migration in the country.

The goodwill and kindness of many people allowed me access to personal collections and to institutions without which the fundamental documentation for this work would not have been possible. Osvaldo Pires de Holanda gave me extensive material about the Autonomist Movement in São Miguel Paulista. José Caldini Filho made it possible for me to have copies of an incredible collection of photographs, newspapers, and documents about São Miguel. Photographs were also provided to me by Nelson Bernardo, Nair Cecchini, and Helena Oliveira Silveira. Pastor Jonas of the Baptist Church of São Miguel Paulista expedited my access to the old documents and acts of that institution. At the Diogo de Faria, Carlos Gomes, and D. Pedro schools, I consulted old registers and material about students, including some schoolwork and essays. Finally, at the History Laboratory of the University of Cruzeiro do Sul I surveyed an important collection of documents, including various photographs and a very important collection of fifty-three interviews realized in 2000 by students in the history program with former residents.

I carried out forty-two oral history interviews.[40] From a network of contacts created around the Association of Retired Chemical Workers, I had the opportunity to interview several former Nitro Química workers, residents,

and political activists in the neighborhood. Together with the local impact of the publication of *Trabalhadores e cidadãos*, the contacts that appeared through this network opened the way for new interviews with other residents of São Miguel who were not directly related to the trade union or political world, allowing me to assemble a rich, diverse collection of testimony.[41]

Chapter 1 of this book seeks to highlight the general importance of internal migration to the formation of the working class in São Paulo after the Second World War. In dialogue with specialized literature and primary sources, I analyze the internal migration of workers from the countryside in the context of São Paulo's accelerated industrialization of the 1950s and 1960s, when companies had an intense need for manual labor. However, in addition to economic and demographic factors, I highlight the agency of, and the strategies chosen by, the migrants in this process, as well as how gender relations influenced different experiences of migration between men and women. Finally, I seek to demonstrate how the presence and the action of migrants were basic to the debate of the "Northeastern question" and to the creation of a political and cultural imagination about the Brazilian Northeast and about northeasterners in São Paulo.

Chapter 2 approaches the neighborhood history of São Miguel Paulista in the context of São Paulo's rapid industrialization and urbanization. São Miguel was transformed by the establishment of Companhia Nitro Química Brasileira there in 1935 and had become the city's fastest-growing area by the 1950s. Although immersed in the peripheral pattern of urban growth dominant in São Paulo during this period, São Miguel was different from other suburbs that were widely considered bedroom communities. This chapter explores how the presence of a large industrial company employing most of the local workforce created unusual conditions for the formation of a working-class community.

In chapter 3, the workers' own actions toward the structuring of their urban setting is a point of analysis, as is the process of class formation beyond the factory space. Aspects of leisure and workers' culture are discussed, noting both elements of homogeneity and traces of heterogeneity within the workers' community, seeking in this way to demonstrate the complexity of the workers' set of experiences. The chapter also aims to investigate processes of building relationships of solidarity, as well as those of antagonism, among local residents. Differences of ethnicity, generation, gender, and levels of social aspiration are highlighted and analyzed. The neighborhood's infrastructure needs in relation to migrants' expectations of "progress" are treated as important issues in creating a strong sense of community. Finally, the chapter