OCCUPYING SCHOOLS,
OCCUPYING LAND
How the Landless Workers’ Movement Transformed Brazilian Education
BY REBECCA TARLAU

“This is a brilliant book by a brilliant young scholar. It is one of the finest studies available on the Brazilian Landless Movement (the MST), perfectly balancing rigorous comparative institutional analysis with an activist’s appreciation for social justice and an ethnographer’s attention to detail. Tarlau captures nicely the complexity of the political landscape in Brazil, and she makes a compelling argument for the underappreciated role that education can play in institutionalizing social mobilization” - Wendy Wolford, Cornell University

“Occupying Schools, Occupying Land is an extraordinary piece of scholarship, both in its fine-grained empirical narrative and its theoretical argument. The originality of its insights and arguments go far beyond research on the Landless Peasant Movement and schools in Brazil. It is an important contribution to the Gramscian current of social theory and should be read by anyone interested in the potentials and dilemmas of struggles for progressive social transformation in capitalist societies.” - Erik Olin Wright, University of Wisconsin-Madison

In Occupying Schools, Occupying Land, Rebecca Tarlau explores how MST activists have pressured municipalities, states, and the federal government to implement their educational program in public schools and universities, affecting hundreds of thousands of students. Contrary to the belief that movements cannot engage the state without demobilizing, Tarlau shows how educational institutions can help movements recruit new activists, diversify their membership, increase technical knowledge, and garner political power. Drawing on twenty months of ethnographic field work, Tarlau documents how the MST operates in different regions working at times with or through the state, at other times outside it and despite it. She argues that activists are most effective using contentious co-governance, combining disruption and public protest with institutional pressure to defend and further their goals.

Through an examination of the potentials, constraints, failures, and contradictions of the MST’s educational struggle, Occupying Schools, Occupying Land offers insights into the relationship between education and social change, social movements and states, and the barriers and possibilities for similar reforms in democratic contexts throughout the world.