

## THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL PERIPHERAL CITIES

### THE RECENT URBAN PROTESTS IN BRAZIL<sup>1</sup>

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#### INTRODUCTION

The so-called “June days, 2013”, when hundreds of thousands of protestors took to the streets of Brazilian cities, were a general surprise. In the last three decades, the Workers' Party known as the PT ticket or *Partido dos Trabalhadores* – and the social movements connected to the party held an almost monopoly over mass manifestations in Brazil. In 2013, the PT completed its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in charge of the Federal Government. Who were the protestors who surprised everybody? What did they want? Had the social policies propelled by the Lula and Dilma Administration failed by attempting to improve the living conditions of the Brazilian poor? Which social forces did they represent?

The many analyzes published about these mobilizations draw attention to some of the common features of the recent international “occupy” protests held by the youth: sudden outbursts, horizontal organization, the central role of social networks, the rejection of hierarchical structure and independent leadership of the political parties, a large degree of spontaneity, among others<sup>3</sup>. This paper does not aim at providing a general or sociological analysis of these events which undoubtedly have brought some novelties that can be noticed in the movements – predominantly held by the young – taking place after the 1999 Seattle protests. What interests us here is to emphasize the specificities of the movements in Brazil and their strong ties to urban issues. The trigger of the street protests was a reaction to the increase in the São Paulo city bus fare. The organization behind the protests was the MPL – Movimento Passe Livre (the Free Pass Movement) –, a network of activists which for eight years have been organizing themselves around demands for free and high-quality public transportation.

The police crackdown on a peaceful demonstration potentiated the hike in the number of protestors, and in the following days, in addition to protests against police action, other demands in terms of healthcare, education, housing, among others, emerged. The high amount of money spent with the preparation for the World Cup in the country, which was promoted by FIFA in partnership with the Brazilian government, and the removal of thousands of families from their homes because of urban interventions were also present on the posters

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<sup>1</sup> This topic has been developed in greater length and detail in a paper entitled: “The future of global peripheral cities”, *Latin American Perspectives*, Sage, forthcoming. Indicators and data on urban life have been updated in this paper.

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<sup>3</sup> See the following studies: *Rebel Cities* by David Harvey, London/New York: Verso, 2012; *Cidades Rebeldes. Passe Livre e as manifestações que tomaram as ruas do Brasil*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2013. See interview with Perry Anderson to *O Estado de São Paulo* newspaper, Caderno Aliás, 03/11/13. Also see a Catalan publication at: <http://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/ACS/issue/current/showToc>

and rallying cries. But there were also organized right-wing groups, which were against political parties and trade unions, in addition to anarchists identified with the international network black blocs<sup>4</sup>.

The explanations given in the numerous analyzes of the movements state many different causes, some of which are unanimous, such as, the degree of force used by the police to control peaceful demonstrations contributed to thicken participation. Another cause, on which there is consensus, according to the analyzes, is the wearing thin of formal political representation with which very few Brazilians identify themselves with. In this regard it is worth noting that the Workers' Party and its allies settled for and accommodated to the traditional way of doing politics in Brazil; moreover, the most powerful media entities have been running a relentless campaign stressing the way the left-wing while in power has been consistently involved in corruption scandals<sup>5</sup>.

After playing a major role in Brazil from 1975 to late 1990, under the drive of the Urban Reform Movement, the urban policy topic sank into oblivion until resurfacing in the 2013 street protests. Just like what happened in a recent past, the urban movements are here to announce a new political cycle; thus, the current urban struggles seem to set in motion another stage in Brazil's recent history as a result of the mobility and housing crises<sup>6</sup>. There are objective data to justify this thesis.

Social policies under the Lula and Dilma Administrations undoubtedly reduced social and economic inequality indicators, as we will show below. Hunger has been eradicated in the country according to the UN<sup>7</sup>. However, income distribution does not suffice to combat urban injustice that has at its core the land and real estate issues. What the population needs is “city distribution”, which has everything to do with territorial insertion or the right to the city.

Recent historical roots of the urban malaise that led to the mobilizations have a neoliberal orientation, in other words, they ask for a smaller role of the government in terms of social policies, and this hits a historically unequal society, which has sought to untie itself from twenty years of a military dictatorship started in the early 1980s.

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<sup>4</sup> Black blocs adopt direct action tactics, have an anarchist vein, are organized in a non-hierarchical and uncentered framework, and oppose the *status quo*.

<sup>5</sup> To better understand what is meant by “the traditional way of doing politics in Brazil” refer to the following theories and scholars: “patrimonialist society”, Raimundo Faoro, (Os donos do poder. Rio de Janeiro: Globo 1989); “the universalization of favor-based politics”, Roberto Schwarz (Cultura e política. São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2012). On the strong participation of the main stream media in an attempt to destabilize leftist governments in Latin America see interview with Rafael Correa, President of Ecuador in <http://www.brasildefato.com.br/node/29243>.

<sup>6</sup> On the new urban movements surfacing in Brazil in the 1970s and the 1980s see *Quando novos personagens entraram em cena: experiências e lutas dos trabalhadores da grande São Paulo 1970-1980*, by Eder Sader, Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1988.

<sup>7</sup> The UN acknowledges that Brazil was one of the most successful countries in fighting malnutrition and poverty in the 2014 FAO report published in September.

## NEOLIBERALISM ON A PERIPHERAL CAPITALIST BASIS

The notion of a dialectic and structural relationship between "formal" and "informal" sectors of occupation has already been sedimented by the literature on the metropolises of peripheral capitalism. Illegality and exclusion are intertwined. Likewise, the shortage of housing, and especially the shortage of city, is linked to a restricted and highly speculative real estate market. Legislation inspired by the urban laws of central countries applies only to part of the peripheral city seeking to emulate the "first world" and thus to reproduce inequality through a process known as "conservative modernization". The formal or legalized city is the city of the capitalist real estate market. This market creates first world islands which reproduce the signs and symbols of international architecture: the fashion city, the official city, the city of imported urbanism. The strong concentration of the formal market and the investment market mirrors the kind of citizenship and rights which apply only to a very small number of people. Exclusion, segregation, informality, and illegality are therefore constructions of social relations, in other words, they are dependent on and subordinate to the accumulation process. This does not mean we are ascribing to reality a dual nature; quite to the contrary, one side of this reality does not exist without the other. What we see is inequality and combination, that is, in the first world island, for example, one is likely to see an abundant and cheap army of domestic workers. Another example are the up-scale residences and condos that have separate social and service entrances targeted at different social classes.

Not even the labeling of an occupation as legal or illegal escapes a class-based criterion. It is not uncommon luxury shopping malls or gated condos to illegally occupy land in Brazil; however, criminalization or violent evictions will only always take place against low-income occupiers. More than the law, as in legal norm, it is the law of the market that prevails.

In turn, informal peripheries are not homogeneously behind.

Among the features of globalization one finds the increase of production (capital mobility) and also the increase of consumption towards new markets. The culture of advertising creates new social needs. Towards the precarious and pre-modern urban periphery, the market launches its unbelievable electronic gadgets. This situation engenders conspicuous consumption in the midst of a lack of basic rights such as the right to public transportation or sanitation. The smartphone launched by the market, arrives before sewage or decent housing, confirming that it is not the consumer (or the basic human needs) that governs production but the opposite: it is the production, and the need for accumulation, which creates the consumer<sup>8</sup>. The neoliberal ideology, as we all know, contributed to deepening these contrasts by restricting government investments in social policies<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> According to Karl Marx, in *The Capital*, the production creates the consumers.

<sup>9</sup> There are many references on this topic. One of the most recent and acclaimed book on the increase of inequality in capitalist countries is Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.

## IN BRAZIL, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS SWIMS AGAINST THE NEOLIBERAL CURRENT

While the actions guided by neoliberal ideologies buried many of the social democratic parties and the major trade unions in central capitalist countries (from the mid-1970s onwards), contradictorily, in Brazil, a leftist movement that managed to create new political parties, new union centers, new urban social movements, new policy proposals, gained momentum. This movement eventually helped to put an end to the military dictatorship (1985), helped achieve a new Federal Constitution (1988), and to elect as president of Brazil in 2002 one of its leaders, blue-collar worker Luiz Inacio “Lula” da Silva, from the Workers’ Party. In 2013, the Workers’ Party had been in charge of the country for 11 years. A former urban guerilla, Dilma Rousseff, who was tortured and imprisoned during the military dictatorship in Brazil, succeeded the 8-year Lula administration.

In the 12 years they held office, PT presidents Lula (2003 to 2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2010 to 2014) implemented unprecedented social policies whose scope cannot go unmentioned. The minimum wage had nominal increase of 262% and a net increase of 72.35% from 2003 to 2014. Over the same 10-year period, the *Bolsa Família* welfare program, which ensures a minimum income per child and per family, reached 13.8 million families or over 50 million people (one in every four Brazilians). This investment has enlarged the food market and the market for popular products having generated a significant impact on the poor regions of the country, such as the Brazilian northeast.

The *Bolsa Família* program has reduced extreme poverty in Brazil by 28% in 10 years. Another program created during the Dilma administration – the Brazil Without Poverty Plan – was able to lift from extreme poverty over 22 million people in two years (people who were living on less than \$ 1.25 / day). Over the same period, 14.4 million rural dwellers had access to electricity for the first time, a measure which boosted the purchase of household appliances. To boost urban and rural consumption, the Dilma administration slashed tax rates for said appliances. The growth of the domestic market added to the increase in the price of commodities (grains, meat, minerals, cellulose, ethanol), which led to a growth of 3.06% per annum in GDP per capita between 2001 and 2010. In the first half 2013, the unemployment rate was 5.3%, the lowest in the last 10 years according to the Brazilian Census Bureau (IBGE)<sup>10</sup>. The FAO/UN food security report states that Brazil is a world reference in the fight against starvation, due to the speed with which it reached 1.7% of the population that does not know when their next meal will be. This figure is considered residual data<sup>11</sup>. In 2003, the figure was 9.3%. These achievements are even more significant if we stress that they have impacted the height and weight of children across the country, especially in poorer regions. Between 2008 and 2012 the average height of children included in the *Bolsa Família* Program increased by almost 1 cm<sup>12</sup>. Brazil ceased to appear in the FAO hunger map and the federal

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<sup>10</sup> The drop in unemployment rates is likely to pickup in the second half of 2014 as the GDP decreases.

<sup>11</sup> Source: *The State of food insecurity in the world*, FAO/UN Sept, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> See “Uma vergonha a menos”, an article published in Carta Capital Magazine on 09/24/2014 about the Health Ministry’s data.

government was able to reach the trenches of poverty, thus impacting positively in reducing regional inequality<sup>13</sup>.

In cities, however, the living conditions worsened regardless of the recently achieved new legal and institutional framework.

#### ACHIEVING A NEW LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CITIES

The fight against the dictatorship that took over the country with a military coup in 1964 culminated in a Constituent Assembly that drafted and voted the 1988 Federal Constitution. As a result of the mobilization of Urban Reform Movements, for the first time in Brazil's constitutional history, two chapters on cities were included in the text. In 2001, Federal Law # 10,257, also known as the City Statute of Brazil, was passed to regulate the provisions enshrined in the 1988 Constitution. The new statute contained the main principles for Urban Reform: the social function of property and the social function of the city. In 2003, the Ministry of Cities was created, this would not necessarily have been a breakthrough in itself had it not been a claim of the organized urban movements.

Between 2004 and 2013, conferences on the development of cities were held in Brazil. They promoted a discussion process, which originated in the municipalities, went through state legislatures, and culminated with the election of delegates to the National Assembly in Brasília, where claims on urban policy are then agreed upon. In 2004, the National Council of Cities was created. In 2005, Federal Law # 11,107 on Public Consortia was passed. This statute intended to assist city administrations in promoting shared actions across the Brazilian territory. In 2007, a Federal Law established the regulatory framework for sanitation; this took place after 13 years during which sanitation policies were left in the limbo due to a tug of war over privatization.

The Federal Government was gradually resuming public investments that were previously restricted because of economic difficulties, but also by the ideologies of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and others. In 2007, the PAC was launched – the Growth Acceleration Program – with significant investments in housing (especially in slum upgrading) and sanitation. This was finally taking place after more than 20 years of inconsistent and erratic investment policies in the field. And in 2009 the *Minha Casa Minha Vida (My House, My Life)* Program was launched as a result of an agreement between the federal government and major companies in construction and urban development.

With these legal and institutional achievements, and more, with the return of government investment in urban policy, why is it that city life has become worse?

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<sup>13</sup> On the regional inequality issue see “O Brasil precisa se consolidar como nação”, by Tania Bacelar de Araújo, 2006 and “Pobreza: métricas e evolução recente no Brasil e no nordeste” by Lena Lavinias, 2010.

## THE URBAN POLICY DEADLOCK

In fact we are living a paradox. After 29 years of neoliberal policies, just as the Brazilian government finally resumes investments in housing and sanitation, followed by investments in urban transport, the situation of urban life worsens dramatically.

First of all we must remind ourselves that cities are not only the stage and the actors of social relations, but they are also commodities. The built environment is the product of certain social relations, but unlike other commodities, buildings, bridges, viaducts, and street furniture are attached to the territory. They are a *sui generis* kind of product. Each location of land or property is unique and as such presents itself as a monopoly. This differential ensures that an increase in value will be assigned to the owner as result of the legal framework. The business of the city is real estate income.

Real estate income crosses all urban policies that take place in the built environment as a result of the different features of the different locations<sup>14</sup>.

It is because it is a special commodity, tied to the (urban) land that housing, for example, it does not obey the law applied to other kinds of commodities. With the latter, the more you produce the more the price falls. When it goes unregulated, the production of housing with subsidies, which is what took place in Brazil, leads to an overall price increase.

The *Minha Casa Minha Vida* Program launched in 2009 was responsible for a real estate boom and a price explosion.

President Dilma Rousseff has decided to tackle the 2008 crisis and go after increased employment rates and economic growth with a plan called neodevelopmentalist. The main pillars of this plan were the construction and the automotive industries<sup>15</sup>. But if the plan was successful in creating jobs the same cannot be said about its impact on the life of cities, as we shall see below.

Real estate prices have skyrocketed since 2008. Between January 2008 and September 2012, the squared meter (m<sup>2</sup>) of urban properties rose by 184.9% in Rio de Janeiro and 151.3% in São Paulo; the same thing happened in many other Brazilian cities (FIFE ZAP).

According to a survey coordinated by Helena Menna Barreto Silva between 2005 and 2012, the price of new residential units for sale in the São Paulo market increased two-fold, the price of used property increased three-fold, rising above all the indicators adopted in the study. Some city councils and municipalities have flexibilized legislation to favor private enterprises. The symbiosis between governments, the legislatures and development, financing and

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<sup>14</sup> In addition to the most widely known, David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre, other Marxists also wrote about the production of cities and the built environment. It is worth noting the members of the French School of Urbanism of the 1970s, among which: Christian Topalov, Alain Lipietz, Jean Lojkine. Also see the Annals of the Bartlett International Summer School published between 1980 and 1990, Bartlett School, UCL.

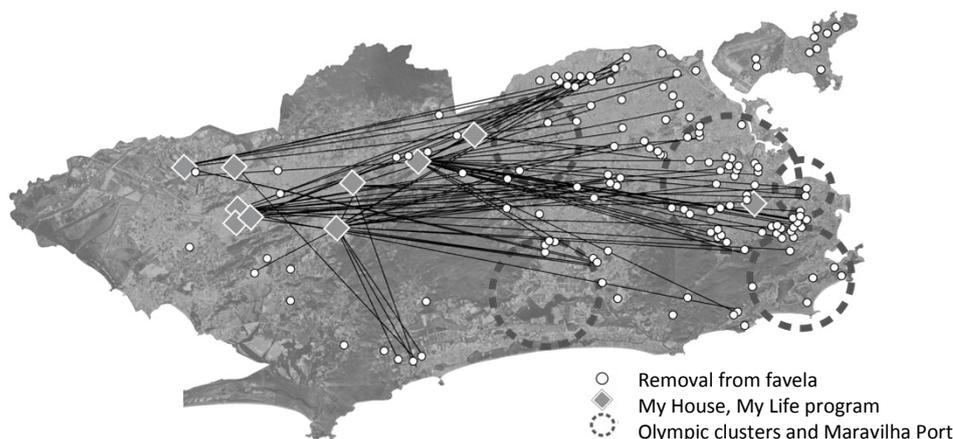
<sup>15</sup> On the so-called new developmentism, see “Brasil e o Novo desenvolvimentismo” by Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira, 2011.

construction capitals lead to a housing boom that took the city by storm<sup>16</sup>. Many studies, websites and blogs<sup>17</sup> have called attention to the high number of fires and violent evictions taking place in favelas obstructing the path of major urban interventions or located in areas that increased in value due to real-estate market speculation.

Urban and metropolitan peripheries have grown horizontally toward new frontiers, thanks to the speculative real estate market<sup>18</sup>. Only in the city of Rio de Janeiro, the gentrification caused by the "housing boom", fueled by the preparations for the FIFA 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics, caused approximately 40,000 people to be moved from more central areas to the metropolitan peripheries. In some cases, people were moved 70km away from their original location. Travel time has increased according to the removal map built by Faulhaber based on data from the Rio de Janeiro City's Housing Secretariat.

### Removals in the city of Rio de Janeiro

Source: Faulhaber based on SMH data.



Urban mobility in Brazil has traditionally focused on prioritizing privately-owned vehicles, thus giving a scenario of widespread violence.

The average traveltime in São Paulo was 2h46' in September 2014<sup>19</sup>. One third of the population, however, spends over 3 hours commuting. In other words, a significant share of one's life is spent in some kind of transportation. It is obvious that the situation is always worse on overcrowded buses or trains, but it also affects the luxury cars. Stress, anxiety

<sup>16</sup> 62% of the funding for the campaigns of city councilors running for office in São Paulo came from the construction and/or real estate sector. Data retrieved from the website "Arquitetura da Gentrificação", <http://reporterbrasil.org.br/gentrificacao/>.

<sup>17</sup> See my paper in Latin American Perspectives, forthcoming.

<sup>18</sup> See PhD dissertation entitled *O boom imobiliário na metrópole paulistana: o avanço do mercado formal sobre a periferia e a nova cartografia da segregação socioespacial* [The real estate boom in São Paulo: the advances of the formal market on the periphery and the new cartography of social and spatial segregation] by Letícia Sígolo, FAU USP, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Rede Nossa São Paulo/IBOPE 2014

disorders, depression are conditions that affect 29.6% of the São Paulo population according to research carried out by the Center for Psychiatric Epidemiology at the University of São Paulo<sup>20</sup>. Among the cities of the 24 countries surveyed, São Paulo is the one with the lowest level of emotional health, and a significant share of the resulting conditions is attributed to traffic.

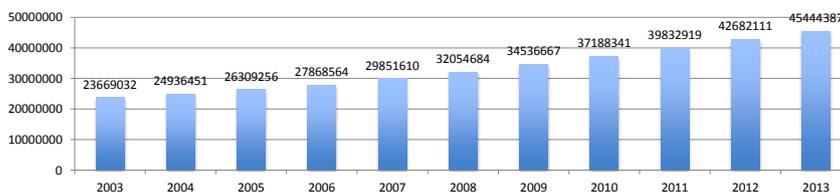
Moreover, high air pollution levels have been affecting life expectancy in the city as shown in studies done at the Health and Sustainability Institute. Pollution is decreasing in 1.5 years the life expectancy of the population, and increasing the demand for emergency rooms and hospital admissions of children and the elderly. There is also an increase in the number of coronary heart disease<sup>21</sup>. Large and mid-sized cities are experiencing traffic congestion due to the avalanche of cars taking over the streets as a result of the subsidies given by the federal government. State and local governments, in turn, essentially only invest in road interventions, blatantly going against what is established in the Master Plans, which invariably prioritize public transport<sup>22</sup>.

The number of cars has increased from a little over 23.6 million in 2003 to 45.4 million in 2013. This means that the amount of cars has almost doubled.

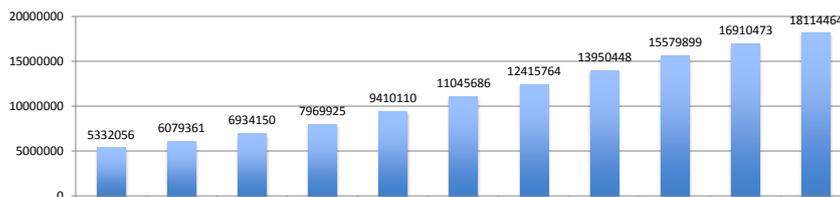
### Brazil's car and motorcycle fleet (2003-2013)

Source: Annual report of the National Federation of Automotive Vehicle Distribution

#### Car fleet



#### Motorcycle fleet



Motorcycles were the way found to dodge congestion and enable speedy deliveries. They are essential for the city to operate. The number of motorcycles in the same period more than tripled. Only rarely do couriers respect traffic laws because being fast is their competitive advantage. The number of motorcycles has grown much more than the number of cars in the

<sup>20</sup> Center for Psychiatric Epidemiology at the University of São Paulo (USP) [http://ipqhc.org.br/pag\\_detalhe.php?categ=Pesquisa&id=262](http://ipqhc.org.br/pag_detalhe.php?categ=Pesquisa&id=262)

<sup>21</sup> The Health and Sustainability Institute at [www.saudeesustentabilidade.org.br](http://www.saudeesustentabilidade.org.br)

<sup>22</sup> The enlargement of the Marginal Tietê expressway in São Paulo in 2011 is one of the many examples of urban interventions that do not comply with the city's Master Plan.

10-year period mentioned above. As a consequence, the death rates of motorcyclists have grown proportionally higher according to the Violence Map on traffic accidents<sup>23</sup>. In 2011 alone, more than 43,000 people died as a result of traffic accidents in Brazilian cities.

Despite the significant increase in privately owned means of transportation, an ANTP - National Association for Public Transportation – report, comparing mobility conditions between 2003 and 2012, showed that in 2012 approximately 80% of trips were made on public transport (49%) or non-motorized transport (walking or cycling: 29%). This year only 22% of trips used individual private means of transportation<sup>24</sup>.

Individual private vehicles are responsible for 60% of gas emissions and 72% of energy expenditure measured in TOE (Tonne of Oil Equivalent), states the ANTP report. Regarding the costs of air pollution and traffic accidents, ANTP 2010 figures show that out of a total of BRL 17 billion spent, approximately 80% goes to individual private means of transportation.

The data demonstrate the battle waged between capital and labor in the urban environment and also by means of its production. Automakers, real estate capital, and housing and heavy construction (infrastructure) industries have taken over Brazilian cities and have provided private financing of election campaigns. The route taken by the cities clashes with Master Plans and federal laws which establish guidelines to ensure the social function of property and to prioritize public transportation. At the exact time when the Brazilian government resumes investments in public policies, after almost 30 years of low amounts of investment, cities face an increasingly deeper crisis.

It is always important to remember that the jurisdiction over the use and occupation of land as well as over transportation and sanitation policies, is municipal. In the case of the management of metropolitan areas, the 1988 Constitution assigns jurisdiction to the state level. Therefore, while at the city level the Master Plans have never left the paper, at the metropolitan level what we have are unruly metropolises that completely lack any ability to articulate themselves<sup>25</sup>.

#### FALL AND RISE OF URBAN STRUGGLE

The three strands that fueled the advance of the urban reform proposal which achieved a new legal and institutional framework started showing a certain lack of ability to continue to promoting social change as of the late 1990s. They are:

- The critical and academic production that started building specialized knowledge on Brazilian cities - as part of the peripheral capitalist universe – focusing mainly on studying the precarious conditions of reproduction of the labor force earning low wages;

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<sup>23</sup>[http://www.google.com.br/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB0QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mapadaviolencia.org.br%2Fpdf2013%2Fmapa2013\\_transito.pdf&ei=u-AiVJGvK4LoggTogoHoAQ&usg=AFQjCNG7yCrikaK9z4ptyXe8HV87kjqA6Q](http://www.google.com.br/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB0QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mapadaviolencia.org.br%2Fpdf2013%2Fmapa2013_transito.pdf&ei=u-AiVJGvK4LoggTogoHoAQ&usg=AFQjCNG7yCrikaK9z4ptyXe8HV87kjqA6Q)

<sup>24</sup> 2003/2012 Comparative Report – ANPT Information System on Urban Mobility – July/2014. The survey was carried out in cities that in 2003 had a population of 60 thousand or more (438 municipalities). <http://www.antp.org.br/website/biblioteca/search.asp>

<sup>25</sup> See Maricato, E. “Metrópoles desgovernadas”. Estudos Avançados, São Paulo, no. 25, p. 7-22, 2011.

- The social movement that brought together several trade union, professional, technical, and popular forces – the Urban Reform movement – and grew during the fight against the military dictatorship;
- The new kinds of local governments - democratic and participatory city halls – which inaugurated a participation-based, transparent and ethical way of managing cities as of the 1980s.

In the case of the social movements that built the Urban Reform proposal, their former vitality and originality were gradually lost as they lost their independence and were swallowed by the institutional apparatus<sup>26</sup>. Despite the fact that over 10,000 participatory councils at municipal, state and federal levels, were created, and despite public investments being made, Brazilian cities came to a standstill, mostly due to the maintenance of a speculative real-estate/ land pattern which creates outcasts and segregates<sup>27</sup>. Improving wages and increasing consumption will not solve urban problems that depend on land reform and on public services. Distribution of income does not suffice to democratize the right to the city.

For anyone looking into life in some Brazilian cities, a reaction to the existing malaise could have been predicted<sup>28</sup>. More than one million people took to the streets in June 2013 and since then sparse mobilizations and protests have taken place<sup>29</sup>.

The first half of 2014 was busy with demonstrations against the over-the-roof costs of the urban interventions for the FIFA World Cup funded by the Brazilian government. The city of Rio de Janeiro is still being prepared for the 2016 Olympics.

As usual, what tends to happen when these mega events take place in any one country is that a tsunami of international capital takes over the national governments and the cities undergo rampant speculation which is followed by gentrification, as shown in the map above. The people affected by the urban interventions of these mega sporting events formed a People's Committee for the Cup and the Olympics. They set up a website and promoted frequent mobilizations throughout Brazil<sup>30</sup>. In September this year, an action for repossession in downtown São Paulo caused 200 families to be evicted from a building that sat empty for 10 years until it was occupied six months before. The city center became a war zone: buses were set on fire, shops were looted, and arrests were made. Among the occupiers arrested were a

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<sup>26</sup> The PT sought to implement changes by avoiding conflict according to André Singer in *Os sentidos do lulismo*. São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2013. Therefore, we can say that the PT unpoliticized political struggles by attempting to enter into agreements that pleased all the parties involved. This was possible while the economy was growing.

<sup>27</sup> See Erminia Maricato, *O impasse da política urbana no Brasil*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Because of the perplexity I noticed during talks given in many capitals, in March 2013, two months before the protests, I wrote an article entitled *Cidades no Brasil: sair da perplexidade e passar à ação* (Cities in Brazil: leaving perplexity and moving towards action). Available at <http://www.cartamaior.com.br/?/Editoria/Politica/Cidades-no-Brasil-sair-da-perplexidade-e-passar-a-acao/4/27330>

<sup>29</sup> See the book *Movimentos Sociais na era global* by Maria da Gloria Gohn, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> The people affected by the urban interventions for the 2014 FIFA Cup and the 2016 Olympics set up a portal [http://www.portalpopulardacopa.org.br/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=387&Itemid=293](http://www.portalpopulardacopa.org.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=387&Itemid=293)

number of elderly citizens, children and even pregnant women. There are 20 legal actions for repossession pending concerning buildings in this area of the city. There are currently around 60 formerly empty buildings being occupied in the old city center. These occupations challenge the courts that insist on ignoring the legal advances and on treating the situation as a police matter and not as a social problem. Four social movements promote and organize the occupation initiative in downtown São Paulo.

The MTST – the Homeless Workers Movement, which has many former MST - Landless Workers' Movement – members, has promoted events throughout the year. In one of their actions activists occupied the headquarters of well known construction companies. In two other events other issues were targeted by the protests: first, the poor quality and the high cost of cell phone services and second, the water shortage caused by a severe drought due to the mismanagement of the city's water supply by the state government.

In the northeastern city of Recife, an occupation is trying to put to a halt a real estate project with twelve towers of up to 41 floors each being built in the city's old town pier. These buildings will completely tarnish the old center's scenario made up of historic colonial houses. The support of artists gives visibility and strength to this struggle, which has been named Occupy Estelita<sup>31</sup>.

Pressures in favor of or contrary to Master Plans that were being voted at City Councils were the cause of conflicts involving the police. In January 2014, it was the turn of the southern city of Florianópolis, where protesters forced their way into the town hall to stop the vote on the Master Plan. In July of the same year, social movements surrounded the building of the São Paulo city legislature to press for the unamended approval of the version of the Master Plan that was discussed democratically.

There is a clear generational feature in new movements even though many of the activists from the earlier decades are still present<sup>32</sup>. There are groups of young people organized around mobility, housing, democratic communication (since the major media entities behave like a political party for the elites). Many young people are organized around culture and art in peripheral neighborhoods. Recent urban struggles have brought to the center of the national political agenda the issue of mobility.

We still have not yet reached the urban question or the real estate factor which is at its core. This is a longer fight, especially if we consider the role played by land and real estate in patrimonialism, and the role played by land and real estate as a result of the financialization promoted by the globalized economy.

Everything points to a new political cycle. There are two conflicting scenarios at hand: increasing exclusion and social rights, or repeating another chapter of "conservative modernization". One of the aspects of this conflicting scenario is the clash between the new legal framework assigning urban rights to everyone, and a reality in which rights are granted

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<sup>31</sup> On Occupy Estelita, see "Ocupe Estelita: o movimento de uma cidade contra as empreiteiras" by Luiz Carlos Pinto, Carta Maior, junho de 2014.

<sup>32</sup> *Levante Popular da Juventude, Intervenções, Consulta Popular, Movimento Passe Livre*, are some of these new organizations.

only to a few. This discrepancy between the letter of the law and the enforcement of the law is part of the history of Brazil. It turns out that the current legal framework dealing with cities – the 1988 Constitution, the City Statute, etc – was born from social struggles. And for the birth of a new Brazil we have to face the urban question at the center of the social struggles.

São Paulo, October 2014.

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