
11. Brazil's urban social movements and urban transformations in perspective

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INTRODUCTION: CLAIMING URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS IN BRAZIL

A large body of literature has focused on urban social movements in Brazil, especially those that emerged in the late 1970s as signs that the country's 20-year dictatorship had begun to wane (Assies 1994; Jacobi 1987). Indeed, urban social movements are a key voice in demanding participation and attention to popular needs (Mainwaring 1987), even in a context of inequality and a deepened urban crisis (Maricato and Colosso 2021). Urban social movements' struggle for important rights and material improvements call attention to new issues, and prompt changes in the discourse and actions of other political actors. Despite some retraction in recent years, Brazil's experience reinforces the importance of urban social movements in achieving improved conditions in cities. These movements are therefore pivotal in understanding urban transformations in applying a right to the city. Given this focus, I situate this chapter within debates on urban social movements around the world, and struggles over the right to the city (Domaradzka 2018; Mayer 2012). For French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, the city was an *oeuvre* involving heterogeneous ideas among diverse people struggling over the shape of their city (Mitchell 2003). As Lefebvre noted, "the right to the city, complemented by the right to difference and the right to information, should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (*citadin*) and user of multiple services" (Kofman and Lebas 1996: 34).

In Brazil, although the most notable moments for urban social movements occurred in the 1980s, their roots were established during the authoritarian past, a context of inequality and unequal citizenship rights, and strongly embedded in a colonial legacy of slavery and the presence of landed oligarchies persisting into the twentieth century (Sales 1994). Considerable scholarship shows that political culture in Brazil has been dominated by authoritarian relationships of dependence and clientelism – or *troca de favores* (exchange of favours) – in national life and politics, exemplified by the concession of privileges from those with power to those without (Gay 1998). In a condition characterized by an absence of citizenship, *cidadania concedida* (citizenship by concession) was negotiated through power relations distinguished by a focus on rule and submission (Sales 1994). Under Getúlio Vargas' long dictatorship between 1930 and 1945, *cidadania regulada*, or regulated citizenship, referred to an exclusionary form of citizenship (Santos 1979), ambiguous given its combination of

recognition of workers' social rights and state control over workers, thus promoting an urban 'underclass' (Fischer 2008).¹

Despite a long history of social movements, those of the early 1980s left a mark on the country's urban policy and practice. As Brazil moved towards redemocratization, formally returning to democracy in 1985, an urban reform movement emerged in the early 1980s based on criticisms of the country's unsuccessful technocratic planning model (Ribeiro and Santos Junior 2001). The National Movement for Urban Reform (*Movimento Nacional pela Reforma Urbana*, MNRU) developed an urban reform proposal during the 1987–1988 Constituent Assembly (*Assembléia Constituinte*), charged with crafting a new Constitution in a "battle ... for the democratic imagination of the Constitutional Assembly ... elected by direct vote" (Holston 2008: 250). Given the inclusion of popular amendments, the Constituent Assembly involved considerable participation (Bassul 2005). One of these – the amendment on urban reform – defined a sphere of urban rights linked to the role of the state, a notion of democracy through participatory urban management, and a 'social ethic' that politicized the discussion, thus formulating a platform for urban social movements around access to the city as rights of all inhabitants (Saule Junior and Uzzo 2010: 261). Such ideas also helped to inspire a rights and legal emphasis in the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT), a centre-left political party which emerged in 1980 during redemocratization, with deep connections to trade unions and urban social movements.

Ultimately, the MNRU was key in approving a 'citizens' Constitution in 1988 including two articles on urban policy, reaffirming the social function of property, or the obligation for land uses contributing to the common good (Friendly 2020; Ondetti 2016). Later, the movement became known as the National Forum on Urban Reform (FNUR), and was crucial in promulgating the 2001 law known as the Statute of the City (*Estatuto da Cidade*) to improve conditions in Brazilian cities (Fernandes 2011; Friendly 2013), despite an 11-year battle over the urban policy contents of the law. Despite these achievements, a general sense that "Brazil's recent political-economic malaise has challenged confidence in radical, rights-based programmes for overcoming spatial segregation and social exclusion" prevails, prompting a reconsideration of such debates, specifically for urban social movements (Friendly and Stiphany 2019: 272).

This chapter is reflective and exploratory, based on the author's extensive research on the right to the city, urban policy, planning, and social movements in urban Brazil across a range of contexts (Friendly 2013, 2017, 2020, 2022). The material is based on a longstanding engagement with these ideas, movements, actors, and policies in Brazil. Although the chapter does not follow an historical trajectory, for clarity, Figure 11.1 shows a timeline of key moments of Brazil's urban social movements. In the following sections, I consider Brazil's urban social movements in perspective, showing three *key processes* involved in such debates. These key processes are: (1) the importance of debates on the right to the city and a rights and legal emphasis among these movements; (2) growing challenges of Brazil's urban reform project; and (3) recent struggles reflecting ideas of insurgent planning. Table 11.1 summa-

rizes the key processes identified in this chapter within debates on Brazil's urban social movements. Based on a discussion of these key processes, in the conclusion, I highlight paradoxes framing Brazil's trajectory of urban transformations. Indeed, the Brazilian case is noteworthy due to a disjuncture between progressive urban policies claiming the right to the city and the social function of property, combined with the persistent reality of urban inequality and social exclusion. Nonetheless, Brazil's extensive experience over the past decades provides lessons for the Global South about how a radical, rights-based approach to urban policy may become institutionalized, despite obstacles challenging this progress over the past 30 years.

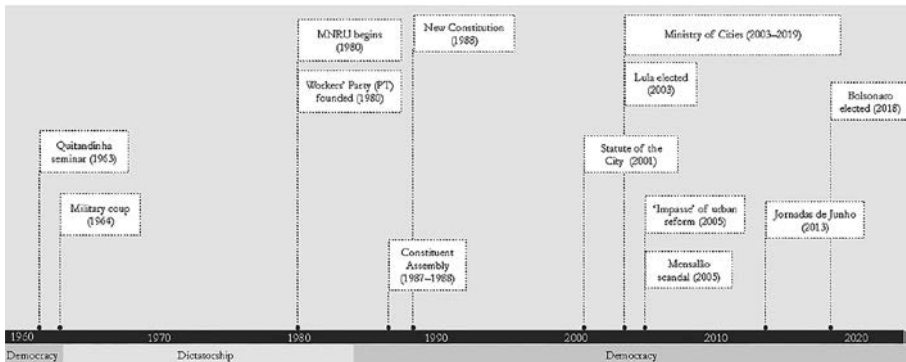


Figure 11.1 *Timeline of Brazil's urban social movements*

BRAZIL'S 'RIGHTS TURN'

In Brazil, a rights-based approach has been influential among urban social movements. Indeed, the transformations accompanying Brazil's democratic transition were fuelled by social movements of the 1980s around claims for full citizenship, "a radical rights-based project" following the dictatorship (Klink and Denaldi 2016: 404). Needs-based justifications of earlier years lost traction, as a change occurred among urban social movements; thus, "residents began to understand their social needs as rights of citizenship and to generate rights-based arguments to justify their demands" (Holston 2008: 240). Popular mobilization through organized social movements in the 1980s was unlike anything that Brazil had experienced before. These movements engendered a new politics of citizenship based on a "right to have rights", allowing them to claim previously defined rights, and define what constitutes rights through political struggles (Dagnino 2005: 153). For Jacobi (1987), the identity of these movements emerged from the collective construction of rights, directly related to the expansion of citizenship spaces. The push for democracy by social movements solidified into claims for full citizenship, evolving into a broad-based discourse framed by social justice and rights-based claims against infringements of the dictatorship (Dagnino 2005). Indeed, with a growing arena for debate, "there was

Table 11.1 Key processes in debates on urban social movements in Brazil

Key process	Goal	Theoretical inspiration	Actors
Rights and legal emphasis	Claims for full citizenship based on a 'right to have rights' starting in the early 1980s.	Inspired primarily by ideas on the right to the city by Henri Lefebvre from the late 1960s, but also by Manuel Castells' work on the urban question and David Harvey's work on social justice and the city.	Organized urban social movements.
Struggles for urban reform	Legal-political reform asserting citizenship rights, focused on redefining property rights, a new relationship between the state and society, and extending citizenship to urban social rights.	Inspired specifically by the seminars known as 'Quitandinha' in 1963, defending social justice principles in cities, as well as the right to the city.	Led by the MNRU (included popular movements, academics, NGOs, and professionals), and was later known as the FNRU.
Instances of insurgent planning	Non-official insurgent struggles for political and social rights and mobilizations by communities contesting differentiated citizenship, and opposing the state.	Inspired by James Holston's work on insurgent citizenship in Brasília of the 1980s and expanded by others in the planning world such as Faranak Miraftab, and drawing on rights-based debates.	Collectively organized groups and urban activists, such as the Jornadas de Junho protests in 2013.

a growth in awareness of the concept of citizenship and its constituent rights. This led emerging movements to adopt a discourse that posited needs as social rights" (Earle 2017: 109). The advent of a discourse of citizenship rights by the urban poor is thus a key outcome of these movements (Jacobi 1987; Sader 1988). In this period, following the title of Sader's (1988) book, 'new characters' came onto the scene as new subjects of their own history (Tavolari 2020).

These movements became recognized as new forces on the political 'scene', gaining a new political dimension as the state became the addressee of these claims, contributing to a redefined state–society relationship. As Sader (1988) noted, the politicization of demands and conscientization of these movements illustrated a change, as these movements become aware of their agency and capacity to change the status quo. Such rights-based arguments "constituted their proponents as bearers of the right to rights and as worthy of that distinction as any other class of citizen" (Holston 2008: 241). Rather than making deals with politicians to improve their livelihoods, the poor had the right to adequate urban services, supported by the development of a rhetoric among these movements around organizational autonomy (Jacobi 1987).²

In this context, the idea of the right to the city “found fertile ground in Latin America”, specifically in Brazil, long before the Statute’s approval (Klink and Denaldi 2016; Omena de Melo 2017; Tavolari 2020: 477). Lefebvre’s notion of the right to the city as a process and struggle in the realm of everyday life provided considerable resonance to Brazil’s social movements between the late 1960s and early 1980s (Friendly 2020; Huchzermeyer 2018). Lefebvre’s writings and even visits to Brazil in the early 1970s thus inspired a rights and legal focus in Brazilian social movements (Huchzermeyer 2019).³ For example, a passage from Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*, published two years after his visit to Brazil, notes that:

The vast shantytowns of Latin America (favelas, barrios, ranchos) manifest a social life far more intense than the bourgeois districts of the cities. This social life is transposed onto the level of urban morphology but it only survives inasmuch as it fights in self-defence and goes on the attack in the course of class struggle in its modern forms. Their poverty notwithstanding, these districts sometimes so effectively order their space – houses, walls, public spaces – as to elicit a nervous admiration. (Lefebvre 1991: 373–374)

Brazil’s movement around legal reform has been based on two pillars of the right to the city proposed by Lefebvre: the right to habitation, and the right to participation (Fernandes 2007). The spread of rights-based ideas began during the dictatorship, when ideas about law, justice, and democracy carried an enhanced social weight (Tavolari 2020). In addition to Lefebvre, Holston (2008) highlights Castells’ (1977) work on the urban question and grassroots movements, and Harvey’s (2003) work on social justice and the city in understanding Brazil’s rights discourse. These ideas “captivated the imaginations of planners, architects, lawyers and social scientists, who promoted the urban social movements and who eventually became leaders of NGOs and local government” (Holston 2008: 349).

In addition, Tavolari (2020: 477) notes that rights-based ideas spread in part due to links forged between intellectuals and urban social movements, and mediation carried out by activist intellectuals through which “the movements began to learn of, and to claim, the right to the city”. Lefebvre’s work in Brazil became known in academic circles through the notion of ‘everyday life’, influenced by Marxist thought of the time, and emerging movements which made the issue of everyday life key for their political demands (Martins 1997). These ideas also spread due to academics at the University of São Paulo’s Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism who read Marx’s *Capital*, focusing on land rent (Arantes 2009; Tavolari 2020). Sociologist José de Souza Martins held seminars on Lefebvre’s work in these years, and is believed to have introduced Lefebvre’s work in Brazil (Machado 2008; Stanek 2011). In this context:

the study of Marx provided the necessary mediation for a reading of contemporary authors in the Marxist tradition, among them Lefebvre. Accordingly, his ideas on urban matters became a central issue only to the extent that researchers in geography, architecture and urbanism began to take an interest in reading about them. (Tavolari 2020: 478)

Considerable work during the 1980s highlighted broad debates on the right to the city (Jacobi 1986; Maricato 1985). As Tavorari (2020: 479) notes – and this is key to understanding how and why these ideas were taken up by urban social movements – these texts of the mid-1980s are “intervention-oriented, using language directed to a broad readership comprising mainly the social movements themselves”.

Key within this ‘rights’ turn, Holston (2008) uses the term *insurgent citizenship* to explain how the poor, driven by rights-based arguments, established an alternative citizenship approach by destabilizing entrenched social inequalities. For Holston (2008: 34) “insurgency describes a process that is an acting counter, a counterpolitics, that destabilizes the present and renders it fragile, defamiliarizing the coherence with which it usually presents itself ... It bubbles up from the past in places where present circumstances seem propitious for an irruption”. Indeed, the circumstances establishing the context of inequality in Brazil – limited access to political rights and land, residential illegality, and the misuse of law – helped to mobilize residents of urban peripheries. In Brazil’s democratic transition, insurgent citizens in Brazil’s autoconstructed (self-built) peripheries of large cities began contesting differentiated citizenship, claiming their rights to urban services and the legal ownership of property. Thus, the city constituted both the context of citizenship struggles and the substance of these struggles. Referring to how insurgency is reflected in Brazil, Earle (2017) shows that mobilization among some of Brazil’s poorest populations is a demand for equality, achieved through constitutional rights. Earle (2017) thus uses the term ‘transgressive citizenship’, showing how movements advance, defend, and implement a right to the city by opposing the state through civil disobedience and a politics of rights. Moreover, this rights-based focus was key to Brazil’s urban reform movement, which I turn to in the next section. In the following section, I return to debates on insurgent planning, constituting a final key process to understand Brazil’s urban social movements in perspective.

A LUTA PELA REFORMA URBANA

In the context of the base reforms (*reformas de base*) mobilizations of the early 1960s, progressive architects took up the idea of ‘urban reform’ to solve Brazil’s growing housing challenges.⁴ Two seminars on urban reform, known as ‘Quitandinha’, were held in 1963, resulting in a proposal demanding social justice in cities through a focus on urban planning and the participation of populations in formulating and implementing policies (Bassul 2005). While urban development and planning were identified through centralized planning and intervention to ensure access to land and housing for low-income populations, the 1964 military dictatorship interrupted such efforts.

Ultimately, urban reform returned to the agenda 20 years later, connected to broader trends of democratization. Founded in the early 1980s, the MNRU began developing an urban reform proposal within the context of Brazil’s Constituent Assembly, uniting demands defending the right to the city (Santos Junior 1996).

Three strategies were envisioned to produce urban transformations: redefining property rights through the social function of property; new relationships between the state and society; and extending citizenship to urban social rights (Grazia 2003; Ribeiro 1994). Urban reform thus referred to structural reforms with a spatial dimension, focusing on reforming the institutions regulating urban space to achieve social justice, and combined land policy, community upgrading, and participatory planning (Santos Junior 1996; Souza 2005). Therefore, actors in the MNRU understood that urban reform is only possible with legal-political reform asserting new citizenship rights (Fernandes 2007). As Silva (1991: 32) notes, the MNRU involved “the emergence of new forms of political struggle, where the issue of creating new citizenship rights and the search for greater social justice takes place through new relationships between social movements and the legal-institutional plan”. The story of the MNRU – an intellectual and political articulation of popular movements, academics, NGOs, and professionals, including architects, engineers and lawyers sharing urban reform ideals – is therefore a history of struggle uniting diverse social actors (Santos Junior 1996; Saule Junior and Uzzo 2010).

The MNRU emerged in Rio de Janeiro, where technical organizations, unions, popular movements and institutions providing advisory functions came together around urban issues (Ribeiro 1994). Galvanized by the Plenary for Popular Participation in the Constituent Assembly, in 1985, this group formalized what later became an urban reform platform. As the MNRU was unlike traditional mass movements, Silva (1991: 33) calls it a “discontinuous and fragmented movement” of “national expression” that “expresses itself in extremely different forms of popular participation by the various cities in the country, sometimes in an articulated way, or simply disarticulated as a movement”. For Avritzer (2010), while the MNRU’s composition changed over time, its success resulted from its inclusion of professional associations, its concentration on one issue, and the intensity of actions bolstering this agenda. Incorporating popular movements fighting for land and housing since the 1970s, Maricato (cited in Silva 1991: 13) notes that:

The popular amendment for urban reform is a platform resulting from the social forces that participated in its elaboration ... Its formation would be unfeasible if it were not preceded by a certain accumulation of propositions and reflections, carried out by entities linked to urban struggles: *mutuários*, *inquilinos*, *posseiros*, *favelados*, architects, geographers, engineers, lawyers, etc.

Following the 1988 Constitution, the MNRU focused on building regional and local forums to consolidate its reach (Ribeiro 1994). The movement became involved in allied local governments such as those of the PT – which regarded itself as an exponent of social movements – to implement participatory tools defended by the MNRU (Serafim 2012). Applying popular mobilization, pressure, and negotiation, the MNRU conceived of urban planning as a ‘pact’ forged in a participatory process including those previously excluded, which became widely accepted by social movements (Bonduki 2017). A national seminar on urban reform was held in 1988,

later known as the first 'National Forum on Urban Reform' (*Fórum Nacional de Reforma Urbana*, FNRU). Thus, a new moment emerged for the movement, from then on, called the FNRU. It thus became "an articulator of urban actors in Brazil", pressing Congress to regulate the Constitution's urban policy articles, including – later – approving a national urban development law (Grazia 2003: 56; Saule Junior and Uzzo 2010).

In the late 1980s, some FNRU members entered municipal governments, especially those of the PT, a common strategy for social movements to advance their goals. Ties between social movement actors within and outside the state allowed for the creative use of historical traditions of state–society interactions, fostering new forms of dialogue (Abers et al. 2014). By 2002, the number of PT-administered cities expanded considerably, many applying urban reform proposals, thus becoming 'laboratories' of urban reform. Moreover, the urban reform principles opened space for civil society participation in municipal governments through plebiscites, referendums, public hearings, councils, conferences, and participation in municipal master plans (Abers et al. 2014). Thus, even before approval of the Statute in 2001, the FNRU acted at the municipal and state levels, pressing for the inclusion of urban reform principles and stimulating collective action (Serafim 2012; Silva 2002). For key FNRU members, these practices represented achievements towards universalizing the right to the city through the collective construction of laws, policies, programmes and social practices (Grazia 2003).

After Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva (PT) assumed office in 2003, key FNRU members joined the Ministry of Cities, the federal body charged with urban issues, and a longstanding FNRU demand conceived as a space to construct a national urban policy based on urban reform principles. As Maricato (2020: 17) recounts, the Ministry of Cities "was created on the day Lula took office ... [it] demonstrated his government's reception of urban social movements that formed that base of the PT".⁵ Under Lula, formal participatory venues were strengthened, resulting in increased interactions between social movement actors and government representatives (Abers et al. 2014). While these ties were reinforced when PT assumed power nationally, the relationships had been forged from collective action starting in the 1980s.

As critical scholars noted, an 'impasse' and fragmentation of urban reform began by 2005, informed by alliances between leftist and conservative forces to prioritize 'governance' in Congress, and more indirectly, the dominance of capital in producing urban space (Klink and Denaldi 2016; Maricato 2014, 2020). Following the *mensalão* scandal in 2005 which implicated key members of Lula's administration in corruption, a reconfiguration of power in the National Congress resulted in a transfer of control of the Ministry of Cities to the conservative Partido Progressista (PP). FNRU members in the Ministry were replaced by those unconnected to urban reform, illustrating a precarious balance between the state and civil society (Serafim 2012). In this period, Serafim (2012) notes how the FNRU often took paid trips to Brasília, facilitating connections to other organizations, yet also a growing dependence of the FNRU on the Ministry, a strategy used to mitigate conflicts between movements and the Ministry's leadership. Thus, Maricato (2014: 10) highlights "the loss of offen-

siveness and fragmentation of social movements gathered under the banner of urban reform” and the “loss of the centrality of the urban land issue” by the 1990s, which was accentuated during the Lula government. As the FNRU became institutionalized, it abandoned its anti-capitalist struggle as the movements “gradually became entangled and *fetishized*” (Klink and Denaldi 2016: 404). Ultimately, a subtle shift occurred in:

the emphasis on autonomous and community-driven praxis of Brazilian social movements and practitioners – aimed at the right to land, housing and the city as a collective production and appropriation – to a more professionalized practice of urban reform, which was embedded in state-mediated master-planning and land-market instruments aimed at the social function of individual private property. (Klink and Denaldi 2016: 404)

Beyond considerable critiques of urban reform from a policy perspective, the rise of neoliberalism in Brazil – beginning even in the late 1980s – led to a “perverse convergence” between urban reform and neoliberal agendas, influencing both urban policies and movements in contradictory ways (Rolnik 2013b: 56). This was further reinforced with the 2018 election of right-wing Jair Bolsonaro in a process of regression and ‘de-democratization’, including the extinction of the Ministry of Cities in 2019 (Bianchi et al. 2021). While the fragmentation of the urban reform agenda is worrying, new avenues for critical action have emerged, led by urban activists as instances of insurgent planning.

INSTANCES OF INSURGENT PLANNING

A city only exists for those who move around it. And getting around means being able to have access to quality public transport that does not create barriers to locomotion. But it also means being able to move around the city on foot to protest for rights. A decree cannot impede the right to the city. (Movimento Passe Livre 2013)

In recent years, insurgent planning has taken on new meaning as a mode of planning, especially in Brazil (Freitas 2019; Friendly 2022). Influenced considerably by the Brazilian experience, the idea gained recognition through Holston’s (1989) work on insurgent citizenship. As Miraftab (2009) has noted in characterizing the idea, insurgent planning is counter-hegemonic by unsettling the normalized order, but also transgressive and imaginative, meaning that it transgresses time and place, locating historical memory and transnational consciousness as the focus. Holston’s (2008) ongoing work in this area shows that while differentiated citizenship produces inequalities, vulnerabilities and destabilizations, it also results in the means to challenge them through insurgence. As Freitas (2019: 286) notes referring to applying the right to the city agenda in the case of Fortaleza, “in response to states’ failure to fulfil the promises of substantive inclusion, the non-official, insurgent, and conflictual practices of collectively organized groups have been capable of shifting city-building process balance toward public interest in a myriad of ways”.

In the remainder of this section, I highlight the example of the 2013 *Jornadas de Junho* protests, showing how people claimed their rights to the city through insurgent planning (Friendly 2017; Vicino and Fahlberg 2017). In June 2013, the world watched in surprise as Brazilian cities erupted in protest, first in São Paulo, and then across Brazil. More than 2 million Brazilians joined in, protesting socio-economic and political conditions, demanding reforms from various public policies. The protests were initially led by the Movimento Passe Livre (Free Pass Movement, MPL), an autonomous apolitical movement supporting public transportation since the mid-2000s, demanding reversal of a bus fare increase of 20 cents. Poor transportation was thus a key focus, a “symbol of segregation and injustice that the working classes suffer through in the day-to-day” (Gomes and Maheirie 2011: 361). Through continued protests, the police responded with growing brutality. Following the decision to reduce bus fares in Rio and São Paulo, social media and the mainstream media effectively called people to protest, supporting the multiplication and deradicalization of the demands (Saad-Filho 2013). Thereafter, demands for transportation coalesced into other issues, including health, education, public spending on the upcoming World Cup, corruption, limited democracy, and a lack of participation. Dissatisfaction and resistance movements had been spreading in urban areas for decades, marking a shift in collective action across Brazil (Holston 2014). As Caldeira (2013) notes:

Those who had been articulating new imaginaries and a deep indignation in alternative spaces for quite a while finally arrived to the streets and made sure to fix on the others the feelings of surprise ... Those who did not realize what was going on were the political parties that have not listened to them, the governments that have disrespected them continuously, and the middle classes that arrived only late to the streets and to the indignation.

Challenging the “existing emptied out top-down spaces of participation”, the protests highlighted what type of city was desired (Braathen et al. 2016: 266). Echoing ongoing demands of urban social movements, the protests highlighted demands for democracy and participation in decisions about public policies, including demands for basic social rights and reminders of forgotten promises (Rolnik 2013a). The protests expressed frustration with the gap between promises and results, and unfulfilled promises emerging from Brazilian cities’ material conditions, making the protests – overall – about the ‘urban question’ (Fernandes 2013; Friendly 2017). Compounding Brazil’s challenging urban situation, the adoption of neoliberalism deepened issues of exclusionary urban development, resulting in profound repercussions in urban areas (Maricato 2014). Indeed, the MPL (2013: 13) noted that:

like a ghost that haunts cities, leaving marks on the living space and memory, popular uprisings over transportation have challenged Brazilian metropolises since their formation. [The protests] are a well-deserved expression of rage against a system completely delivered to the logic of the commodity.

As a result, the protests’ urban dimension situates the city as a locale of insurgence where claims to rights are made, struggles over citizenship transpire, and city dwell-

ers participate in shaping social relations. Lefebvre's (1996: 158) notion of such insurgencies as "a cry and a demand" to transform urban spaces and ways of living thus resonates with broad demands in Brazil, framed by a rights discourse through a right to better conditions (Vicino and Fahlberg 2017). As Harvey (2012: xiii) notes, the right to the city "rises up from the streets, out from the neighborhoods, as a cry for help and sustenance by oppressed peoples in desperate times". Due to the 2013 protests in Brazil and other places, the critical potential of the right to the city became "stronger than ever", and many argued "that the term had come to unify the left and that attentions should be turned to the movements that were occupying streets and squares" (Tavolari 2020: 487) (Figure 11.2). In Salvador, for example, a letter presenting claims by MPL noted that, "we are fighting for a life without turnstiles, in which citizens have the universal right to the city and to public services" (Nascimento 2013).⁶ The protests later became more amorphous involving protesters from various classes, groups, and multiple voices, illustrating both the changing repertoires and cycles of protest (Alonso and Mische 2017). The continued return to the streets, such as protesting Bolsonaro's approach to dealing with Covid-19 in 2021, highlights the sustained relevancy of such actions.



Source: Photo by Mídia Ninja.

Figure 11.2 Occupation of the Congresso Nacional, Brasília, 17 June 2013

Cities thus play a key role as the locale of insurgent demands for political and social rights (Harvey 2003, 2009; Mitchell 2003). Moreover, in a moment when democrati-

zation seems to be under threat in Brazil, as Fischer (2021: 217) notes, it is essential “to critically examine a form of insurgency that entwines so readily with Brazil’s deep histories of inequality”. While ongoing protests have revealed the deeply paradoxical nature of Brazil’s democracy (Hagopian 2011, 2016), such contradictions are also key to understanding urban transformations in Brazil, which I turn to in the final section.

PARADOXES AND THE PROMISE OF URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS

In this chapter, I explore Brazil’s urban social movements, highlighting three key processes: (1) a rights and legal emphasis among these movements; (2) considerable challenges to Brazil’s urban reform project; and (3) struggles involving insurgent planning. Yet a number of paradoxes, impasses and contradictions continue to plague Brazilian democracy, and thus its urban transformations. As Caldeira and Holston (2015: 2011) note, Brazil’s urban reform model “depends on a process of public participation that is required but not binding, that is formal but vague in procedural rules, and that has its clearest policy outcome in municipal laws and related mandates both of which are then susceptible to judicial challenge”. Fischer’s (2008) notion of a ‘poverty of rights’ further highlights the contradiction between the power of progressive law and citizenship, and the inequality, anger, and cynicism driven by a series of economic crises and consistently unequal rights in the country. For inhabitants and their communities in Brazilian cities, the past few years have not resulted in expected gains to life quality, resulting in the persistence of exclusion as an ongoing feature of Brazilian cities. Similarly, as Holston (2008: 271) shows, “Brazilians experience a democratic citizenship that seems simultaneously to erode as it expands, a democracy at times capable and at other times tragically incapable of protecting the citizen’s body and producing a just society”. Holston’s (2008) notion of ‘disjunctive democracy’ thus accounts for contradictory processes as a feature of Brazilian society in which the expansion of citizenship rights is inherently uneven.

Despite obstacles, the endurance of Brazil’s urban social movements over the past decades provides lessons about how to institutionalize a rights-based approach to urban policy. Since the 1980s, Brazil’s experience in institutionalizing the right to the city within urban policy, through urban tools, and within different participatory spaces at a range of scales has provided rich examples for other countries and cities to apply such ideas (Bassul 2005; Fernandes 2011; Friendly 2013). Beyond the legal, institutional and administrative requirements for institutionalizing such an approach, Brazil’s experience illustrates that any kind of change will not occur without widespread and concerted social mobilization on the part of a broad range of actors. Despite considerable obstacles within this process, this model based on the right to the city and the social function of property “could be transferred to other contexts with the recognition that policies, as socio-spatial processes, may actually change as they travel” (Friendly 2013: 173). Yet as Freitas (2017: 953)

observes, there is a need for a more structural understanding of the right to the city “that recognizes the necessity for continual political action in order to hold the state accountable and to keep focus on the factors that produce unevenness”. Such an understanding clearly underscores the role of insurgent planning as a key feature of Brazilian political systems, in addition to the activities of more traditional urban social movements such as those discussed in this chapter. For example, mobilizations by community organizations in favelas during the Covid-19 pandemic highlight how insurgent practices evidence creative responses in the face of crisis (Cruz et al. 2021; Friendly 2022). At a deeper level, this suggests the need to advance critical thinking committed to democracy and the right to the city to recognize the transformative role of urban social movements, especially insurgent actors in producing urban change. Referring to the demonstrations of 2013, Maricato and Colosso (2021: 162) highlight how, even in regressive contexts, collective experiences by new social and political actors act through “everyday policies along with the living forces that make society dynamic, experimenting with new forms of collective action and the declaration of living together”. Ultimately, Brazil’s persistent contradictions cannot be reverted without rethinking the critical role of social movements in cities as transformative change agents.

NOTES

1. However, as Holston (2008) notes, the idea of ‘regulated citizenship’ misconstrues this idea. Thus, Vargas’ use of social rights sustained a nineteenth-century notion of differentiated citizenship in an adapted format to urban industrial society.
2. In the 1950s, popular associations based on neighbourhoods as territorial spaces came to characterize the history of social movements in Brazilian cities. These *sociedades de amigos de barrio* (SABs) functioned through a system of bargaining in which residents claimed urban improvements from local elected officials, while *comunidades eclesiais de base* (CEBs) emerged in the 1960s as neighbourhood movements associated with the progressive branch of the Brazilian Catholic Church.
3. Although Lefebvre did not mention visiting Brazil, he visited Brazil during the 1970s, lecturing and observing changes from rural to urban (Hess 1988; Huchzermeyer 2019; Machado 2008). Lefebvre’s work on a theory of difference was influenced by his “first-hand experience of life in Latin American shantytowns ... This experience evidently leads Lefebvre to treat shantytowns explicitly as struggles against the state” (Huchzermeyer 2019: 472).
4. The base reforms were a set of proposals for structural reform formulated by intellectuals, practitioners, academics, and social and trade union leaders which mobilized Brazilian society on education, health, public administration and culture, and agrarian and urban reform (Bonduki and Koury 2007).
5. An academic and architect, Ermínia Maricato was the technical coordinator of urban development in the Ministry of Cities between 2003 and 2005, during the Lula years.
6. During protests, passengers were encouraged to jump turnstiles to cause people to reflect on their commute and recognize the political in the mundane of everyday life (Friendly 2017). As Gomes and Maheirie (2011: 361) note, the turnstile became a “symbol of segregation and injustice that the working classes suffer through in the day-to-day”.

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