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Building Mistrust: 'Minha Casa Minha Vida' and its Political Effects in Rio de Janeiro

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Considering the recent decrease in Rio de Janeiro working-class voters' support for the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, Workers' Party), this article investigates a largely unexplored factor behind this shift: the influence of the federal housing programme Minha Casa Minha Vida (MCMV, My House, My Life), designed by the PT. It is argued that the programme's features and its intersection with local political junctures have resulted in worsening living conditions for many residents and increasing socio-spatial segregation. Understanding policies as a domain in which people experience politics and shape political subjectivities, the article suggests that the poor implementation of the MCMV has contributed to spreading disillusionment with the PT and politicians at large among Rio de Janeiro's working classes, a shift that made Bolsonaro with his anti-establishment framing a viable option in 2018.

Keywords: housing rights, Jair Bolsonaro, Minha Casa Minha Vida, Rio de Janeiro, slums' displacement, Workers' Party.

Rio's Conservative Turn

Jair Bolsonaro's election to the presidency left international opinion stunned. However, by examining recent political upheavals in the country, Bolsonaro's election can be explained as the outcome of several processes. Indeed, what public debates and academic analyses have described as 'the conservative wave' has grown over several years at the local, regional and national levels. This wave is characterised by four core features: a call for securitisation, discrediting the State as corrupt and paternalistic, moralising individual (especially sexual) habits, and interpersonal intolerance (Almeida, 2019: 207).

Rio de Janeiro has held a leading position in this gradual electoral shift toward conservative voting. Data from the last three presidential elections illustrate this point: according to the Tribunal Regional Eleitoral do Rio de Janeiro (TRE-RJ, Regional Electoral Court of Rio de Janeiro), in the second round of 2010 Dilma Rousseff, running for the centre-left Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, Workers' Party), won in 78 of the city's 97 electoral districts. In 2014, she won the second round against the centre-right Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB, Brazilian Democracy Party) candidate Aécio Neves,

because she gained most of the electoral districts won in the first round by Marina Silva from the Partido Socialista Brasileiro (PSB, Brazilian Socialist Party). In both cases, the low-income areas of the city, such as the North and West Zones, voted predominantly for Rousseff. In 2018, however, the result was quite distinct: Bolsonaro overcame the PT candidate, Fernando Haddad, in all the city's electoral districts except for one wealthy neighbourhood. Similar results also characterised the municipal election of 2016, when Marcelo Crivella, a bishop of the evangelical Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and right-wing Partido Republicano Brasileiro (PRB, Brazilian Republican Party) candidate, won against Marcelo Freixo, a university professor committed to human rights activism representing the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (PSOL, Socialism and Freedom Party). While low-income areas of the city have provided a favourable electoral pool for centre-left candidates since 2006, their voting patterns have recently shifted in a conservative direction.

Bolsonaro's own political career illustrates this conservative turn at a national level: a rank-and-file State of Rio de Janeiro representative in parliament since 1991, he saw his popularity begin to grow in the turmoil before and following Rousseff's impeachment. In the run-up to the 2018 elections, his message reached a significant segment of the Brazilian population, well beyond the State of Rio where he began.

At the time of Rousseff's impeachment, I was conducting ethnographic research in Rio de Janeiro. Between October 2015 and September 2016, I investigated urban inequality and the city's transformation during the preparations for the Olympic Games. The research was aimed at analysing how urban inequality – in the entwined dimensions of class, race, and space – was being manipulated, transformed and/or enhanced by these intensive city-making processes. To this end, I chose two favelas as my primary ethnographic grounds: Santa Marta in the affluent and touristic South Zone, and Cidade de Deus in the West Zone, further from the centre. I also moved throughout the city to participate in processes and events related to the research topic, such as Vila Autódromo community's struggle against displacement. As part of this research, I conducted qualitative interviews with 51 young residents living in Santa Marta and Cidade de Deus, aged from 16 to 30 years old, selected using a snowball sampling method. I also interviewed nineteen more mature residents with core roles in favela daily life, including sports trainers, presidents of local associations, and public workers in local social services. I supplemented this data with five in-depth interviews with residents of Vila Autódromo, focused on the eviction process. Since I was doing ethnographic research, I actively participated in the life of the neighbourhoods under consideration and my main research data derive from countless informal conversations with the favela residents I met. This article is based mainly on data concerning Cidade de Deus and Vila Autódromo. The data I collected convey an array of ambiguous and often contrasting political opinions in the low-income areas I considered. Many people I met shared a feeling of distrust towards politics and politicians, often evidently influenced by the ongoing Operação Lava Jato (Operation Car Wash) corruption investigations that were catalysing the attention of the whole country. The inquiry, involving businessmen and politicians from various political parties, seriously damaged the PT's public image (Anderson, 2019). In several conversations, people expressed their disbelief in politics as a whole or left-wing parties specifically, and many saw these parties as the main culprits in the unfolding corruption scandals. Janice is a 50-year-old woman who makes her living selling sweets on the street and lives in the Cidade de Deus, close to her four daughters. While we were watching the latest news updates about 'Operação Lava Jato' on television, Janice began to sob. She stated that she no longer trusted politicians,

'neither Lula (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva) nor his people', complaining that they worked for their own interests and were all corrupt. Cláudio and Gabriel, in their twenties, live nearby. At that time, they were unemployed and, like many favela residents, faced serious structural impediments to accessing higher education. Both benefited from policies implemented by PT governments: Cláudio's mother participated in the conditional cash transfer programme Bolsa Família (Family Fund), while Gabriel's father's income grew with the steady rise of the minimum wage. Nonetheless, they told me that they would vote for Crivella in the forthcoming municipal election. Gabriel stated that, as an aspiring entrepreneur, he should vote according to his new interests. Cláudio was attracted by Crivella's religious affiliation, as he too was evangelical. The feeling of having been let down by the PT expressed by Janice – especially in light of the ongoing corruption investigations – had driven many residents I met to seek different reference points, such as evangelical churches, and to reconsider their political subjectivity, a shift that directly impacted their voting behaviour. Nevertheless, this feeling was far from homogeneous in the context I frequented. Many people continued to openly support the PT, citing the policies it had effectively implemented for the poorest segments. A theatre professor from Cidade de Deus often discussed ongoing political events with his students, and he warned them not to give credence to the main television channel because it was far from objective and trustworthy. On another occasion, at a café, I witnessed a debate about *panelaços*, the home-based protests against Rousseff in which protesters banged pots and pans from their windows taking place mostly in the city's richest neighbourhoods. Rosabela, a middle-aged black woman and domestic worker, stated: 'I would never do that. The PT stole money, but they all do that! At least the PT has helped us. All these people complain about the PT because of theft, while in Barra there is no employer who pays me a decent wage!'

These few anecdotes convey the heterogeneous, and often contrasting, political subjectivities that have recently arisen in areas which were once key electoral bases for the PT. Data from the last four presidential elections show a significant shift in the voting behaviour of the electoral district comprising Cidade de Deus, consistent with the wider trend of the city's West Zone. According to the TRE-RJ, in the second round of the 2006 election Lula secured 74.09 percent of the vote there, while Rousseff received 58.49 percent in 2010 and 51.64 percent in 2014. Later, in 2018, this electoral district expressed a preference for Bolsonaro, and indeed he earned 60.24 per cent of the total votes.

The 2018 election results therefore reflect a host of background factors such as economic recession, corruption and widespread urban violence, political contingencies such as the weakness of Haddad's candidature, and the growing influence of Bolsonaro-supporting evangelical churches in low-income areas (Hunter and Power, 2019: 70). Esther Solano (2018), in her research with Bolsonaro's voters, highlights that many people supported him because he represented something 'new'. Bolsonaro has distanced himself from the right-wing parties that traditionally held power in the country and presented himself as a hero fighting against corruption, an advocate of radical solutions to the issue of violence, and a protector of morality (Almeida, 2019: 210). Both the widespread, increasing feeling of betrayal by the PT and people's cumulative disgust with politicians as a whole paved the way for Bolsonaro's victory as an anti-establishment and anti-PT candidate (Hunter and Power, 2019: 70).

This article analyses a further element that played a part in discrediting the PT and political class as a whole, an element which has remained largely unexplored to date. Italian sociologist Ota De Leonardis (1998: 177) argues that policies, more than politics, is the field in which people experience the state. The case study at hand suggests that

the ways in which a specific social policy promoted by the PT has been implemented in the city of Rio de Janeiro has worsened the living conditions of its final beneficiaries. In the following sections I discuss the federal housing policy Minha Casa Minha Vida (MCMV, My House, My Life) and its intersection with local political junctures. Specifically, the MCMV converged with the ongoing intensive process of urban renovation sweeping over the city to legitimate the massive displacement of favela dwellers. In this local case study, the MCMV is examined from the point of view of beneficiaries as a lived experience of PT policies, one which has generated among them a mistrust of politicians, including PT representatives. The argument presented here sheds light on the way personal experiences of policies operate as an important field in which politics are perceived and political subjectivities take shape.

The Design of the MCMV

From the dictatorship's downfall until recently, Brazilian public debate about housing and city management proceeded in a democratic direction. The practices of evicting favela dwellers from their homes became less and less common during the 1990s, while public and political debates began to recognise the importance of legalising and ameliorating such settlements and providing them with services and infrastructure. In 2001, a 'Estatuto da Cidade' (City Statute) was created that adopted these principles to tackle the issue of socio-spatial segregation in Brazilian metropoles (Ferreira et al., 2019: 2). The statute established the 'Zonas Especiais de Interesse Social' (ZEIS, Special Zones of Social Interest) category that was used to regularise the property rights of informal settlement residents and allocate unused urban areas to social housing (Gonçalves, 2013: 266).

These developments were boosted by Lula's election in 2002. The PT government created the Ministério das Cidades (Ministry of Cities) to cope with the urban social question. The most important achievement, however, was arguably the institution of the Sistema Nacional de Habitaçáo de Interesse Social (SNHIS, National System of Social Interest Housing) that stemmed from a popular proposal brought into being through the collection of 1,000 signatures (Ferreira et al., 2019: 6). The SNHIS distributed responsibility along the three levels of government and established councils involving the public to draft Local Plans of Social Interest Housing. To make these measures effective, the government created a specific National Fund for Social Housing managed by a participatory board. As part of these political processes, municipalities and citizens became involved in designing and controlling policies on urban housing issues (Amorim Aragão and Cardoso, 2013: 32). Socio-economic spatial segregation, unsafe housing, and urban violence were described as core problems the nation needed to overcome. The policies of this period sought to achieve the 'right to have rights' for segments of the population whose participation in the city was precarious (Rolnik, 2015: 322). The SNHIS and Ministério das Cidades were meant to inaugurate a new wave of long-term urban and housing policies based on these principles. Working in this framework, the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro launched the programme Favela-Bairro (Favela-Neighbourhood) to improve favelas in the early 2000s and this programme gained strength thanks to the mobilisation of several state and non-state actors, such as favela resident associations (Becerril, 2017: 942).

However, later federal policies proceeded in another direction, with repercussions on the local level. In 2008, the global financial crisis erupting in the United States began

to threaten Brazil, and the government decided to tackle the issue with a massive housing policy: the MCMV programme. The MCMV drew inspiration from social housing policies in Mexico and Chile based on the idea that housing for the poor should be a good to acquire via market transactions and, at the same time, a business opportunity for private companies (Rolnik et al., 2015: 131). The programme aimed both to protect the country from the effects of the financial global crisis by investing in infrastructure, and to meet the longstanding social need of housing for the lower classes.

On 25 March 2009, Rousseff, then Ministra da Casa Civil (Chief of Staff), held a televised launch of Brazil's biggest-ever housing programme for the lower classes. President Lula took a step back to bring Rousseff into the spotlight and later announced that she would be the PT candidate in the forthcoming presidential elections. The MCMV programme constituted a core PT strategy for regaining political capital (Andrade, 2011: 212). Indeed, it was innovative in terms of the amount of public funds invested to enable home ownership among the lower and lower-middle classes: 34 billion *reais* to build 3.4 million houses in five years (2009–2014) (Ferreira et al., 2019: 7–8). At the same time, it shifted the public debate about housing and urban issues away from a participatory approach.

The MCMV involved three branches, depending on the income level of beneficiaries. In the first branch, for people earning zero to three minimum monthly salaries, private companies built the houses with public incentives and sold them to the government-owned Caixa Econômica Federal bank. Caixa would then assign the units to beneficiaries on the basis of a list provided by the municipalities. The government covered most of the expenses and residents were required to pay a low monthly rent for ten years (Amorim Aragão, Cardoso, 2013: 36). This amount corresponded to ten percent of the family's monthly income, with the minimum rent for the buildings contracted during the first phase of the programme set at R$50.00. In the second phase, the amount was reduced to five percent of the family's monthly income, with a lower limit of R$25.00 (Rolnik, 2015: 151).

The first branch also comprised the category 'MCMV Entidades' that allowed social cooperatives to participate by taking over the private companies' role. This provision was an achievement for housing social movements, but it represented only two percent of the overall programme budget. For the other branches (income from three to six and from six to ten minimum salaries), the construction companies presented their projects to Caixa but were responsible for selling them on the market. Buyers received a subsidy from Caixa and aid in accessing credit.

Considering the role of the entities involved, the federal government and private companies occupied key positions. The programme's centralised management represented a significant break with previous principles of involving civil society and municipalities in decision-making processes, while private companies were given leeway to choose the location and characteristics of housing units (Amorim Aragão and Cardoso, 2013: 52). Moreover, the latter obtained significant benefits: in addition to the incentives for building, constructors in the first branch were freed from the obligation to sell the units they built and from risks such as delayed payments or unoccupied units. The role of municipalities, on the other hand, was limited to managing recipients' applications and supporting the assignment process; they were no longer able to give any input on social-interest housing (Amorim Aragão and Cardoso, 2013: 63). They thus gained a valuable benefit, in that allocating units meant earning visibility and local political support.

In contrast to programmes implemented in the 1990s and 2000s, local communities, residents' associations and other non-state actors were completely excluded from the

MCMV's design and implementation (Becerril, 2017: 943). Residents lost their voice on the urban and housing policies involving them and their agency in shaping such policies. While the MCMV catalysed the interests and hopes of many actors in the housing sector, its design displayed weaknesses from the outset, especially in terms of transferring decision-making power from municipalities to private enterprises. In the following sections, a more detailed analysis outlines further ambivalent elements that shaped the MCMV's impact on the lives of the poor. I will begin by describing how the people from low-income areas whom I met during my fieldwork think, talk and act about their houses.

Dreaming of Houses

We were walking on muddy ground, among the debris of destroyed buildings. All around us was strewn the wreckage of what had once been Vila Autódromo, a favela that was being displaced by the Municipality. On many crumbling walls I made out sentences clamouring against the evictions. Furniture, windows and doors were spread everywhere. Cranes worked around us, making constant noise. Ivana showed me the landscape. 'There is nothing left around here', she said. Walking through the area, she became quieter and quieter until she pointed at a particular pile of rubble: 'Once, this was my home'. Nothing was left but debris. Two women arrived and greeted her, Dona Penha, a middle-aged leader of Vila Autódromo's resistance against the removals accompanied by Leidi, a younger woman. Dona Penha was smiling peacefully. 'Don't worry, everything will be fine in the end. If it's still a mess, that's because it's not the end'. Leidi was upset, however. 'Have you seen the work over there? They have no respect for us living here'. Ivana kept crying quietly. She said, 'people tell me it's stupid to cry for a home. But it was important to me. Now I have a new home, but I live a long way off, alone with my husband. The neighbours do not talk to me, only "good morning, good evening!"' The women listened empathetically, then Penha said, 'I remember when you lived in the shack with your two kids! You built your home piece by piece. You kept polishing it up for years'. Ivana remembered when she completed the kitchen and threw a big party for the community. 'I was so proud of it! Every night I kept cleaning it thoroughly. I thought that my kitchen was so gorgeous!'.

Ivana's emotions about her destroyed home are not rare: houses occupy a core place in life. As mentioned above, housing in Rio de Janeiro is among the most complex of social issues, bringing to the fore the country's deep inequalities. Among low-income communities and favelas, houses take on particular meanings. These settlements are often the product of inhabitants' first-hand work of illegally appropriating the land and self-constructing. Building one's own home is a process that requires time and often involves creativity. Walking through the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, I saw a house covered in the famous Ipanema pavement tiles and walls painted in deep violet, mint green or yellow. People in low-income communities struggle to find places to live, but they also invest in personalising and improving their homes over time. Every time I visited Marcilene at Cidade de Deus, she told me about her plans for her home. It was a two-room unit with a sheet metal roof that baked during the summer. The house was in a narrow alley where some boys sold drugs. Marcilene had received the house from her sister when she moved into a MCMV unit. Marcilene's husband was shocked by the place at first, but then they began a hard and time-consuming project of renovation. The first time I visited her, she told me she wanted to instal a chessboard pattern floor so 'the kids

would enjoy playing on it'. She planned to hang her television on the wall, eliminating the TV stand to gain more space. 'I will put a high table here, for eating with stools, to separate the living room from the kitchen'.

Housing is the first struggle working-class people have to face when living in a metropolis characterised by deep economic inequality. They cannot afford to buy or rent units in a formal neighbourhood, so they must choose favelas or other informal settlements that are economically accessible but offer more precarious living conditions. At the same time, houses are a domain in which people have more opportunities to make visible improvements. For favela dwellers, in fact, it is often easier to renovate their houses than to improve their working conditions. And, as elsewhere, houses are often tailored to the lives of their owners, acquiring storeys over time to host the new families of grown children. In sum, houses provide people in favelas with a domain to shape a self-image of competence, knowledge and improvement, and a model to think about their own change over time (Holston, 1991: 451–456). At the same time, in wider society, favela houses bear connotations of illegality – regardless of their actual legal status – that imbue their inhabitants with social stigma.

MCMV buildings acquire specific meanings in this landscape. Indeed, the programme has promoted working-class access to home ownership, reifying legal property as a sign of distinction. In championing the programme, media outlets and politicians have described home ownership as the result of hard work and as a sign of moral integrity (Cardoso, De Sousa Araújo, Jaenish, 2014: 488). Achieving ownership allows the poor to symbolically distance themselves from the favelas and to represent their move as upward social mobility.

Lourdes, Marcilene's sister, received a three-room unit in the MCMV complex built in the Cidade de Deus. She applied as a single mother, concealing her relationship with her partner. I visited her place on the occasion of her daughter's birthday. When I met up with Marcilene and her children to go to the party, we heard several gunshots coming from the area where Lourdes lived. 'It happens all the time', said Marcilene. 'They start shooting and Lourdes gets stuck at home, imprisoned'. The shooting was a risk, but Marcilene was worried about her niece. Finally, we crossed the favela's dangerous area to arrive at a huge building resembling several other MCMV blocks in the urban periphery. Lourdes lived on the third floor in a small but neat apartment. The living room was full of party decorations. The house consisted of a living room, a narrow kitchen, a small bathroom and two bedrooms. Lourdes proudly showed me her home, but then she started complaining.

> It's a nice place. But you know … it was my dream, once. Finally, I would have my own home! A flat! I never hoped to get to own a flat! But, then, the dream turned into a nightmare. This house is in the most dangerous part of the favela, the guys shoot around here all the time. I'm scared. Many times, I cannot leave home. It's a jail. (Interview with Lourdes, 2016)

Moreover, she criticised the structure itself. The building had multiple problems with water infiltration and the maintenance of shared areas. Neither Caixa nor the construction company responded to the inhabitants' requests. The rapidly deteriorating condition of the building generated tension and conflict among residents. Weeks later, her husband also complained to me about the quality of the building. In a bitter voice he stated: 'This is what they think we deserve! Politicians think that just anything is good enough for poor people!'.

Lourdes described her first reaction to obtaining a MCMV unit as her 'dream come true'. This dream encompassed both her securing legal ownership of a house and the imaginary surrounding 'flats' as a housing type. Indeed, many wealthy neighbourhoods in Brazil are characterised by apartment buildings. In Rio de Janeiro and other metropoles, luxurious apartment complexes are growing. Some of them are gated communities known as *condomínios fechados* (gated communities) that intensify certain features of apartment buildings; they are physically isolated from the outside and designed to create an appealing reality inside their walls, providing residents with gardens, swimming pools and gyms. Independently of where they are located, their focus is on the enclosed environment they construct (Caldeira, 1997: 160). Armed sentries or cameras guard their perimeters. Caldeira (1997) stresses that the value being sold in this business is socio-economic segregation itself: they are designed to conceal the deep inequality of Brazilian metropoles and create homogeneous entourages of wealthy people. Such communities are the outcome of defensive architecture, conceived to avoid social conflict by isolating and fragmenting the citizenry.

MCMV buildings often resemble the model of *condomínios fechados*. In some cases, such as the Málaga Garden complex in Campo Grande at the western periphery of Rio, they are surrounded by walls and include amenities such as swimming pools and playgrounds. Moving there from favelas, some people perceive this change as a sort of symbolic social mobility (Cardoso, De Sousa Araújo and Jaenish, 2014: 87). However, many of the construction companies participating in the MCMV programme prioritised profit over quality standards and kept their costs low by making the buildings out of low-quality materials. Most of the complexes started having serious structural problems only a few years after inauguration (Amorim Aragão et al., 2013: 152–153), as in Lourdes's case. Quite unlike *condomínios fechados*, then, MCMV buildings more resemble the 'garbage-can model' of low-quality standardised houses (Ferreira et al., 2019: 14) that end up fostering the segregation of the poor.

In the documentary 'Realengo, aquele desabafo!' (Observatório das Metrópoles, 2011) about the Málaga Garden complex, an inhabitant declares that she has been unemployed since she moved there because it is harder to make a living when all her neighbours are in the same condition of need. Indeed, the first favelas in Rio de Janeiro were erected near wealthy neighbourhoods where it was easier to find work. Favela dwellers continue to rely heavily on work in Rio's middle- and upper-middle-class neighbourhoods, for example as domestic workers, security guards or porters. Concentrating mass numbers of low-income people in a gated community can worsen their situation. The Chilean project that inspired the MCMV ended up producing huge pockets of poverty (Rolnik et al., 2015: 149). To limit this risk, the MCMV programme established a maximum number of units per block. However, contractors bend this rule by subdividing one project among several blocks under different names while the complex actually shares the same location and design (Amorim Aragão et al., 2013: 148).

While auto-construction in the favelas gives rise to a heterogeneous imaginary of housing, the MCMV has reduced this diversity to standardised blocks 'following constructors' taste' (Bonduki, 2009). This curbing of creativity involves not only the shape of MCMV houses, but also the way they are used. Favelas are often characterised by the extensive use of public space (Bertazzo, Jacques, Varella, 2002). The border between public and private is blurred, and the street serves as the locus of reproduction for multiple social practices (Cardoso, De Sousa Araújo and Jaenish, 2014: 97). The programme instead imposes a strictly regulated way of living. When I visited the Parque Carioca MCMV complex, I met many people who had been moved there from Vila

Autódromo, and complained about these rules. The buildings stand on concrete platforms, the playgrounds were already dilapidated, and the swimming pool was dry and closed off. Furthermore, Parque Carioca was governed by a set of rules that clashed with people's previous habits: the use of common areas is strictly regulated, they can party only in the common room, they cannot use their own units for any commercial purposes, they cannot hang wet clothes outside their windows, and they cannot keep animals in their units. Cardoso, De Sousa Araújo and Jaenish (2014: 97) have stressed that some new inhabitants of MCMV buildings understand these restrictions as a way to draw closer to the upper classes, avoiding the risk of 'favelising' their new residences. Others, however, protest such rules, feeling oppressed and unable to exercise those aspects of everyday life that are characterised by informality and intense sociability in favelas. Although this discussion goes beyond the scope of the present article, it is worth noting that researchers have found that inhabitants' sociability and creativity are reorganised in the MCMV complexes rather than disappearing altogether (Kopper, 2019).

In summary, the way MCMV was designed and implemented has often ended up restricting beneficiaries' scope for creativity and personalisation around their homes, in terms of both structural characteristics and ways of using domestic space. The standardised models fail to consider inhabitants' opinions or tastes, and sociability is controlled and regularised via sets norms. The thickness of meanings and symbolism associated with houses in auto-constructed favelas is lost. According to De Leonardi's insights and the ethnographic data I collected, the programme seems to offer beneficiaries a direct experience of policies that, given the poor quality of the final result, provokes feelings of discontent and disaffection towards the politicians and parties, including the PT, that promoted and praised the MCMV. Indeed, they often hold these actors responsible for the shortcomings of the federal housing programme.

The Olympic Games Bring Much More

Not taking into consideration local urban planning, the MCMV programme allowed contractors to choose the location of the buildings (Amorim Aragão, Cardoso, 2013: 44). As a result, companies built most of the units in the urban periphery where lots were cheaper (Rolnik et al., 2015: 132) but access to services and commerce was more restricted than in urban centres. The government did not take any measures to curb this effect, such as a 'localisation incentive' for projects situated in central areas (Bonduki, 2009). Moreover, many residents have lost their jobs due to the greater distance from their previous place of employment and the rule against using the apartment as an informal place of business makes their lives even more difficult. Therefore, while some scholars regard favelas as a strategy for the poorest to claim a 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996) in the twofold sense of accessing urban life and gaining the collective right to make decisions about a city's transformation (Mendes 2015: 16; Holston, 2008: 204), the MCMV has instead contributed to creating a situation of 'housing without city' (Rolnik, 2015: 314).

While the location of the housing complexes is one of the programme's most widely criticised aspects, its implementation in Rio de Janeiro coincided with other processes of city-remaking connected to the World Cup and Olympic Games. In order to host these mega-events, the Municipality launched urban renovation plans involving transportation, big sport infrastructure and the requalification of specific areas, including the

city harbour and some favelas in the South Zone that had recently become a tourist attraction in the city (Freire Medeiros, 2012).

The Vila Autódromo evictions were part of this wider process. The community was located in the West Zone, close to Barra da Tijuca, a rich neighbourhood that the city targeted for transforming intervention along with the harbour. Indeed, Barra da Tijuca was one of the Olympic clusters, a location for renovated sport infrastructure that would be connected by new, rapid bus routes and an underground line. Vila Autódromo had already been almost completely removed in 2016, and at the entrance to the area hung a huge banner reading 'The Olympic Games bring much more'.

What the Olympic Games brought for these residents, however, was the confident resumption of favela displacement (Magalhães, 2013; Barbosa et al., 2019). As mentioned above, there had been progressively fewer projects of favela removal since the 1990s. Federal and state laws regulated removals in order to protect dwellers' rights. Infrastructural improvement and property regularisation became the recommended measures for managing informal settlements. In the early 2000s, however, voices in favour of overcoming the 'removal taboo' (Gonçalves, 2013: 344) began to gain traction in public discourse, and the idea was embraced by part of the media. This view resurfaced with force in the period when Rio de Janeiro was preparing to host the two mega-events, leading to a 2009 decree stipulating the removal of 119 favelas (Mendes, 2015: 13). More recent evictions, such as that of Vila Autódromo, were tied to the Olympic Clusters. Other favelas, located in the wealthy South Zone, were removed because they were located in a 'dangerous area'. According to the City Statute, the sole allowable reason for undertaking a removal is risk to inhabitants and the environment. In a play on words, local social movements objected that these favelas were not in an *área de risco* (risky area), but in an *área de ricos*, an area of rich people who refused to have a favela nearby. Indeed, spatial segregation and distance from the poor increasingly represent values to be sold in unequal Brazilian cities (Cavalcanti, 2014).

These transformations of the Olympic City can be explained as processes of what David Harvey calls 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2008: 34). Favela dwellers were dispossessed of lands they used at use value, and then the same areas were valorised by public urbanisation investment or by the displacement of the poor itself. Entrepreneurs bought these assets at low prices from their previous occupants – either regularised favela dwellers or landowners – and profited by integrating them into the circuit of property valorisation by capital (Alves and Monteiro, 2014: 265).

Moreover, this new wave of removals often violated dwellers' rights (Comitê Popular, 2015). In disregard of the law, the Municipality removed several communities without offering any legal defence or bringing in technical consultants when the motivation was environmental risk. The Municipality did not consider any of the alternatives proposed by the communities threatened with eviction, and negotiations were usually conducted with single individuals or families, thereby weakening the collective capacity for resistance (Alves and Monteiro, 2014: 270).

The municipalities' exclusion from decision-making around social housing brought about by the MCMV contrasts sharply with the central role that the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro played in promoting favela displacement to the furthering of construction companies' interests. Moreover, thanks to MCMV options, the Municipality slotted this wave of evictions into a narrative of 'housing rights' and thus distanced itself

from old-style removals. The evictions were described as processes aimed at providing the poorest classes with proper and safer housing. Many removals were facilitated by their connection with the assignment of an MCMV unit. Alternatively, evicted people were offered financial compensation. However, the amount being offered was generally so low that accepting social housing became the sole option (Amorim Aragão et al., 2013: 150).

The resistance of Vila Autódromo captivated public opinion. Dwellers' obstinacy revealed the fallacy of the Municipality's 'housing rights' rhetoric around removals. Although Vila Autódromo's residents were legally entitled to occupy the land, after months of pressure, threats, and promises, the Municipality succeeded in removing nearly the whole community. In January 2016, only 40 families still remained. Dona Penha hosted me in her house, the headquarters of the resistance. The house was cosy and had a beautiful front garden with fruit trees. She explained to me that:

> people still living here do not believe in the Municipality anymore. We know they are lying to us, that if we accept, our lives will become worse. Here we own our houses, most of us live in good places that we built and improved year after year. We feel at home here. People who negotiated and moved to houses or to MCMV are regretting it. (Interview with Macena da Penha Maria, 2016)

Indeed, several former dwellers complained that the Municipality had cheated them. At the beginning of the removals, the city's mayor Eduardo da Costa Paes visited Vila Autódromo to facilitate negotiations. To this end, he lied to people about the MCMV, promising that they would have the freedom to sell, donate or rent the new apartment immediately. However, the social housing programme has different conditions: inhabitants cannot sell or rent their own units until ten years have elapsed, a period which has been set aside for paying the contribution.

The removal process triggered violent conflicts within the community and even within families. People have reported that the Municipality used several strategies: weakening internal cohesion to divide the resistance, threatening inhabitants that if they did not leave *no amor* (peacefully) they would be removed *na dor* (forcefully), and pressuring them by beginning construction work inside the favela. In turn, the community called for support from several actors. Together with two local public universities, it formulated a plan of urbanisation for Vila Autódromo as an alternative to be proposed to the Municipality. As the evictions proceeded and the favela was progressively destroyed, they continued modifying the plan according to the new conditions. The last time I visited Dona Penha, some students from the Fluminense Federal University were measuring an area covered in rubble. They were designing a new kindergarten because the Municipality had destroyed the former one. At that time, there were almost no children living there. Designing a kindergarten seemed to me a symbolic act of hope: the dwellers still believed they could win and that children would be playing again in Vila Autódromo.

While the peripheral location of MCMV buildings is one of the programme's weak points, therefore, in Rio de Janeiro this element has taken on an additional dimension. In the ongoing processes of city-remaking, the MCMV proposed a framework to legitimise and justify a move that is actually nothing but the displacement of poor people from certain areas undergoing market valorisation. The Municipality and private companies described evictions as having to do with the promotion of rights: specifically, the right to access proper, safe housing. In many situations, such as Vila Autódromo, the

Municipality intervened to facilitate the process with no respect for or consideration of those who were supposed to be the final beneficiaries of housing rights. The ways the MCMV was implemented in the Olympic city contributed to transforming the city according to a model of spatial segregation in which the rich centre is separated from and opposed to the poor periphery (Cano and Ricotta, 2016: 167). Moreover, by offering a ready-made solution to the evictees, the programme eliminated the space of opportunity for negotiating proposals, thus restricting social participation in policy-making about housing.

The intersection of urban removals and the MCMV is a field in which citizens experience the overlapping of the PT's federal policies with local policies implemented by an administration led by members of the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB, Brazilian Democratic Movement Party), a centrist party allied with the PT. Although displacements from favelas are embedded in local political upheavals, many people I met doing fieldwork associated the injustices of the two policies with the way they were effectively correlated in practice. 'We cannot trust politicians' and 'They are all the same' were recurrent expressions among the people I met who faced evictions. The words of Alcide, a resistant member of Vila Autódromo, were more eloquent. Claiming that the PT was responsible for the direction of the discourse on urban and housing issues in the city, he said: 'I have fought on all my life. I went to jail for the political struggle. And now I have to fight against those who were once my allies, those who were my heroes in the past'.

Conclusion

This article builds on the assumption that policies are a fundamental domain in which people experience politics, all the more so when the space for direct participation in policy-making processes shrinks (De Leonardis, 1998: 177). The way social policies are experienced in everyday life contributes to shaping people's opinions about politicians and influencing their political subjectivities. Adopting this premise, the article has analysed how the MCMV housing programme, designed by the PT-led federal government, was implemented in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The MCMV was a core policy for the PT: firstly because it was a key point of Dilma Rousseff's first presidential platform, and secondly because it directly addressed urgent urbanisation and housing issues.

Considering the programme's critical points, the discussion has shown that the MCMV gave substantial decision-making power to contractors, with little room for public institutions and social participation. In Rio de Janeiro, this arrangement has resulted in the construction of standardised blocks of flats in the peripheries, in order to increase profits for the enterprises involved. Beneficiaries have moved to low-quality houses in huge complexes located far from well-urbanised areas. The MCMV has created pockets of serious poverty far from the city centre, increasing socio-spatial segregation.

Moreover, a serious shortcoming of the programme has been its role in shifting the public debate on housing and urban issues. While one of the programme's pillars since the 1990s has been the importance of public participation in conceiving housing policies, the MCMV completely erases this element. It is not only civil society that lost an aspect of participatory democracy obtained through years of struggle; municipalities also gave up their decision-making power.

Local entities' loss of voice contrasts with the active role Rio de Janeiro's Municipality recently played in the city's urban transformation. In the run-up to the 2016 Olympic Games, the City organised massive favela removals, legitimising evictions through the implementation of the MCMV. Displacing the poor has always been a way of increasing the value of urban areas in Rio de Janeiro. The MCMV has concealed the real motive behind evictions, however, instead asserting a narrative of housing rights. The two policies – MCMV and removals – were developed on different legislative levels and run by two different, though allied, parties: the PT at the national level and PMDB at the municipal level. In the ethnographic research I carried out, favela dwellers often seemed unaware of the MCMV's structure or the official distribution of responsibility between the two levels of government. Nonetheless, they were extremely conscious of the instrumental use of the housing programme to justify evictions and displacements in the city. In brief, the MCMV's structural features and its intersection with local political circumstances have led to a poor implementation of the programme in Rio de Janeiro and, often, to a worsening of final beneficiaries' living conditions. This discussion suggests that such an experience of social policies may have contributed to working-class beneficiaries' widespread feelings of betrayal and disappointment with the PT – treated at the time as though it were still in government – and/or the entire political class. Electoral data for the district comprising Cidade de Deus, one of the main ethnographic field sites underlying this article, show a conservative shift in voting behaviour and significant decrease in support for the PT. Among the multiple factors contributing to generalised disillusionment with politics and the PT (especially the Operação Lava Jato) and drawing on the ethnographic data presented here, this article argues that the poor implementation of PT social policies such as the MCMV in Rio de Janeiro added to the growing mistrust of 'establishment' parties among the working class. It was in this context that the electoral shift towards a conservative candidate such as Bolsonaro – who successfully presented himself as an anti-system candidate (Hunter and Power, 2019: 80) – became a possibility; one that carried with it not just people's desire to 'punish' a corrupt political system, but also their hopes for positive change.

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