Two periods of Brazilian neoliberalism as city government

Dois tempos do neoliberalismo brasileiro como governo das cidades

André Dal'Bó da Costa [I]

Abstract:

This article discusses two different phases of neoliberalism as city government practice in Brazil: the first one as progressive neoliberalism and the second as authoritarian, austere, and militarized management of social collapse. In the first part of the text, I use the works of Christian Laval and Pierre Dardot (2009 [2013] and 2016) and Dardot et. al (2021) to inscribe the proposed debate in the transition between two expressions of neoliberalism, initially as world reason or political rationality and later as war strategy. In the second part, such phases will be observed through recent transformations in city government practices, using some examples related to the latest housing and land regularization programs.

Keywords: neoliberalism; social movements; political philosophy.

Resumo

Este artigo discute duas diferentes fases de aclimatação do neoliberalismo como prática de governo das cidades no Brasil. A primeira, como progressismo neoliberal e a segunda, como gestão autoritária, austera e militarizada do colapso social. Na primeira parte, dialogo com os trabalhos de Dardot e Laval (2009 e 2016) e de Dardot et al. (2021), para inscrever o debate proposto na transição entre duas expressões do neoliberalismo, primeiro, como razão mundo ou racionalidade política e segundo, como estratégia de guerra. Na segunda parte, tais fases serão observadas a partir de recentes transformações nas práticas de governo das cidades, através da análise de alguns exemplos relacionados aos últimos programas de provisão habitacional e regularização fundiária vigentes no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: *neoliberalismo; movimentos sociais; filosofia política.*

Part One

Two neoliberalisms

It is possible to suggest that there were at least two different phases of neoliberalism adaptation in twenty-first-century Brazil, seen as a mode of city governance. The first phase, which took place during a period of relative economic and republican stability, here called *neoliberal progressivism*, began with exchange rate stabilization of the national currency, something which later became embodied as a policy in the context of the *commodity boom*, and then ended with the *impeachment* coup (1994-2014). During this period, all the elected national administrations (Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Lula and then Dilma), carried out their governments based on a powerful and renewed network of programs and public policies capable of controlling social emergencies – this took place concomitant with timid social inclusion figures, which in any case were mediated by the expansion of the consumption capacity of the lower income population – albeit without providing any lasting expansion of basic rights guarantees or programs mediated by the State and capable of altering the colonial and slaveholding heritage that has been part of the making of Brazil - such a heritage results, to this day, in segregated and unequal cities. In short, such an inclusion was a fragile one without any lasting effects; it took place through consumption or unfolded a kind of mirage - an emulation of social well-being. The second phase, in turn, which developed after the *impeachment* coup and became even more accentuated after the 2018 presidential election, is characterized by a recent authoritarian, "austere", and militarized shift in planning, management and public policies. This takes place in an advanced scenario of systemic crisis pertaining to unemployment and to the collapse of basic social rights. In this situation, such public administrations seem to make use of a renewed framework of governance practice – these in turn are the manifestation of a new kind of neoliberalism which can be seen today, a more explicitly violent, "austere" and militarized one.

This schematic and essayistic panorama of two phases seeks to outline two distinct temporalities pertaining to the Brazilian adaptation of neoliberalism. In this paper, we employ such frame as a resource for an attempt to identify and qualify the different forms of neoliberalism and their respective practices regarding the control and management of populations, cities, and metropolises. This in short is what I propose as a thought exercise. That said, it is necessary to emphasize, however, that both forms, although better located in each of the temporal periods thusly delineated, in no way end there – rather, they do overlap, oscillate and renew themselves in between such periods, Today, neoliberalism does assume the features, quite clearly, of a form of governance marked by social collapse, as is typical of the crisis of modernity. However, there are undeniable continuities between it and the previous period. Moreover, Brazil's history and therefore also that of the production of space and the very formation of its cities and metropolises is still a result of a continuous productive interaction between the archaic and the modern (Oliveira, 2003).

The productive overlap of time periods and phases of development (which one can see through the perspective of a critique of the developmentalist instance in Brazil) precedes

the recent occurrence of a generalized crisis of legitimacy regimes related to supportive sociability and social justice. This crisis takes place across the Western world and such a phenomenon results from profound changes in societies and cities. These changes in turn are shaped by the latest metamorphoses of neoliberalism. One could observe and grasp such a situation from the perspective of the great diversity of aspects of the daily life of Brazilian cities – including social conflicts related to the struggle to stay in the places people inhabit or their territories of origin. It could also be grasped starting from the fact that, in much of the world, governance models based on the welfare state have been collapsing, considering the very way they were structured – and this is so not merely when they are viewed from the longue durée perspective in terms of the historical course of modernity, but also in the broad sense of public and political life in Western societies – at least with regards to expectations and future projects looming in the horizon.

One should also highlight the fact that such a modern legitimacy of social justice and solidarity (as a reference) exercised a large role mediating and regulating conflicts between the freedoms of the capitalist market and the guarantees of basic rights – especially in the second half of the twentieth century, during the post-war period. This took place while several international treaties were consolidated. Those, to a large extent, subordinated – at least as treaties, manifestos, and public documents – the economic order to social justice (Supiot, 2010). The collapse of these social justice frameworks, as well as the generalized decrease in access to basic rights (which were accessed through the State and its administration), is

not new – nor is the generalized deregulation of labor, with its labor force gradually being replaced (through private relations). Quite the contrary, such a development dates, right in the economic center, at least from the 1970s. From then on, several Western governments expanded their austerity agendas and pursued policies to limit basic social rights, as non-state mediations (especially market ones as well as private solutions) advanced their march on all levels of social life.

This broad global movement, which could be *roughly* described as an important part of the development process of a new *governmentality* (Foucault, 2004a), has been going on, therefore, for at least half a century since its last great change brought upon the modes of management of social life itself. Its triumph has been based on a new and generalized political rationality which is not restricted only to economic mediations, but rather is capable of producing subjectivities and mediating all aspects of life under the frame of entrepreneurship and competitiveness (Dardot and Laval, 2009).[1] Framing the situation in such a way can give us tools to better understand much of the limitations and failures of the recent Brazilian attempts at expanding social rights, which occurred during part of the New Republic period. Brazil lived a late cycle of reforms which reduced inequalities and expanded access to elementary social rights, in the context of enduring tremendous social inequalities – which still echo the slavery and colonial heritage characteristic of the southern hemisphere (Oliveira, 2003). Such reforms took place while neoliberal mediation, as a social force, was already fully pulsating throughout society. Such a neoliberalism even shaped the very public policies conducted by

supposedly or manifestly progressive and left-wing governments. Such overlapping of periods can explain the impossibility, and even part of the inevitable failure, of the late national project for a republican and democratic society marked by the enforcement of rights in Brazil. In a nutshell, the Brazilian administrations that took governed the country between 1994 and 2014, carried out mainly the great task of answering to emergencies and social urgencies in a neoliberal framing by creating several programs and public policies – these ended up functioning as a powerful network and as a device for the governance of emergencies (Oliveira and Rizek, 2007) without, however, producing any real and lasting changes in society and cities in terms of expanding collective and social well-being at least.

Having made these previous considerations, for the purpose of schematically placing us at the time period that precedes the time this article focuses on, we are at present experiencing the moment following a world cycle within neoliberalism or even that which is conventionally called neoliberalism within liberal democracies or even, more accurately, progressive neoliberalism (Fraser, 2017), or sometimes even left-wing neoliberalism (Dardot and Laval, 2009, p. 316; Dardot and Laval, 2016, p. 216). Once the possibility of having rights fully enforced through the mediation of the State administration no longer looms in the horizon, the number of humans deemed superfluous from the perspective of the global system of accumulation, has gradually increased – these include the unemployed, migrants, homeless, landless, and prison inmates, among others. This takes place on a planet that is rapidly heading towards environmental and urban catastrophe without

any real perspectives of an alternative – so far, we have been globally experiencing a new time characterized by continuous civil war, by a permanent state of exception and by the militarization of daily life as new ways of managing social and environmental collapse on a global scale (Arantes, 2014).

Returning to that modern paradigm of social justice seems to be an exhausted possibility today. Thus, a broad political spectrum from left to right has been captured within the same very delimited framework, namely one of accelerating the very exhaustion of democracy (Dardot and Laval, 2016, p. 7). Such a political spectrum is therefore reduced to only carrying out programs to postpone social collapse and to control emergencies, generating – as a necessary part of this development – a new spatial governmentality for managing cities, territories and populations, thereby delimiting – in theory – a renewed *"austere", military and authoritarian urbanism*, capable of leading cities, metropolises and their societies which are now inserted in the context of the collapse of social right normative horizon.

These considerations pertaining to an authoritarian turn can be highlighted or even confirmed, by the simply observing the results of the elections in the last decade, in several of the representative democracies around the world – these mark the beginning of a new cycle of governments that are,[2] at the same time, neoliberal, authoritarian, and populist. They resort more readily to state violence, thus bringing to scene yet another component of this acceleration of the deconstruction and the displacement of the ethical and normative horizon of social rights. Such a development (pertaining to the aforementioned deconstruction and displacement process) is

made possible by governments that relie on old, renewed and new forms of population management and control – within space – based on the greater surveillance and militarization of daily life, including the need to block or to even eliminate populations that are deemed superfluous for the minimum cohesion of a highly financialized accumulation system, as discussed in other territorial contexts - see Graham (2016) and Weizman (2017).

Roughly speaking, one of the possible ways of interpreting the success of such authoritarian candidacies, that recently were democratically elected, characterized by far-right government proposals and programs, is based on their ability to capture a widespread sense of insecurity in daily life, resulting from the difficulty in maintaining elementary living conditions and the impoverishment in the context of a structural work crisis -to these factors one can add a general disbelief in the various State institutions, including a disbelief about the state's institutional capacity to guarantee basic social rights.

In several parts of the world, such a widespread sensation might have played a factor in the greater acceptance of discourses focused on combating the current State institutions, and also the greater acceptance of proposals to expand securitization and control through a greater repression of social insurgencies and unwanted enemy dangers – whether real or a product of the social imagination –, thus providing a timely response to popular expectations and anxieties in the context of a scenario of apparent bankruptcy of social rights and the implosion of the collective dimension of work. However, unlike any movement towards the possibility of returning to a hypothetical past stage of society

cohesion with minimum stability, mediated by social welfare, these new authoritarian governments on the right have acted, so far, in such a way as to accelerate and deepen the overall picture of collapse, resulting, therefore, in the deconstruction of the normative and formal bases aimed at equity in the public and collective life of cities and metropolises. In this scenario of a new implosion of the societal dimension, Brazil, as of recently, is perhaps one of the most significant laboratories for this new period. Its federal government (2019-2022) has been acting quickly to change laws and norms that regulate guarantees and social, urban, environmental, and territorial balance.

Generally speaking, as part of the recent factors that make up this cycle of new administrations (which are at the same time *neoliberal, violent and austere,* with their new practices, which we can already see in Brazil and in several other countries), there are some recurrent factors: the implosion of work's role as a social life mediation force; the expansion and renewal of forms of control, isolation and elimination of non-employable and surplus populations, through the increase in incarceration and police lethality; the improvement of technologies and methods, with increased police efficiency and lethality; the expansion of border control (international or internal) to contain migration movements; the greater and more violent repression of street protests; the expansion of groups classified as enemies or dangerous to the public; the expansion of places, streets and neighborhoods classified as dangerous for differentiated space management; the exponential use of autonomous programming language surveillance technologies; the diffusion of discourses by so-called smart cities;

the trivialization and popular acceptance – even greater – of violence in all aspects of life, which includes encouraging the arming of the civilian population, often openly defended by heads of state; spatial control methods through securitization zoning; government and management plans based on indicators and artificial intelligence with a spatial component; automated management of urban space by autonomous programming; and also, finally, through the permanent expulsion of traditional and/or poorer populations, and/or without income, from their original territories and residence, whether in rural areas or in urban centers with better infrastructures, services and the possibility of employment.

Taking such a general picture of recent events and practices as signs of the present time and pillars of new forms of governance based on the latest adaptation of the neoliberal metamorphosis, we can initially argue that we are already a step beyond the widespread and consolidated public policy agendas for neoliberal management of life (which dominated the Western world after the 1970s, including the Brazilian New Republic, as a way of guaranteeing the management of social emergencies), and we are now experiencing the emergence of the predominance of governments supported by what we could call a new *"austere" and authoritarian urbanism.* This development still has the fundamental characteristics of a neoliberal governmentality, as presented by Foucault (2004a), or as *world Reason* (*Raison-monde*), by Dardot and Laval (2009), for governance and self-regulation of populations, but now notably altered by the increase in violent mediations in view of the need to manage cities and territories increasingly devoid of the dimension of

solidarity and social rights and, therefore, freed from the modern normative project of minimum social equity.

It is, therefore, about understanding neoliberalism in a new scenario of *social collapse management*, subsequent (but still overlapping) to the previous moment of a generalized neoliberal management of space and cities, thus seeking to identify and better understand new practices of control and surveillance of everyday life.

Neoliberalism as a new civil war on a world scale?

In *The Choice of Civil War: Another History of Neoliberalism*, Christian Laval and Pierre Dardot (2021), together with the professors and members of the *Groupe d'études sur le néolibéralisme et les alternatives* (Gena), Pierre Sauvêtre and Haud Guéguen, present us with neoliberalism as a force historically capable of producing a mediation of *civil war* against all ways of life and social organizations that oppose the project of an imperative regime of competition and accumulation - which has been constituted throughout history as moments of direct opposition to socialism, communism, unionism, social reformism and, more recently, against any and all movements that defend solidarity and greater social equality.

For the authors, this would even be the great reason and also the inaugural decision of neoliberalism itself as an opposition that is violent in principle (Dardot et al., 2021) already in its first genesis, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Such genesis, contemporary to the Bolshevik revolution, was born as a proposal of total opposition to the possibility of

building egalitarian societies, an opposition that presents itself violently or in open war when necessary. In this historical process presented, then, neoliberalism is also a name that can be given to the constant fight against any projects aiming at a more egalitarian society - in a struggle for the imperative of economic freedom for competition. From the perspective of this interpretative key, neoliberalism, for the authors (ibid.), is thus a *strategy of war* against an enemy that stands for equality; it also is a *governmentality of war against* equality and for economic actors full competition. Civil war is thus an inevitable formulation for reading the contemporary problem of cities and territories.

For these authors, calling such a form of governance as *civil war* would not be an extrapolation, nor a discursive exaggeration that tries to draw attention to the present moment; it is really a civil war, which demonstrates the use of state force when it comes to repressing or controlling any type of society organization aimed at resistance, or at expanding the distribution of rights or at reducing inequalities. In Brazil, be it in cities, metropolises or in the countryside, daily life has met with an exponential increase in police lethality over the last two decades – this illustrates such an argument. This growth of violent management, however, occurs today not only in Brazil, but in most of the world, including in global economic centers, even when one controls for population proportions. In addition, legal, police and technological devices (which originate from and are typical of times of war) are increasingly becoming part of the routine life of cities, a tool for ordinary management of public order and daily life. Perhaps here one can better observe these changes at the metropolises. In these urban centers, the part of the population that

stand for a different order is also targeted as an enemy of society and the State. However, the real reason for this fight is not about securing and protecting the well-being of society, but rather about targeting part of society itself (Weber 2005), due to the fundamentalism of the competitive order.

In Brazil today, the latest federal administration (2019-2022) stands as a clear example of such violent management: it openly exercised a set of practices that characterize a kind of total war against social rights and those institutions of society not aligned with the authoritarian neoliberal model of pillage. Several public policy fields were encompassed by this mode of violent management: the environment, the regulated labor market, the retirement system, public spending on social rights (expenditure ceilings), and public universities, among others.

Finally, according to Dardot et al. (2021), one should also highlight two factors regarding this moment today: the first, the deliberate opposition between the State and some key sectors of the population that oppose the neoliberal logic, in the same sense used by Foucault (2004a), here described as an *exercise of power*, but now carried out and operated through the support of a part of the civilian population itself; that is, it is a war motivated by an internal division produced within society, thereby creating a field of popular support for such modes of government; and the second factor, which is linked to the first, being the strategy of creating opposition between two fractions of the population. It is thus common to mobilize the defense of the values of the past, or of the family, and to oppose "foreigners", "leftists", "vagabonds", "communists", "land invaders", and son on. In short, it is about

activating (and suggesting and pushing) an intense opposition to minorities (through a more or less common repertoire) - all these groups taken together as internal enemies that hinder progress. Such a set of factors orbits around a security imaginary, which includes the idea of a threat to the security of part of the population - the one part that is supposed to be honest, hardworking, and good. The other part of the population can thus be a legitimate target of State force.

Considering these two different phases of the adaptation of neoliberalism, as explained thus far, the second part of this article then seeks to identify the different expressions of Brazilian neoliberalism with a focus on public housing policies in regard to how they relate with housing struggle movements and their resistances. To this end, this exercise will resort to a very brief analysis of the Minha Casa, Minha Vida Program ("My Home, My life"), taken as a characteristic management device of the center-left, progressive neoliberal period, revealing some of the implications of this government practice on the production of urban and metropolitan space. Then, we discuss some essential points in the most recent housing policy of land regularization, here viewed as an expression of austerity and the gradual withdrawal of the State as a guarantor of urban infrastructures and services.

Part two

Progressive neoliberal devices

The transversality of neoliberal rationality can be understood as a determining factor in the conception of public policies in the period previously called *progressive neoliberalism* or *left-wing* neoliberalism. This becomes evident when we highlight some of the characteristics of the Minha Casa Minha Vida Program (MCMV) operation, in its first two editions. One can thus interpret such a public program as a Brazilian 21st century *neoliberal device* – a powerful and very well finished one, for it has been able to – simultaneously – mobilize the reproduction of construction industry capital, now extended to the financial cycles of the stock exchanges; capture and take advantage of struggles and resistance efforts; and, in addition, present itself and discursively legitimize itself as an expansion of *social well-being* and an effort to decrease inequalities. As a result, it manages to momentarily pacify daily life and to contain any impulse that could rise against the expulsion of the poorest from the metropolitan centers or from their original territories.

In this way, the MCMV was able to change not only the form and strategy of social housing movements in their efforts, but also the very existential logic of these movements (Dal 'Bó da Costa, 2019). Generally speaking, taking a look at different movements aimed at the struggle for housing rights, which comprises a number of occupations and squatted settlements, throughout the 2010s, one can infer that, at first, the struggles for housing right redirected from direct actions towards broad negotiation efforts with public services. In a second moment, the social movement activists themselves turned into a kind of program managers, that is managers of demands, which even resulted in competition between the various social movements and their respective demands and, moreover, competition between these movements and the unorganized population.

In summary, regarding the different stages, we have seen was the following transition: first, social movements carry out a series of occupations to get state attention and to start negotiations with the governments in force. In these acts, occupation is merely a form of contestation, and, in most cases, the location of the occupied land is thus no longer of the utmost importance: such occupations have no horizon of consolidation (Rizek and Dal 'Bó, 2015). Secondly, upon acquiring the role of managing negotiations within the municipalities, these movements thereby guarantee, for those who are thusly organized, a place in the registers of "Minha Casa, Minha Vida" program. In a third moment, different housing rights movements compete with each other for public funding so as to guarantee their demands; in the fourth and last moment, the movements fully become program managers, with the role of organizing their own registrations, plus the search for land, the negotiation with construction companies and a wide variety of functions, which previously were carried out by the state. Finally, by the time the second edition of the program ended in 2019, the movements had been largely demobilized (Dal 'Bó da Costa, 2019) or, at least, had been very much captured by the parliamentary and executive routines of the government.

In summary, we can see the implosion of the bonds of class solidarity and of the struggle for social rights – which were on the horizon of *social welfare*, and previously drove such struggles. All of that took place through a neoliberal government technology, in two different phases of its adaptation.

It should be noted that the MCMV, in force between 2009 and 2019, coincides with the period when the greatest housing campaign (through state intervention/mediation) took place in the history of Brazil. The volume of house units produced within the program until 2017 was 4.7 million units, which amounts to 6% of the total household's number of in Brazil in 2010.[3] The volume of contracts in turn amounts to a little more than 8% – this clearly is a huge volume of constructions, which brought about major changes in Brazilian cities in a short period of time.

As for the changes related to the regional impact and the expansion of urban perimeters, MCMV proved to be extremely harmful to Brazilian cities, as its products were mostly poorly located housing projects of very low architectural quality. They contributed to the perpetuation and to the aggravation of spatial and social segregation, which is shaped by differences in income within the population. The program also inflated the prices within the real estate market, especially the rental values. Ironically – or tragically –, after the first 6 years of the MCMV's program, the Brazilian housing deficit increased significantly in metropolitan regions and large cities.[4] This was, arguably, mainly due to the large increase[5] in rental prices, which reached 51.77% within the Brazilian average, being even higher in capitals and large cities. This increase led a new mass of families to fall into the category of excessive rent burden.[6]

Therefore, this is about framing the MCMV program as yet another feature of the incorporation capacity of neoliberalism. Such capacity is able to unite and pacify a tremendously complex plethora of divergent and contradictory forces withing society, by bringing together the market, accumulation and the discourse of social rights at the same time, within a single legitimizing discourse, now forged by the government itself, through a full and universalizing political rationality.

Setting the divergent apart; promoting competition; and guaranteeing plus giving public legitimacy to big businesses: the novelty that now emerges lies precisely in the ability to do all this, at the same time, through what, in appearance, is but a public housing policy with populist appeal: social pacification. Taking such a situation into consideration, it becomes quite evident that, beyond the strict relationship between market and state, neoliberalism can be better defined by the generalization of a certain political rationality that extends its logic to the whole of society (Dardot and Laval, 2009). In this sense, Minha Casa Minha Vida program reveals itself to be a very well-finished instance of a neoliberal device[7] capable of creating a network between these various elements.

Finally, the existence of the PMCM program cannot be explained without considering the role of the codes or operating models which came into being in the context of corporations, enterprises or companies and which prevail over such neoliberal rationality. Such rationality in turn is legitimized within society by means of different techniques, discourses and institutional practices which arguably produce, therefore, a business subjectivity. This subjectivity is marked by competitiveness, and profoundly alters life in cities, thus enabling a renewed strategy of real estate accumulation to appear under the guise of a public policy - and one that promotes rights, even including the social movements fighting for housing rights, as agents of its force.
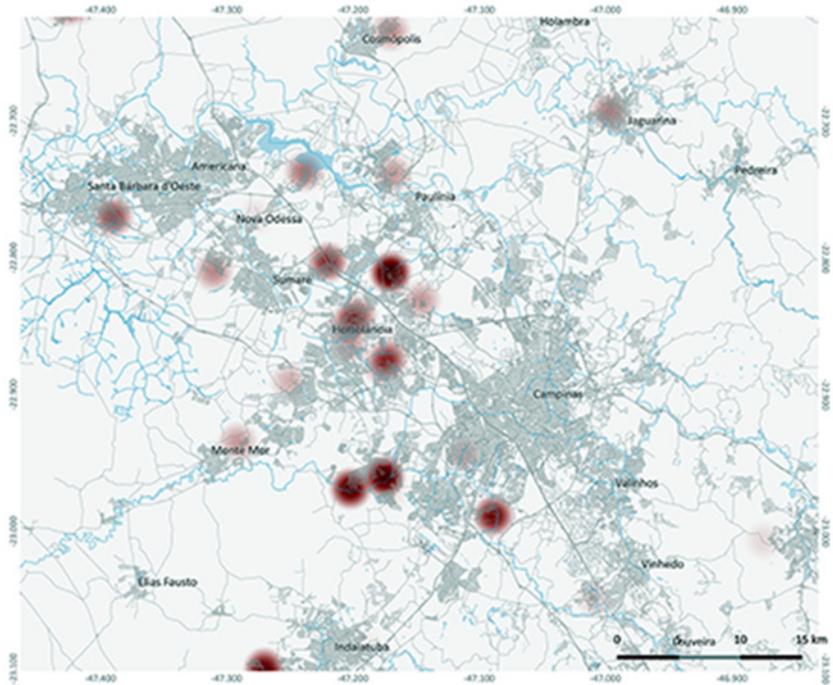
The logic of neoliberal rationality, which extends way beyond the purely economic realm of a number of processes (often described as financialized), thus have a presence even in the midst of the production of space, by means

of various norms. Such norms pertain to the exacerbation of individuality, competitiveness, self-management, the non-stop risk calculation regarding interpersonal relations and, finally, the implosion of any mediation or legitimacy regarding solidarity in everyday life. This is, to a large extent, precisely what underpins the liberal economic imperative and the current ongoing process for the deconstruction of basic rights societies throughout the Western world.

To illustrate the spatial result of the program, I hereby present the mapping of urban sprawl caused by the MCMV in the metropolitan regions of Campinas and São José dos Campos, which are the areas where the occupation cases I studied throughout my master's and doctoral research process are located: the Vila Soma (2012-current), Zumbi dos Palmares (2008-2013) and Pinheirinho (2004-2012) squatting occupations. I have also mapped (as I shall show) some other capitals and metropolitan regions of Brazil, where the changes were also very significant, displaying a unique pattern induced by public housing policy.

The maps presented below speak for themselves and confirm the reiteration of spatial segregation, the urban sprawl pattern pertaining to cities and metropolises. One thing does stand out as a novelty, namely that, during the formation of large Brazilian cities and metropolises, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, spatial segregation was consolidated, above all, through house-building with no permit on irregular and peripheral terrains, with the absence of the State (albeit a planned absence). At the present time, the MCMV program is driving a new cycle of urban sprawl and segregation, this time with a more decisive presence of the State.

Figure 1 – Implementation of the MCMV program in the Metropolitan Region of Campinas/SP
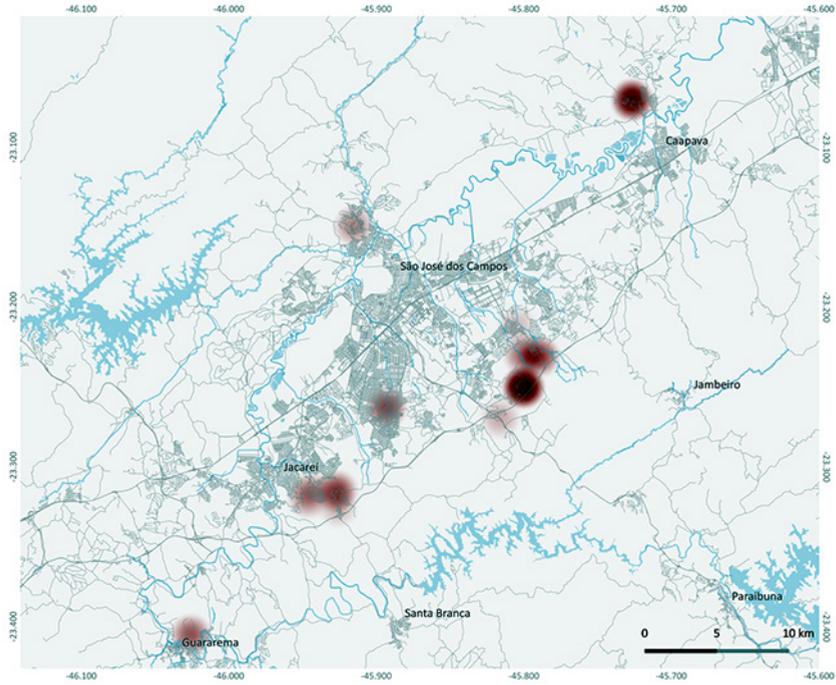

Caption

- - - - - -2600 UH

- - - - -240 UH

Prepared by the authors. 2018. Made with QGIS 2.18.9.
Source: roads and hydrography (Open street maps, 2018); location of municipalities (Malha Municipal IBGE, 2018); data on projects from Minha Casa Minha Vida for Residential Leasing Fund, FAR-A (Caixa Econômica Federal, 2018) using the Electronic Citizen Information System (Portal e-Sic, 2018).

Figure 2 – Implementation of the MCMV program
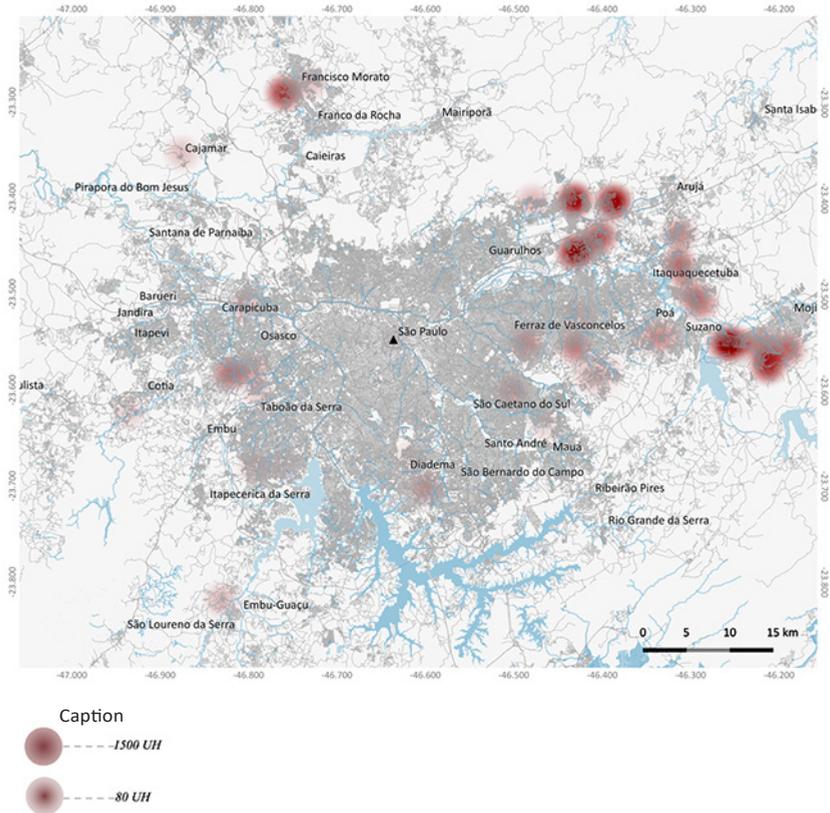in the Region of São José dos Campos/State of Sao Paulo (SP)

Prepared by the authors. 2018. Made with QGIS 2.18.9.
Source: roads and hydrography (Open street maps, 2018); location of municipalities (Malha Municipal IBGE, 2018); data on projects from Minha Casa Minha Vida for Residential Leasing Fund, FAR-A (Caixa Econômica Federal, 2018) using the Electronic Citizen Information System (Portal e-Sic, 2018).
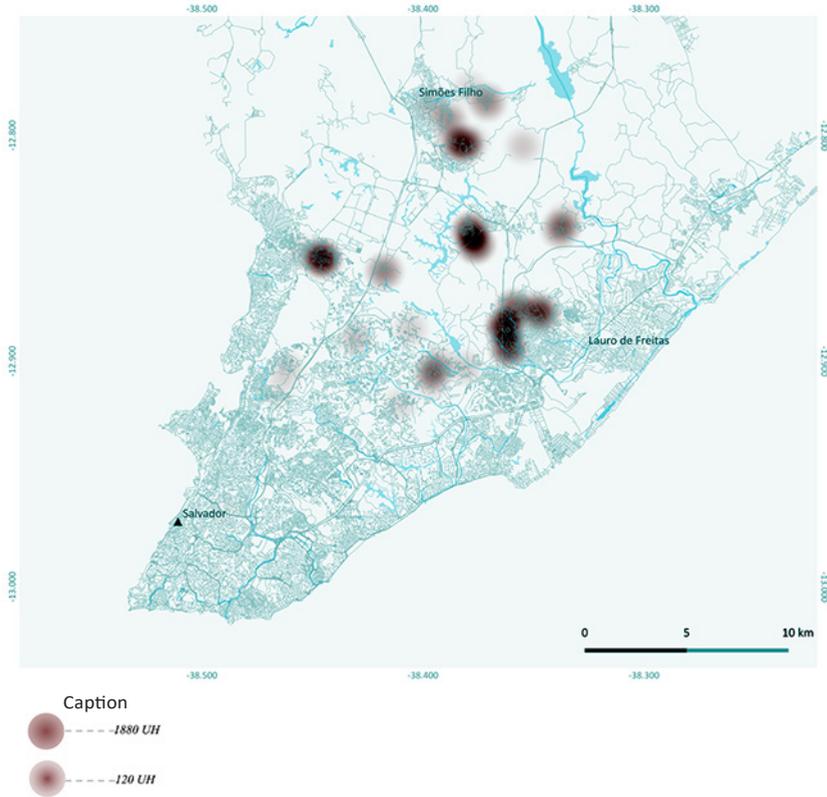
Figure 3 – Implementation of the MCMV program
in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo

Caption

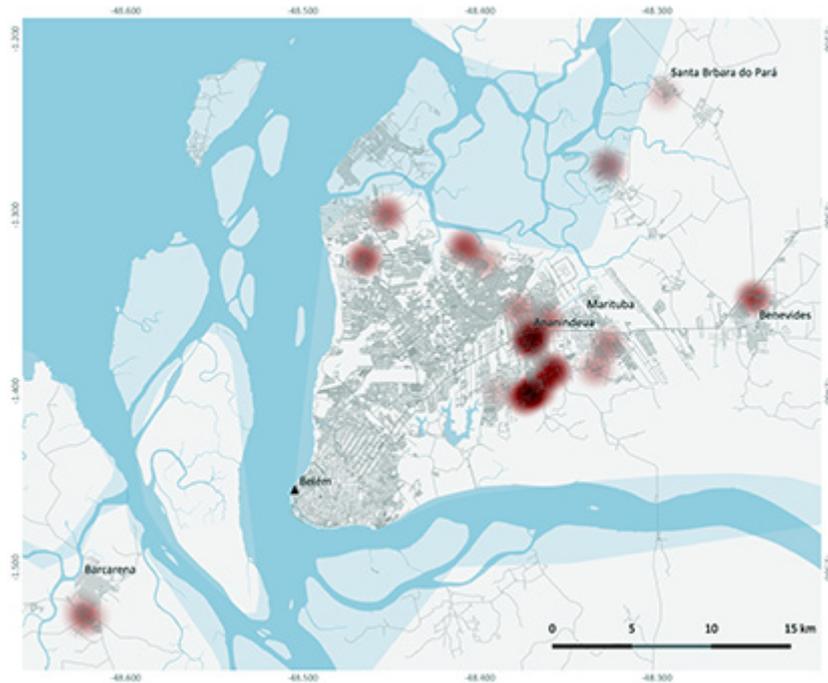Prepared by the authors. 2018. Made with QGIS 2.18.9.
Source: roads and hydrography (Open street maps, 2018); location of municipalities (Malha Municipal IBGE, 2018); data on projects from Minha Casa Minha Vida for Residential Leasing Fund, FAR-A (Caixa Econômica Federal, 2018) using the Electronic Citizen Information System (Portal e-Sic, 2018).

Figure 4 – Implementation of the MCMV program
in Salvador/State of Bahia and neighboring municipalities

Prepared by the authors. 2018. Made with QGIS 2.18.9.
Source: roads and hydrography (Open street maps, 2018); location of municipalities (Malha Municipal IBGE, 2018); data on projects from Minha Casa Minha Vida for Residential Leasing Fund, FAR-A (Caixa Econômica Federal, 2018) using the Electronic Citizen Information System (Portal e-Sic, 2018).

Figura 5 – Implantação do MCMV em Belém/PA
e municípios vizinhos

Caption
- - - - -1220 UH
- - - - -150 UH

Prepared by the authors. 2018. Made with QGIS 2.18.9.
Source: roads and hydrography (Open street maps, 2018); location of municipalities (Malha Municipal IBGE, 2018); data on projects from Minha Casa Minha Vida for Residential Leasing Fund, FAR-A (Caixa Econômica Federal, 2018) using the Electronic Citizen Information System (Portal e-Sic, 2018).

A new city governance scenario[8]

How then are we to understand the forms of governance of cities, metropolises and – more broadly – the Brazilian territory in the present time characterized by an authoritarian, austere and militarized turn (these features are here described as *austere militarized neoliberalism and explicit violence*)? How should we think about the production of cities and resistance movements against the increase in violence as a means of organizing the territory? The latest deforestation and mining events in the Amazon, the deliberate fight against indigenous and traditional territories and the rise in incarceration plus the extermination of the poor, black and peripheral populations, carried out as an open management project by the top management of the last federal government (2019-2022), demonstrate that intensive violence and the proposal to destroy social rights were at the center of this government's new practices.

It is noteworthy that the attempts to frame the issue through the notions of neoliberal rationality, either through the Foucauldian conceptual key of *biopolitics*, or in the updating of the notion of *world Reason*, by Dardot and Laval (2009), previously debated, would all limit the analysis of the authoritarian present we describe, as they would miss the most violent elements bow used in an open and expanded way, albeit as population management. It is not about, however, considering the historical period of *neoliberalism to be over*, nor is it about the obsolescence of a theoretical framework; rather it is about seeking its new temporalities and metamorphoses, as well as the possible overlaps between its periods.

Thus, it is also possible to recognize neoliberalism as a continuity of that force of social cohesion that has historically been able to produce direct combat against all proposals for a social life or social organization marked by solidarity. It now produces new internal enemies for this very purpose, with the State remaining in charge of monitoring, repressing, controlling, blocking and, in extremis, waging war against any type of social organization aimed at expanding the distribution of rights or at reducing inequalities - the goal being to guarantee the competition imperative.

As a result, we are currently witnessing a transformation in the usage of control devices (both legal and technological) on a global scale – with origins in military and war thinking. Such are now employed as part of the ordinary management of public order, with a daily impact on the lives of cities, as pointed out by Graham (2016) and Weizman (2017). It is even related to a reformulation of government thinking itself based on military principles, as pointed out by Weber (2005), among others. Through such control devices, those who resists or call for any other state of affairs are permanently targeted as enemies of society and the State. The workings of such violent management encompass everything: the environment, the regulated labor market, the retirement system, public spending on social rights and even we ourselves, the critics within universities and their research.

Concluding Notes

The current government practices of Brazilian cities, as we have seen and concluded in the context presented above, through the recent Land Regularization legislation (federal law no. 13.465/2017), and through the normative changes on land regularization policies (which have been further regulated through a series of related pieces of legislation),[9] mark an evident shift in the mode of government, with austere characteristics – those remove from the State its obligations pertaining to maintain basic services and to the infrastructures of urban space, relegating them instead to new possible arrangements between companies within the land regularization sector and residents of areas undergoing regularization. In practice, this development changed the very manner land regularization takes place. If, previously, it was necessary to carry out urbanization projects for spatial planning and land use, with the necessary regularization of basic infrastructures and services, for further bureaucratic smoothing (by means of a definitive issuance of deeds and guarantee of property title), now, all it takes is filing a simple project plus a regularization letter of intent (accompanied by some private contracts), and that can guarantee formalization procedures and legal compliance. This allows for commercialization, for obtaining loans, and financing, thereby producing real estate goods, even without starting any definitive urbanization and spatial planning – and above all without any guarantee.

As an example of the implications of this new set of laws on government practices and modes of management of Brazilian cities, one could cite the Vila Soma occupation, which began in 2012, in the municipality of Sumaré/State of Sao Paulo. It is now inhabited by over 10,000 people, being notably one of the most emblematic cases of organized struggle for housing rights in the recent history of Brazilian cities (Dal 'Bó da Costa, 2019). The occupation began with the autonomous self-organization of marginalized families and, throughout over 10 years of struggle, managed to remain in the occupied land – today it is going through land regularization procedures, but the whole process has been permeated by various contradictions.

If today we can critically point out the ambiguity or even, one could say, the bankruptcy of the numerous legislative instruments pertaining to Brazilian urban law (from the 1988 Federal Constitution to the emergence of the much-celebrated City Statute). These have shown themselves to be quite unable, by themselves, to guarantee social interests or the social duty of private property, not to mention the security of tenure or the materialization of housing rights. Moreover, there has been a step backwards, however – and beyond this tragic finding – it is essential to highlight the new austere turn that has just expanded the field of private and privatized relationships in the production of urban space itself, through the new national land regularization legislation, as mentioned above.

In the present context, as an attempt to guarantee they could remain on the occupied place, Vila Soma (considering the long history of family struggles in that place), they chose to negotiate the direct purchase of the occupied area with the winner of the insolvent estate judicial auction, and, subsequently, discuss the costs and private forms of regularization. Thus, it can be seen, in practice, how the conjuncture

imposed a new form of conflict resolution outside the scope of guaranteeing housing rights and outside the scope of the struggle for the social function of property - as opposed to the commodification of land and to land regularization now under a new arrangement, which is also, it stands out, a new market niche for companies that operate by replacing the government precisely within the realm of its duty to apply and enforce the instruments of urban policy and also within the production, maintenance and guarantee of the basic services and infrastructures of the city.

In summary, regarding the conflict, it is necessary to give some context, noting that the Vila Soma occupation struggle,[10] which began in 2012, takes place in a total area of one million square meters, in the central region of the municipality of Sumaré, in the Metropolitan Region of Campinas. The occupation began to be organized as a strong social movement for house rights and, given the judicialization trend regarding land tenure conflicts and the high complexity of the case (involving almost 3,000 families, or 10,000 people), it became one of the most paradigmatic cases in the history of urban housing conflicts since the Pinheirinho conflict in São José dos Campos/State of Sao Paulo (2004-2012). After numerous manifestations, political articulations and judicial decisions, plus disputes with local authorities and, notably, the interests of real estate speculation, an unprecedented decision, the Federal Supreme Court (STF) ruled that the ownership repossession be suspended, in early 2016,[11] thus bringing a new perspective for families in the occupied area and materializing the public interest of land regularization.

From the perspective of opposing and resisting the neoliberal imperative, the Vila Soma occupation then began to demand the expropriation of the area for public interest purposes, with the tax compensation of a property originating from an insolvent estate. This requirement was justified with appeal to housing rights and the social function of property, claiming that such a solution, allowing the people to remain in the occupied area, even in defiance of proposals and attempts to relocate them to another area (a marginal and poorly located one), through housing initiatives of the Minha Casa Minha Vida program. This unique solution stands out, as I presented above, as a *device* of *progressive neoliberalism*. In this context, within the Vila Soma occupation a discuss started and then a call to demand policies aimed at regularizing land tenure of public interest, thereby guaranteeing the security of tenure and the recognition of those residences (informally built), as well as the infrastructures of public services - this stood in clear contrast with the latent irrationality of the new constructions within housing complexes on the outskirts of cities, such as those located in Figures 1 to 5 previously presented.

Despite the constant struggle, there was no land expropriation - or any other definitive solution mediated by the State. Worse, in 2019, Minister Carmen Lúcia threatened to suspend the 2016 ruling, at which point a new round of negotiations was opened. To summarize, whatever was agreed to – against the will of much of the social movement players – took place through a private agreement between residents and the company that bought the land in the judicial auction, with the consent of

the municipal government of Sumaré, for the purpose of land regularization. It is noteworthy that those living there were responsible for the entire cost, be it regarding the purchase of the plots or the infrastructure – and they were also responsible for the financing monthly payment. At the time of writing, it was clear that many of those who inhabited the occupation in 2019 had to leave their homes due to default or due to being unable to pay.

In the present, in view of the change in the political agenda that assumes *authoritarian, austere and militarized* characteristics for managing social collapse, the pacifying management movement clears take place via a network of programs and public policies made possible in previous governments, for solutions now predominantly private. As in the specific case of Vila Soma, the real estate market has assimilated land regularization as a new business model, especially in the manner brought by federal law 13.465/2017, which anticipates titling and, therefore, the formalization of the commodity. Hence comes a whole kind of new real estate and financial products, anticipated, and even unrelated, to the need to implement urban infrastructure and public services.

A new housing commodity which is very precarious then consolidates - it is now legalized and supported by the State; and, thus, the range of properties titles and land tenures that can be formally bought and sold are immediately expanded, even if they lack the minimum infrastructure conditions, and even if there is no city at all. Finally, backed by this urban precariousness (now converted into a formal commodity), new financial routines may also emerge, through credit markets and debt securitization initiatives. Moreover, a new layer

of control over the lives of the poorest part of the populations within the metropolises is established through long loans: that is, houses, infrastructure, and urban services on credit, in unending installments - or a new governance of poverty by means indefinite debt.

Thus, the case of Vila Soma points to the combination of a new phase of commodification of the land regularization process of "social interest" – with the replacement of the urban policy role of governments, that now figure as mere mediators and legitimizers within a new chain of private arrangements. This new austere moment is only made possible within the framework of federal law 13.465/2017, which now includes a large volume of lands previously irregularly occupied or even indebted, with notary problems, in a large market niche for middleman businesses, which imposes property sale relations as the new unique solution for families living in these areas. Therefore, what we have in mind here is a privatization process – a process whch privatizes the government's obligation to guarantee social rights, now pertaining to the very realm of the production of cities. It perversely takes place through public actions aimed at hypothetical housing rights, now legally recognizing irregular constructions without basic infrastructure as a passive item within land regularization and mediation processes – generating long indebtedness amid the marginalized population that dwells in Brazilian urban centers.

In this context, it seems that the solution reached in the specific case of the Vila Soma occupation points to a new format for solving urban conflicts – one that is even more ambiguous, with a remarkably austere characteristic: there is a consensus between

the families desires to remain in the occupied area, with residences already built, and the economic interest of the landowner in receiving land that was previously impossible to transact in the formal market. In this arrangement, the agreement becomes merely a a private purchase and sale instrument, in which the resident families assume the burden of responsibility for the infrastructure and are also faced with a new parceled debt and a renewed risk of eviction due to payment default. Now, however, the risk of eviction is individualized in terms of plots registered in a notary's office, thereby undermining any future possibilities of collective resistance (by remaining in the occupied place). Finally, the violence of the police state can always be activated again at the moment when the eventual eviction of the defaulting family is necessary – and this, I highlight, is now individualized by plots, thus imploding the collective dimension of the struggle – to guarantee the release of the commodity. The privatization of urban services and infrastructures, austerity and selective violence with well-defined targets now are all modes of governance and production of cities.

[I] https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0363-5020
Universidade de São Paulo, Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Departamento de Filosofia. São Paulo, SP/Brasil.
andredalbo@gmail.com

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Notes

(1) I used the original version, in French, because the Brazilian translation, published in 2013, omitted part of the text.

(2) I refer to the transformation of the ways government exercises its power on a global scale, the essential and common trait of it being the emergence of authoritarian experiences with the coming to power of (democratically) elected representatives characterized by ultraconservative discourses (sometimes openly racist and xenophobic), and by agendas also aimed at the greater militarization of daily life and social relations - sometimes also associated with austerity programs and the reduction of social rights guarantees. This is precisely the case with Trump, in the United States (2017-2021); Bolsonaro, in Brazil (2019-2022); Netanyahu, in Israel (1996-1999; 2009-2021; 2022-); Orban, in Hungary (2010-); and one could also cite the recent and broad rise of other far-right leaders, such as Salvini and Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Marine Le Pen in France, the Swedish SD party, originated from a neo-Nazi group, and the current favorite in the Argentine elections, Javier Milei, who claims to be an anarcho-capitalist, promises the closure of more than half of the federal ministries and the dollarization of the economy.

(3) For comparison, the total number of permanent private households was considered in accordance with the 2010 IBGE Census.

(4) Data on the housing deficit according to the João Pinheiro Foundation for the years 2010 and 2015.

(5) The variation of the Fipe-ZAP Index regarding rent value in the period from March 2009 to March 2015 was 98.37%, while the IPCA variation, in the same period, was 46.60%. Therefore, in the same period rents rose 52.70% above inflation.

(6) According to the João Pinheiro Foundation, the excessive rent burden is characterized by directing over 30% of the family income towards rent payment.

(7) I use the term device in the broad sense used by Foucault ("dispositif") (2004a): a network that can be established between a diverse and heterogeneous set that encompasses discourses, institutions, organizations, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical and moral propositions, among other elements.

(8) Part of excerpts B and C, from the second part of this text, result from the presentation made at the Institute of Advanced Studies of USP, during the debate "What is the research agenda for criticism of the metamorphoses of neoliberalism?" during the 2nd Seminar "Metamorphoses of Neoliberalism", in November 2020.

(9) Federal Law 13,465/2017, Federal Law 14,188/2020 and related decrees and ordinances.

(10) For a detailed history of Vila Soma's conflict, see the second chapter of Dal'Bó da Costa's PhD thesis (2019).

(11) Decision on injunction 4.085, Justice Ricardo Lewandowski, on January 13, 2016.

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