

State violence in the production of territories, informality, and protection networks*

Violências do Estado na produção de territórios, informalidade e redes de proteção

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Abstract

Based on violence originated by the State, this article describes and analyzes evictions to put the production of urban space and conflict into perspective. The text's empirical basis is an ethnographic study carried out in the central area of São Paulo, where the State's strength is revealed through evictions, displacements, destruction of territories and long-established social fabrics, and production of informality and informal markets; it also approaches the articulation of networks and protection arrangements (including housing) as responses to this violence. Another objective is to observe, in these disputes, a tactical and situational mobilization and instrumentalization of institutional webs, analyzing the process of creation of repertoires and practices in this movement marked by conflict.

Keywords: violence; eviction; precariousness; informality; territory.

Resumo

Este artigo toma as remoções como prisma descritivo e analítico para perspectivar a produção do espaço urbano e do conflito, a partir, sobretudo, da violência produzida pelo Estado. O texto tem como base empírica pesquisa etnográfica realizada no centro de São Paulo, onde a força do Estado se revela na realização de remoções, deslocamentos, destruição de territórios e de tecidos sociais longamente constituídos, como também na produção de informalidade e mercados informais; relaciona-se também com a articulação de redes e arranjos de proteção (habitacionais, inclusive) como respostas a essas violências. É objetivo, também, observar nessas disputas a mobilização e a instrumentalização tática e situacional das tramas institucionais, vendo como nessa movimentação conflitiva outros e novos repertórios e práticas são criados.

Palavras-chave: violência; remoção; precariedade; informalidade; território.



Introduction

The uncertainty of living on the verge of being removed, on the condition of “displaceability” founded by the “threat of displacement” (Yiftachel, 2020), establishes a social and urban experience, a way of experiencing “contemporary urban citizenship” (ibid.), lacking of any promise of or normative reference for future stability and security in ways of inhabiting and living. The condition of threat, as an expanded and systemic experience, which prolongs itself over time, exceeds in scope and impacts the actual event and political act of eviction itself (ibid.). The effects of such indeterminacy, therefore, go beyond the territorial limits of spaces affected by the condition of “permanent transitoriness” (Rolnik, 2015; Villela et al., 2019; Santos, 2019), as they also condition the lives and urban trajectories of its residents. This circumstance of indeterminacy and threat governs the lives of people and families who live in these spaces, as well as their access to – and the production of – dwelling spaces, places of work, sociability circuits, and urban mobilities.

To understand these processes, according to Schiller and Çağlar (2015), it is necessary to retain the “urban scale” as an analytical plan that enables to explore points of convergence and put them into perspective, from the urban materialities (urban networks and infrastructures) and the broader and shared social experience of precariousness, to the trajectories of different social groups that are subject to processes of socio-spatial displacements – the trajectories taken as an analyzer of operational and situated modes of expulsion and displacement. In the production

of contemporary post or neocolonial urban spaces in cities of the Global South, but increasingly present and disseminated in those of the North, policies and dynamics of dispossession, displacement and permanent threat are structuring, and cannot be read and understood in a deracialized way (Yiftachel, 2020; De Genova and Roy, 2019).

Given the scale and centrality of “expulsions”, understood as an analytical and descriptive category of ongoing processes in contemporary capitalism (Sassen, 2014), it is important to understand, in an articulated way, the dynamics and mechanisms producing *displacements*, but also the production of forms of *emplacements* (Schiller and Çağlar, 2015 and 2018), even if temporary and precarious. Mobility practices and their modes of location/fixation (*emplacement*) presuppose and construct spaces and territorialities, as well as mediations, circuits and sociability. These arrangements can be taken as analyzers of the procedures, social relations, political aggregations, and instruments triggered by and involved in moments of conflict and evictions, as well as in the processes that produce territorialization and permanence – as an attempt and “*expectation* of stability”, which is different from stability itself (Rizek et al., 2015, p. 302; authors’ emphasis, translated from Portuguese).

At the heart of the different forms and practices of territorialization is the dispute over the statute of these spaces, their right to exist and remain, and the threats surrounding them. What is at stake behind these disputes is the political question of state power to define what can be accepted and tolerated, from what must be repressed and criminalized. Informality should not be understood as an object of state (non)regulation, a dimension outside the state,

but as produced by the state itself (Roy, 2005, p. 149). The state legal and planning apparatus “has the power to determine what is informal and what is not, and to determine which forms of informality will thrive and which will disappear” (ibid.). Thus, “state power is reproduced through the capacity to construct and reconstruct categories of legitimacy and illegitimacy” (ibid.).

Informality is therefore encompassed within State practices, present even where it appears not to be: “there is nothing casual or spontaneous about the calculated informality that undergirds the territorial practices of the state” (Roy, 2009b, p. 82). In this way, formality is not fundamentally separated from informality, as two distinct and opposing sectors (Roy, 2005, p. 148). Fragmented and diffuse processes of urbanization “does not take place at the fissure between formality and informality but rather, in fractal fashion, *within* the informalized production of space” (Roy, 2009b, p. 82, author’s emphasis) – prompting the consideration of the *differentiations* of informality: the different informal arrangements, spaces and practices.

Conceived in this spectrum of “differentiation within informality” (Roy, 2005, p. 149, author’s emphasis), urban informality is not necessarily synonymous with poverty, as informal practices and arrangements produced may also be associated with wealth and power (Roy, 2009b, p.82). This analytical displacement raises a crucial political and urban question: “why some forms of informality are criminalized and thus rendered illegal”, and destined to be evicted and destroyed, “while others enjoy state sanction”, and protection, “or are even practices of the state”? (ibid., p.83). From this perspective, we can understand that the

forms of elite informality are often regularised and legalised by the state, including through urban planning processes. [...] the state formalises and criminalises different spatial configurations, authorising and legalising the land invasions of the powerful and criminalising the habitat of the disenfranchised. (De Genova e Roy, 2019, p. 359)

In Brazil and in the city of São Paulo, around the different spatial arrangements and popular informal practices that seek to circumvent the procedures used to criminalize ways of life and ways of dwelling, constellations of residents, housing movements, political actors, and varied collectives can be found, with different repertoires, practices and interests, reinforcing the heterogeneity and political facet in the production and management of these spaces and their populations. The dispute does not only relate to the appropriations and uses of space, but also to the ways of managing populations in these spaces; not only by the State and its agents, but also by these different actors and repertoires that are present and active, in conflict as in composition and accommodation, in the production and territorial management of these places (Santos and Guerreiro, 2020).

The spaces and ways of life which take place in zones of indetermination, in varied gradations of informality, being subject to so many instances, orders and norms – not just state ones – also produce modes of subjectivation. In Roy's words (2009a), there is a “civic governmentality” marked by ambivalence emerging from the transit between legal and illegal, between subjections, accommodations and confrontations that also constitute the conflict in the spaces and

subjects produced to be governable and the efforts to escape these devices and their regulations. In Yiftachel's words, this is the "emergence of new subjectivities through the production of space" (2009, p. 240;) through the invention, appropriation and transformation of tactics and strategies of survival and coping, making these spaces also "as bases for self organization, negotiation and empowerment" (*ibid.*, p. 243).

There is also an institutional fabric, forged and historically disputed, present and activated framing, conditioning, supporting, limiting, as well serving as a reference and also mobilized as a tool in critical events and in the daily management of the lives and territories in conflict in the city. This fabric is made up of a set of regulations, rights, laws, precedents, instances and institutional devices, including institutional arenas for negotiation and conflict processing, constructed over time in a conflictive way. Built and conquered through mobilizations and confrontations across the historical process, this fabric makes and constitutes the state (Tilly, 1990). This "institutional arsenal" also serves as instrument, reference and field for new clashes in present times – in the sense that it is not a finished and sealed process. The fact that this fabric is never fully effective (therefore, always insufficient) and is in constant dispute means that it is always in transformation, with its limits being tested and its possibilities (re)invented. And, in this way, the fabric is not the only thing in a permanent process of re/de/construction, but also the state itself.¹

These institutional and legal devices, which are resources and means for disputes today, including attempts to destroy and deactivate all this accumulation and

ordering, have been built, formalized and institutionalized in the last 30 years throughout the Brazilian redemocratization process. Along this path, urban guarantees and rights linked to housing (among rights of many other areas and dimensions) have been disputed, negotiated, conquered (Rolnik, 2009), even though the mobilization around these rights and demands started much earlier, being broader and going beyond this time frame.

From the 1988 Constitution and the precept of the social function of property to the legitimacy gained by social movements fighting for housing, from the City Statute to municipal Master Plans, from land regularization processes to the creation and implementation of Zeis (Zonas Especias de Interesse Social; in English, Special Zones of Social Interest), including instances of negotiation and mediation of land conflicts, legal and legislative spaces and devices for processing conflict, such as public hearings, participatory councils, public consultations, public funds and resources, as well as a whole series of guidelines and norms regulating and ensuring minimum rights, guarantees and protections. All of these mechanisms form the institutional fabric and are fundamental to shaping the dispute today, at the same time that their existence is the result of historical and social processes, demonstrating how the fabrication of the state takes place in the field of conflict (Tilly, 1985 and 1990).

This is not about defending and romanticizing this institutional fabric or denying its limitations and crisis. The objective of this article is not to take stock of such institutionality (and its crises), but to describe how it is activated and mobilized by carrying out an ethnography of conflict. The point is not

to glorify or be content with the existing fabric as sufficient and complete; but to understand that the distinction between this fabric as an “abstract code” apart from “society as the realm of its practical application” does not hold: “code and practice tend to be inseparable aspects of one another” (Mitchell, 2006, p. 176;). Thus, the process of producing this formal/institutional repertoire – which will also be referred to in this article as institutionalities, in a broad sense – is continuous: the character of this set is not immanent and immutable, but forged in action, in the situational mobilization of the dispute and with different effects being produced, depending on the situations and confrontations. Neither is this institutional fabric constituted in a hegemonic and totalizing way as if it were the only existing order.²

In the next section, the objective will be, based on the research of and working with evictions and demolitions promoted by the state in downtown São Paulo – and attempts to resist to them –, to describe and reconstitute the conflictive dynamics and relationships that take place through a myriad of devices, practices and strategies which are ordinary, permanent and insidious, conditioning and affecting women, men and children, the majority of whom are poor and black, in their daily lives, in their most intimate, structuring spaces and circuits, as well as in the devices mobilized and invented to circumvent, to remain and to live. Through these minor and daily life plots, the ways in which power is exercised and how it is made and remade on the surface of conflict are inscribed (Foucault, 2015). From the case of evictions in downtown São Paulo, it is possible to observe the way the state violence produces territories, precariousness, markets and informality itself.

Evictions, violence and conflict in the “cracolândia” region, downtown São Paulo

This article is empirically based on ethnographic research carried out since 2017 in the region of Luz and Campos Elíseos, neighborhoods in downtown São Paulo, the vicinity of the so-called *cracolândia* [could be translated as “crackland”], which is the target of a large-scale urban restructuring project, currently under construction. From 2017 to the present day, the complete eviction of the population living and working in three blocks of the region has been carried out due to the implementation of two projects produced by Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in which public companies and authorities work alongside with private corporations: a housing project that is building new residential complexes in the area and another PPP that built the Pérola Byington Hospital. Other blocks neighboring these ones and the surrounding populations remain threatened by the continuity and development of such work, as well as by the arrival of new residents and businesses with a different socioeconomic profile and reality, as well as by the development of new economic, urban and social dynamics resulting from all these transformations.

The so-called *cracolândia* is constituted by the consolidated presence, in an itinerant but constant way over the last few years, of a scene in which a crowd of people openly use crack and other substances, known as “fluxo”, the *flow*.³ Around the flow, a whole dynamic and a “gravitational force” are established (Nasser, 2016; Mallart, 2019), attracting assistance, activism, management policies,

control and repression by the military forces as the police, producing as well an entire economic and urban infrastructure – circuits of commerce and urban economy, as well as an assistance network and housing arrangements.

Around the Coração de Jesus Square, located between the Júlio Prestes and Luz stations, there's a group of old mansions and two-storey houses, some listed as historical heritage, testifying to the times when the coffee aristocracy built the neighborhood in a planned way to be their place of residence. Over time, the elite left the downtown region to other and new areas through São Paulo's urbanization and expansion process, and the arrival and development of automobile infrastructures. These buildings ended up abandoned and became tenements and popular hotels. An entire informal housing market has developed to host workers, most of whom are also informal, and migrant families, coming either from other Brazilian states, mainly those in the Northeast, or countries, especially those from Latin America. Their option (if we can call an option) was to set in this territory constituted at the confluence and junction of many flows – of people, of goods, of possibilities for work and income, of circuits of important urban economic hubs (Santa Ifigênia, Bom Retiro, Brás) – in an attempt to make this location an asset, a possibility and tool to prosper.

The trigger that marked a new chapter in the long and ancient history of disputes in this central area of the city (Gatti, 2015; Santos, 2019) happened in May 2017, on the eve of an important, huge and yearly cultural event of the city, known as “Virada Cultural” (the “cultural turn” maybe we could translate). That year, the main stage of the event in front of the Júlio Prestes station was

not set up and, at the break of dawn, a large militarized and mediatized operation (as the actions “against cracolândia” usually are) took place, carried out by the state government in partnership with the city hall. Using bombs, gunshots and brutality, they dispersed and arrested individuals, and walled up living and commercial spaces, leaving many people unable to access their homes, documents, belongings and goods, due to the concrete blocking of the properties. Following this mega-operation, the then mayor of São Paulo, João Doria, announced the “end of cracolândia”. Two days after the military operation, the intervention continued with city hall tractors demolishing buildings in the area, generating an image that would summarize the beginning of the implementation of the new project: the demolition of properties with people inside.⁴ In an authoritarian and spectacular way, the public authorities' intention to carry out the construction of a housing project in two blocks of the neighborhood of Campos Elíseos, precisely on the perimeter where the flow used to be located, became official.

Shortly after the military operation and the beginning of public intervention and demolition, the mobilization of residents, shop owners, downtown housing movements, activist and cultural collectives from the area, popular lawyers, NGOs, and academic groups was organized. Because the affected blocks were demarcated by the municipal Master Plan as *Zeis 3* (Special Zone of Social Interest, in English),⁵ the public authorities were obliged – by the pressure from this group of articulated agents and also by an action from public prosecutors and from the Public Defender's Office – to set up a participatory local *Zeis* council (in Portuguese,

Conselho Gestor) as a way of guaranteeing monitoring, social participation, and the rights of families threatened with eviction during the interventions that, at that time, were just beginning in the two blocks.

One year after the public start of the intervention in the two blocks, throughout the first half of 2018, a third block (neighboring the other two) was completely evicted and demolished due to the implementation of another PPP, this one led by the Department of Health of the State of São Paulo, for the construction of the Pérola Byington Hospital. This third block was part of the same *Zeis* as the other two and, for this reason, civil society entities filed a lawsuit requiring the local *Zeis* council to cover the three blocks, given that the third block was within the same *Zeis* and the effects and consequences operated as a whole. The public authorities claimed that, as these were different projects (the hospital PPP, for example, had no partnership or participation from the municipal government), two different local *Zeis* councils were necessary, especially because the forms and conditions of directing and serving the resident populations (and the financial resources to do so) would change from one project to the next. In the legal dispute, the side of the public authorities prevailed, and two different councils were therefore created.

The election and establishment of the local *Zeis* council for the third block (the one where the hospital would be built) only took place on the day that people living there began to be evicted – as they voted in the council election, residents received cardboard boxes to make their move. It was a rainy day in São Paulo, but people were forced to leave their homes anyway. In theory, the approval by the local *Zeis* council of projects for the area and the

service of the population living in a *Zeis* should take place before the beginning of any eviction or demolition; that is, the public authorities themselves failed to comply with the law – and this was neither the first nor the last time that *cracolândia* witnessed such situation.

In relation to the others two blocks where the operation began in May 2017, the eviction of the resident population and the small and popular shop owners was carried out effectively and concretely from 2020, after the arrival of the pandemic, at a time when there was still no perspective of vaccine and staying at home was the safest way to protect oneself against the new virus. At the end of 2021, the two blocks were practically empty of their former residents and shop owners, with the aggravating factor of it having occurred during the pandemic, which means public authorities generated agglomeration, evictions, and population displacement (Santos, 2021). Furthermore, the evictions of the two blocks took place without any transparency, communication, or public dialogue with residents, as well as without any meeting of the local *Zeis* council being called.

When monitoring this process, it is necessary to pay attention to the dimension and importance of the registration (in Portuguese, *cadastro*), which ends up becoming a population government policy (Nasser, 2016), ordering, fragmenting, segmenting people differently, causing them to divide, to compete with each other, to want to join and take part, exploring their afflictions in the face of life urgencies. The desire to be registered destabilizes and weakens the terrain of action and possibilities for organizing resistance, also serving as restraint and a form of subjection. The intense and continuous process of coding and fragmentation

in registration makes the construction of more consistent units or collective actions hampered and fragile, given the ever-imminent risk of being left out or being cut off from the promises and guarantees that registration makes possible. The entire bureaucratic and institutional networks that develop from registration as well as from the control and management needs that it triggers further highlights the “gravitational force of the state” (Das, 2004, p. 229) that entangles the subjects and conditions their trajectories and (i)mobilities.

On the one hand, registration carries promises of assistance in an uncertain future, on the other, it can be a gateway to something very concrete and material: in the case of the residents of the two blocks, provisional aid in the form of a monthly BRL 400.00 Rent Assistance (in Portuguese, *Auxílio Aluguel*). This aid has always been recognized as legitimate when discussed by the civil society organized in the local *Zeis* council, given the neglect, violence, and scarcity of possibilities and resources offered by public authorities to residents of the region. One of the disputes on the part of civil society working on the local *Zeis* council was, however, for the provisional aid to be truly provisional, that is, for there to be a definitive assistance in fact, because “with no real permanent housing at the end, many are locked in an interminable state of waiting” (After Echo Park Lake, 2022a, p.180). In São Paulo, there are countless people who were registered in the past with the promise of future assistance who have either stopped receiving provisional aid before having permanent housing or been evicted again.

The condition of being permanently under threat of displacement is based on and sustained by the reproduction of “housing

insecurity through exclusion, expulsion, and waiting” (After Echo Park Lake, 2022b, p.71). These “offer of housing strategies”, most often a vague and uncertain promise, constitute “a mode of poverty governance that undermine the protections against spatial illegalization” (ibid., p.75). The condition of permanent threat of displacement is realized not “only” by the actual displacement and eviction itself; these constitute critical (and traumatic) moments (Brickell et al., 2017; Pain, 2019) which are only part of a process and a broader social and urban experience encompassing and going beyond these events, also made up of constant and varied moments of wait: waiting for definitive assistance; waiting for the fulfilling of a promise (often made by the state); waiting for the end of the wait (Yiftachel, 2020; After Echo Park Lake, 2022b).

In the region of the *cracolândia* blocks, whether due to the high mobility and circulation of people, or due to the precarity of many housing units, it is possible to find several cheaper housing arrangements in the many small and popular hotels and spaces, without the many requirements of the formal rental market (presentation of documents, guarantee/guarantor, contracts). In such terms, the evictions performed in the area by the state result in moving either away from the downtown area or to even more precarious housing conditions in the center region, which can be afforded. Observing the destruction of this social fabric (and its effects and consequences) also highlighted the possibilities, arrangements, and ways of life that existed and were forged in and through the informality that constituted this territory.

In October 2021, the ward office of the central neighborhood of Sé and the civil police carried out a major operation (which is

recurrent in the region) in the few properties in the two blocks that still had people living in them. In this operation, with the justification of closing off properties based on civil defense reports, without presenting any warrant or official document, not to mention any housing alternative, they sealed off commercial and hotels that were still operating, leaving residents of the area not only without their belongings, which were walled up inside such properties, but also without housing. There must be an effort to reconstitute the agents that promote evictions when we say, for example, that the “state evicts” (there are other actors, privates including, doing so besides state agents): because “behind” this “state” there is a heterogeneous fabric of agents and expedients used, taking turns, alternating, complementing, sometimes using judicial decisions, sometimes without any warrant, at times in actions at municipal level, at others, at the state government instances; sometimes carrying out large operations, but also, quite often, taking place slowly (Pain, 2019) and exhaustingly. It is important, therefore, to reconstruct how the power to evict is exercised in practice and in daily life.

The following week, public agents and from the energy company Enel came again to threaten eviction, to close properties and to cut the supply of water and electricity in the few places which were still occupied. During this operation, four residents were arrested for having informal electricity and water connections, popularly known as “gatos”. Seeking to defend themselves and solve the situation, one of the families contacted a private lawyer, instead of the Public Defender’s Office; another family followed suit, also hiring the same lawyer, but without knowing the

amounts that would be charged, therefore taking up an expense beyond their financial means. After paying the legal fees, they ran out of money to buy candles, a necessity considering they had no electricity after the whole block’s service had been cut off during the operation. A few days later, despite lacking the financial resources to afford a move and new expenses, and feeling emotionally unable to continue living under constant threat and harassment, this family left the property and moved to a small squat building in a neighboring block. They started to share a single small room that “rained inside”, which proves that they left their old home to a place in even more precarious conditions.

A few weeks later, an action performed by the civil police, Enel, and the water company Sabesp took place in the block where this very squat building is located, neighboring the blocks targeted by the PPPs – which reinforces the perception that, once the three blocks have been completely evicted and emptied, the radius and perimeter of intervention (and eviction) will expand, reaching small businesses, popular hotels, spaces and squat buildings in the surrounding area. The small squat building located in this block is not linked to any of the organized social housing movements, there’s no person in charge or collection of money contributions, being a sort of self-managed space (by chance or not, the conditions are very precarious).

On the day of the action, the police harassed residents of the squat building, asking what “movement” they belonged to and who their representative was, threatening to, if no one showed up, choose a person “by hand” to take to the police station. Residents responded that there was no leadership, not

only because it was true, but also because there was distrust in placing themselves as responsible. This is a justified fear given that the charge for formalization/regularization means liability, including criminal liability, as may be observed in several actions against squat buildings of downtown São Paulo, large or small, consolidated or recent.

Regarding the police operation in the squat building, one of the residents reported:

They came here this morning, cut off the power supply from that building on the corner, then came here to our squat building, took a photo of the electricity meter... [...] they said [...] that it is an operation that does not require a warrant or something, because it's in cracolândia, so you don't need a warrant for anything that they are doing.

It is necessary to focus on the meanings and effects – and their historical, racial and political construction and legitimation – behind the mechanisms that make this systematic violation of rights possible. It is as if, by activating “cracolândia”, any established minimum and legal protocols and guarantees were deactivated. It is this process and these devices (active and existing in other spaces and territories, such as favelas and urban peripheries) that must be considered in dialogue with the increasingly consolidated ethnographies and researches on systematic state violence against territories and bodies. In doing so, it is also important reflect whether the framework provided by Agamben (2012) on the state that declares “the state of exception”, establishing the “law’s outside” to act in it itself, is the tool that best helps us explain what is happening in this specific suspension of order and/or which order is thus constituted.

It is also important to understand how the construction of stigmatization, the criminalization of spatial practices and popular informality, and the violence that these processes trigger and enable, affect territories; at the same time that this violence is also territorialized by its daily operating dynamics. According to Rolnik (2015), territorial stigma and permanent transitoriness, which mark many neighborhoods and popular settlements, are structuring elements of the political and urban dynamics that enable and promote the triggering of evictions in a context of dispute over urban land. These are territories that constitute a zone of constant and unstable uncertainty between the possibility of remaining and the prospect of expulsion and destruction (Yiftachel, 2009). The process of dispossession enables and triggers violence, which leaves the dispossessed increasingly dispossessed: there is a broad and incessant extraction of wealth resulting from this process of accumulation through dispossession (Harvey, 2014; Schiller and Çaglar, 2018). “In urban regeneration processes, after inhabitants of poor neighborhoods [...] are stigmatized as violent and dangerous, they are first deprived of urban services and then evicted” (ibid., p. 20).

These circumstances and dynamics seem to constitute the historical, social and urban process built around areas of the Luz and Campos Elíseos region, involving the so-called cracolândia, further sustained and legitimized by the “war on drugs” motivation and its triggered and implied racial, urban and militarization effects. In recent decades, and more rapidly in recent years, the urban and assistance network and infrastructure around the flow and its surroundings in the Campos Elíseos neighborhood are being dismantled, interrupted,

displaced. In less than a decade, the social fabric of three blocks (with the threat and possibility of this process expanding even further) has been completely affected, transformed, destroyed. Apart from the demolitions and its previous attempts, already completed or abandoned, which in their accumulation and succession also produce effects and changes – as an example, there's the case of the Nova Luz project, which, despite being legally and politically defeated, caused demolitions of properties and altered land in the region (Gatti, 2015; Santos, 2019); or the Complexo da Dança (complex of dance project), designed for a piece of land in the area that was demolished and had been vacant for many years, that costed a lot of money to the public purse in order to be designed by an international company, and never getting off the ground.

The intervention projects and attempts of urban restructuring focused on this area, it must be recognized, are considerable in terms of magnitude and scale and have been occurring for a long time. We can observe in this history of constant interventions the effort to reverse and recover a region historically constituted as remarkably popular and black in the heart of the city of São Paulo. For the same reason, Campos Elíseos, Luz and Santa Ifigênia (all neighborhoods that make up this region) have been successive targets of policies and attempts to evict, destroy and erase ways of life, material and symbolic heritages, memories, and cultures which have always constituted this part of the city.

Around these policies of erasure and persecution, around the different urban and social interventions, around the “revitalization” projects (which under this name summarize and reveal precisely the lack of recognition of the

lives that exist in the targeted territories) and around the management and control policies targeting bodies and spaces, which have been accumulating and occurring in this same region over decades, constitute the interweaving of regimes with a characteristic territorial logic, in which organized state violence manifests itself against the poor, the informal settlements, the unhoused people, along with a racialized policing of non-white territories (Roy et al., 2020) – policing understood in terms of control, management and repression, which obviously involves the action (most often violent) of the police, but also other practices and arms of the state in carrying out these functions. Thus, the territorial and racial dimensions are articulated in the constitution and functioning of a punitive machinery (Telles et al., 2020), which daily undertakes a miniscule, cruel and slow dispossession (Pain, 2019) affecting men, women and children in their infrastructures and daily lives (Lacerda et al. 2020).

Even though intervention projects vary greatly (their nature, their scales, their mechanisms, objectives, effects), we can observe endlessly accumulating and overlapping a series of different devices of control, surveillance, persecution, and imprisonment (Mallart and Rui, 2017), producing displacements, demolitions and destruction of the social fabric. These devices and policies alternate, overlap and complement each other, in space and time, but always have the same targets: poor and black bodies, populations and territories in this central area of the city. Assistance policies and services, triage, registration, provisional programs, evictions, demolitions, daily police operations (which search people and properties, prohibit access, and determine circulation through

spaces), large operations against “drug trafficking” in the name of “war on drugs”, in their constant succession and overlapping over the last few decades materialize a complex and diverse arsenal, which, even though not planned and elaborated at the same moment, ends up constituting an interweaving of policies (and effects) of repression, control and management of life, territorially articulated, which have as practice the exercise of racialized policing (Roy et al., 2020).

The intensity and dimension of so many policies and interventions can only be understood in light of the strength and persistent efforts of these same bodies and territories in resisting, remaining and surviving. To effectively comprehend the possible resistance and permanence attempts, even in such precarious conditions, it is necessary to pay greater attention to the networks, infrastructures and materialities developed by threatened populations, and also understand why, in order to reach and evict them, it is necessary to destroy these networks.

In terms of precariousness, Butler (2015) distinguishes different states: there is a general shared and universal precariousness that affects everyone, and there is therefore a dependence of all beings (to survive and maintain their lives) on social networks, ties and structures, which are ways of minimizing this constituent precariousness. However, for many people, these networks and protective supports (and access to them) are fragile, inefficient and problematic (*ibid.*). Thus, there is an unequal social distribution of protection against precariousness, politically induced. It is in this correlation of forces and inequality of relations (including protection ones), that networks can be conceived: as a

network of relations and as a sociotechnical network, as Latour (2012) describes, made of beings, artifacts, mediations, infrastructure and materialities. It is on these networks that the possibilities of life depend, and it is these same networks that are attacked and destroyed, sometimes abruptly, in moments of confrontation and violent interventions by state power. It is from this perspective and intricate in these circumstances that networks are also thought as alliances forged from and in precariousness (Butler, 2018), as further described in the next section.

Resistance, protection and defense networks of popular territories

The experience of the pandemic radicalized processes of dispossession and violence, historically present in Brazil, but transformed and deepened by the crises of different natures that erupted during this period. The pandemic emergency made the role and importance of protection, defense and solidarity networks and actions of communities and territories even more evident. Networks do not emerge out of nowhere, they carry within them the background, experience and legacy of previous organization and mobilization (Santos, 2020) and, generally, they are articulated or expanded as a reaction to state violence (Endo and Santos, 2021).

To describe and deepen the analysis, we may take as an example the activity of anti-eviction networks during the pandemic, which evidently had already existed and been mobilized previously, but which needed to

adapt in the face of the unprecedented nature and severity of the new situation. At first, there was the expectation (which soon proved to be an illusion) that, given the worsening of the health, economic and social situation, forced evictions would be interrupted and suspended, especially considering this was a time when the vaccine was not even close to being developed, so “staying at home” was one of the safest and most effective means of protection. Soon, new cases and reports of threats and eviction showed that not only did they persist, but they actually increased.⁶

In face of the increase in cases of eviction, a series of movements and entities working on the subject registered and compiled cases and threats in the state of São Paulo. An international complaint was prepared and sent to the UN Human Rights Council, which then issued a declaration against the evictions to the Brazilian government, requesting that they stopped.⁷ If, on the one hand, the practical and effective effects of this declaration may be limited; on the other, the efforts and mobilizations to carry out an action like this strengthen and expand the articulations, in addition to creating a political fact that serves as support and solidarity for those who are resisting and facing, on a daily basis and “on the edge”, the anguish and suffering of threats and evictions.

The organization became widespread and nationalized, involving residents affected and threatened by evictions, social movements, urban and rural, entities, community organizations, and research laboratories, giving rise to the campaign “Despejo Zero – em defesa da vida no campo e na cidade”⁸ (in English, Zero Eviction – in defense of life in the countryside and in the city) (Gonsales, 2023). The national articulation against evictions

that these movements managed to carry out is similar to practices that have been growing among many organizations and coalitions defending human rights and denouncing the violence of the state, ranging from those which combat racism and genocide of black youth in the peripheries to those which approach environmental and indigenous policies and rights. These are action strategies that combine activism, mobilization, pressure, and constraint, articulating and affecting the local, national, but also transnational scope.

A way of acting that, breaking the false dichotomy between global and local, and being thought of as an engagement strategy that works with multiple forms of sovereignty, could fit into what Roy (2005, p. 154) describes as “scale jumping”, describing a play with different scales, sovereignties and, we could add, institutionalities. After all, the framework and instruments that regulate and are valid in each sphere (municipal, federal, international) vary, as will the procedures and effects of investing and acting in each of them (filing legal proceedings is different from carrying out international complaints, for example). It is necessary to adapt and mobilize different repertoires and resources, in a multiple and simultaneous way, as strategic political work and action take place in and with different fronts, scales and jurisdictions.

Beyond simply promoting a complaint, behind these actions there is an attempt to produce evidence against the state and the crimes that it commits. The lack and concealment of data and traces of and by the state should not be seen as accidental or as a “failure”. Das (2004) works with the “magical” dimension and effects produced and resulting from the illegibility of the state, its everyday

practices, records and “signatures”. This ghostly dimension of the state co-exists and integrates it with its rational dimension: illegibility and rationality constitute the state simultaneously, and hence give also its strength and power, in alternating, confusing and playing with this ambivalence and imprecision. The work and performance of socio-technical networks of support and protection often consists of having to tackle and confront precisely the “magical” effects of this illegibility, trying to unveil it, reconstitute it, reveal it.

Producing evidence against the state and presenting it in instances and arenas that it does not control,⁹ in an attempt to implicate it and hold it accountable, is a possible strategy (among others which may be parallel and simultaneously activated) of resorting to formality, formalization, and institutionalization – in the sense of activating and instrumentalizing the institutional framework (laws, rights, regulations, arenas and instances of conflict mediation and processing, including international ones) – against the state itself. At the same time that these institutionalities are sought and resorted to as a means (among other strategies and political repertoires that may be and are also activated), they are also tensioned as new possibilities are explored in a search to overcome the limitations of institutional formalism.

The enterprise of producing evidence against the state is developed both theoretically and empirically by Weizman (2017). The elaboration of this process makes it clear that these evidence can only be produced by a network: the socio-technical network (Latour, 2012) working produces facts/evidences, because a photo, or video or a cell phone audio alone and by themselves do not

constitute a complaint/evidence. It takes a whole chain of mediations and connections (technical, also) to produce the fact/evidence, starting from the immediate materialities (the eviction itself and its registration), linking them to larger networks, from the WhatsApp ones to legal networks that formally process and produce complaints, and open investigation processes. The complaint against a violation presented in a news article, or post, or that supports, for example, legal proceedings, is built through a collective and continuous process as it goes through the mediations and connections linking diverse and distinct actors, repertoires, and knowledge, which in its composition produce the fact. Thus, the complaint, evidence, or counter-evidence needs to be manufactured, not in the sense of forging it, but of constructing, since they do not exist by themselves, ready; and this production happens in network. We describe this process of collective production of facts, with Weizman and the reconstitution of the state’s traces as references, as collaborative epistemologies (Grupo de pesquisa..., 2020).

These networks are often formed due to the organization of territories and communities, and from this territorial base they connect with and link to other spaces and actors, expanding their power of scale and action (the territory as a platform of/for action). There is a movement that goes from community and local capillarity to the outside, but that also comes from outside to the territory; distinct scales and vectors that intersect, compose, and reinforce each other in a trans-scalar movement. It is in these different positions and in the flow of this movement (territorialization-deterritorialization) that the power of action of territories, communities, and networks intensifies and transforms

(Santos, 2020). Territorially organized initiatives and campaigns are often forged as actions of defense and solidarity against violence and rights violations committed mostly by the state.

It is in the light of matters related to networks and arrangements of protection against political and racialized violence by the state that we can return to an element regarding the evictions in the Campos Elíseos blocks, described in the former section: the emergence of new squat buildings during the pandemic, here also understood as the materialization of practices of support, protection, and permanence efforts. Due to the evictions of the two blocks during the pandemic, it was possible to observe that at least five squat buildings (three of them completely new, occupied during the pandemic), none linked to the traditional social housing movements, became refuges (even if temporary). It was also possible to see that a circuit was established between these squat buildings, the evicted people, and the territory of *cracolândia*, a connection made possible due to the circulations – and attempts to settle – resulting from the processes of eviction and displacement of populations.

Even though squat buildings and the activity of networks may generally have a protective character and represent materializations of support efforts, there are historical, political and social differences in the configuration of territories, housing spaces, and the groups that organize and maintain them. The arrangements produced territorially are reflections of the socio-spatial dynamics that constitute these territories as well. They cannot, therefore, be understood disconnected from the reality that produces them. For this reason too, the networks and actions of territories and communities are not inherently

virtuous in themselves. Depending on the groups organizing them, they can, on the one hand, serve as arrangements that guarantee the protection of life, but, on the other hand, carry out and represent forms of exploitation of vulnerable populations that live in these same spaces. By generating permanence (even if fragile and temporary), they can also enable extraction. Criminal groups control and produce territories and networks as well.¹⁰

In this sense, what actually exists in the concrete reality of the social world is a lot of heterogeneity and diversity in relation to territories, spaces and housing arrangements, and the groups that organize them. The heterogeneous and complex reality of squat buildings in downtown São Paulo, for example, opposes the attempts of simplification and homogenization that support the process of criminalization of the public and political organized social housing movements of downtown São Paulo, which operates through the creation of equivalence around the dynamics of popular appropriation, production, organization and management of space; denying all the existing diversity (Santos, Guerreiro, 2020).

Increasingly, and after the fire and fall of the squat building set in the Wilton Paes de Almeida building, popular known as “Tower of Glass”, in downtown São Paulo, May 2018, this process has intensified (*ibid.*). Among other means and expedients that have been used, the “risk” category, recurrently used in peripheral and environmental areas (Moura et al., 2020), has been mobilized as an argument to support requests for repossession orders in central and urbanized areas, especially against squat buildings (Santos, 2022; Gonsales, 2023). The category carries within itself, in its very constitution, a high degree of arbitrariness, and it has justified

administrative evictions, based on police power (Magami, 2020), characterized by discretion and self-execution, which results in evictions being carried out without a court order. More than failing to comply with it, this is the state itself deactivating the legal system. We see the mobilization of the “risk” category as yet another method of criminalizing popular informality.

These offensives and threatening situations affect all squat buildings, not just the most recent or precarious ones. Even consolidated squat buildings, maintained and organized by politically and publicly organized housing movements, repeatedly become targets and have their maintenance and survival resources threatened and criminalized. To mention just one of the many examples that could be given: in 2021, coordinators of housing movements from two of the oldest and most consolidated squat buildings in downtown São Paulo were arrested following a civil police operation in one of these buildings, which looked for a “escape route” for thieves in the region. Not finding any evidence, they ended up arresting the coordinators for “qualified energy theft”, popularly known and disseminated as “gato”. Five days earlier, the other squat building of those two had been invaded by the military police, without any judicial warrant, with the justification of “looking for drugs”.

Historically, most squat buildings were denied access to water and electricity networks and services (Gonsales, 2023), which is another element creating daily problems and challenges that need to be faced and inventively overcome (Santos, 2019), enabling the production of arrangements and “workarounds”, as well as informal or parallel circuits and markets to solve and circumvent the situation created by public authorities. The conditions required

of residential squat buildings are also not present in many of the old middle and upper class buildings in the city center. The question, already presented here, posed by Roy (2009b), is what practices and arrangements are to be criminalized, and the different territorial and racialized police regimes that are to be set up around these spaces and practices.

Knowing that “laws, codifications, and formal rules have power effects and circumscribe fields of force” (Telles, 2009, p. 101, translated from Portuguese), these situations demonstrate the “differential management of illegalisms” (reinforcing that illegalism differs from illegality [Foucault, 1997]), in which practices and activities, according to the political circumstances and force correlations set in a given field, will be differentially organized and distinguished, within tolerated, ignored, consented, and those that will be the target and object of interdictions, sanctions, and repressions (Foucault, 1997 and 2015; Telles, 2009).¹¹

Thinking in terms of illegalisms and their differential management, one can then better understand that, for example, the uses and practices around electric light (energy boxes, “gatos”, arrangements, and here we are faced with political commodities that, as Misse [2002] demonstrates, are always constituted in the economy and in the arrangements that emerge around illegal markets) become the target and tactics of a broader dispute, of a larger field of conflict that involves squat buildings, but which, in order to be carried out and move forward, finds support in specific, particular practices, in a given social and political situation, which reorganize and determine the paths and resources through which and by which means these disputes take place.

By strategically moving/expanding the radius and focus of criminalization targets and practices, the force correlation in this field of dispute changes and destabilizes. In this case, housing movements and squat buildings are forced to react, responding and defending themselves in terms that until then they were neither accustomed nor prepared for (Santos e Guerreiro, 2020). But, if on the one hand, movements and squat buildings are forced to react and act in an unknown field, around issues and dynamics that had been so far not paid attention to or dominated; on the other hand, an opportunity arises that is not only reactive, but also productive: it sets the possibility of invention to overcome blockages and problems. This further reinforces the understanding that the effervescence and power of arrangements and practices produced by squat buildings are a result and instrument in a dispute for their survival and maintenance in the time and space of a city in conflict (Santos, 2019).

To cite an example: due to the fire and collapse of the Wilton Paes de Almeida building, popular known as “Tower of Glass”, in 2018, according to official figures (challenged as being lower than reality), seven people died and two went missing. This squat building was not managed by any of the traditional organized social housing movements of downtown São Paulo. After this event, some of the squat buildings which are part of the publicly and politically organized housing movements set up a fire brigade course delivered by a firefighter who volunteered to establish and develop this project/partnership (Lara Júnior et al., 2022). A few months after the tragedy, a new fire hit one of these squat buildings, and it was indeed a resident who had taken the course, following

the guidelines that were taught, who managed to prevent what happened from turning into a disaster with people killed and injured.

In the same way, the setting up of a technical assistance collective within the domains of a social housing movement itself (ibid.) or the development of techniques and technologies for protecting, renovating and improving spaces and these old buildings (Carvalho et al., 2022) can be thought of on equal terms: all the dynamism involving organized squat buildings and political organized housing movements, the inventiveness, the building of alliances, the new experiments, these are all strategies of protection and, ultimately, defense of life and for the sake of life.

As in the case of the Claim of Non-Compliance with Fundamental Precept (in Portuguese, ADPF) against evictions approved by the Supreme Federal Court in the midst of the pandemic: the elaboration of technical provisions in agreement with the entire legal process which runs through formal instances in Brasília (in coordination and dialogue with political parties, elected politicians and political caucuses, justices of the the Supreme Court) cannot be understood when detached from the practical dimension and use that they quickly came to have: serving as a weapon in battles “on the ground” to hold back, postpone and suspend evictions in squat buildings and peripheral urban areas that did not stop afflicting communities during the pandemic.

Also regarding the case of evictions in the *cracolândia* blocks: resorting to formal instances and demanding minimum assistance, even if provisional, were not actions based either on trust on the fulfilling of procedural

rites or on the illusion that BRL 400.00 would solve a person's problems; such actions were taken because the state needs to take responsibility/be held responsible. These temporary assistances also become a resource and opens up a range of possibilities, which will be invested in guaranteeing dignity, defending and maintaining life.

Having recourse to institutionalities is a possibility (among others that exist and are also activated) for protection, even more so when popular informality is criminalized in different ways. The instrumentalization of the parameters that constitute the institutional fabric does not occur due to mere bureaucratic or legalistic attachment, but because the mobilization of the resources and technicalities of institutional fabrics in confronting violations can function as a containment barrier, preventing or at least delaying even more violence (e.g. Carvalho et al., 2022). Institutionalality ends up operating, in many cases (even if in a circumstantial, temporary, fragile way), as a form of protection (of physical integrity, also) against the different criminalization devices mobilized against popular informality. Furthermore, when acting around the edges, gaps and under time pressure of the conflict events, it is often possible to adapt and recreate these formal and institutional expedients and, thus, eventually manage to overcome their insufficiencies, opening new possibilities of agency.

However, in the same way that institutionalities are used to try to resist and guarantee rights and protection, this same institutional fabric also provides for and legitimizes violations of rights by public and private agents. Traditionally, it is precisely this fabric and all its instances and resources

that are activated, for instance, to carry out evictions (Santos, 2022). Therefore, the point is not to exalt institutionalality in itself, as if it were "naturally" virtuous or neutral; but to demonstrate how it is an instrument of/in the dispute and how it gains dimensions and contours, and produces effects, situationally, throughout and due to the conflict.

Final considerations

In addition to the observation that conflict is constitutive of urban history, it is also important to make more situated considerations of new trends at play. Regarding the empirical cases described in this article, there are two important points to be highlighted as recent dynamics that reveal specificities within this long conflictive history that inscribes state violence in its relationship with popular informality, production of territories and networks of defense and protection.

The first point refers to the production of precariousness based on the current processes of dispossession and predation. Not that violence and precariousness have not been part of eviction and displacement events historically, but there are dynamics and arrangements that are now happening in different ways than they did in the past. These are transformations in the production and management of precariousness and in the role of the state (and state violence) in the structuring and territorialization of urban markets and spaces.

Building on the case of evictions and destruction of a popular and old downtown area for the construction of PPPs between the private sector and the state: on the one hand,

a public-private modeling and arrangement, linked to financial engineering and finance circuits; on the other, the production and intensification of evictions, informal housing markets and precariousness. The construction of residential towers and the eviction and demolition of the previously existing social fabric have as effects (in addition to an expansion of the real estate supply via PPP) the expansion of the condition of precariousness and informality that is not only induced by the state, but produced by it as well, backed by public policies (Guerreiro, 2020). It is the state not only promoting and providing support (even financial support) to informality, but also producing (along with other agents) the informal market itself. And as it has been, historically: the expansion and production of new markets is a brutally violent process.

The link between violence and (the production/expansion of) the market has been established – being the state the promoter of both (Tilly, 1985). What is possible to visualize is political violence producing new and formal markets, as in the case of the PPP tower apartments; and, at the same time, the expansion and production of new informal housing arrangements and circuits, that are monetized, irrigated and boosted by, for instance, the money offered by the city hall in cases of eviction, the BRL 400.00 called Rent Assistance (in Portuguese, *Auxílio Aluguel*).

In this case, the public policy of “*Auxílio Aluguel*” – which is, in essence, a public policy of eviction – functions not only as a price index in informal housing markets, squat buildings and popular hotels, among other spaces; but also, in its existence and functioning itself, it articulates and transacts formal and informal (and illegal, in some cases), producing a direct

relationship and connection (in this case, via state, but with the participation of many other private groups, more or less organized) between violence, public policies, and markets. The production of informality reveals itself not as terrain and practices forged outside the state, in an unregulated way, from the bottom up only, but rather as particular of these “structures of power”, with the state constituting itself as an “informalized entity”, which uses informality as an instrument of accumulation and authority (Roy, 2009b, p. 81).

The second point that seems to reveal new dynamics concerns the networks of support and resistance to evictions, which are operated in circuits and intersections that previously did not occur in the current terms or, at least, not at the same speed and scale. Such networks rely on hard-won institutional and legal fabrics and spaces, instrumentalizing them in an attempt to (re)activate the democratic and emancipatory meanings inscribed in the disputes they derive from. These networks make strategic use of the law – in the same way that the state also does.

In activating networks of supporters in moments of emergency and of processing the conflict, we have a dimension of the breadth they acquire, their heterogeneity and their trans-scalar power of action, connecting the “streets” to institutional and legislative spaces (in its three instances), but also to international spaces and groups; connecting leaders of popular social movements, residents of squat buildings and popular settlements, human rights activists, popular lawyers, urban planners and urban technical assistances groups, researchers, artists, cultural and health collectives, journalists and media activists, politicians and collective/activist caucuses. In

these networks, different ways of acting and repertoires are connected, trying to access the established institutional fabric, spaces and practices, but also seeking to build others.

The rights, devices and arenas of institutional negotiation and regulation serve as a horizon for the actual realization of the promises this same set announces. In the strategic instrumentalization of institutionalities, there is an opportunity for this very fabric to tension and remake itself, in the search for overcoming its limitations, in expanding its meanings. Likewise, their use and reference can serve as a tool in disputes against the violence of state or

non-state agents. Among other action paths and strategies that are also simultaneously activated, the use of institutionalities serves as an attempt to circumvent risks and violence resulting from abandonment and brutality by the state. In this process of dispute and (re)invention, the contours and (re)actions of the state are reordered, while the field of conflict itself is reconfigured as well. And, at the confluences, competitions and coercions of all these conditions and circumstances, the constant efforts of common people take place to build daily lives and spaces, seeking to guarantee possibilities of safety, stability and prosperity.

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Notes

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(1) State here is understood not as a homogeneous and monolithic apparatus, but as a deed—and effect—resulting from different practices, techniques, relationships, repertoires, movements, and instances (Mitchell, 2006; Trouillot, 2001). For this reason, in order to retrace the state, its instances and dynamics, ethnographic strategies are relevant to describe and analyze the “encounters with the state” (Trouillot, 2001).

- (2) In other terms and analysis, Feltran (2020) formulates and works with “normative regimes”: demonstrating that there is no such thing as a single and absolute regime, the author states that others exist, and that these different regimes that regulate social life can coexist, in a non-harmonious and often conflictive way, but also in cohesion and hybridization. A normative regime that regulates spaces, ways of life, codes and conducts, with social recognition and legitimacies, shall be defined, ultimately, by its capacity (and condition) to (be able to) resort to violence to be recognized and enforce its authority. According to the author, another normative regime, in addition to the legal/state one, would be, for example, that of the “world of crime”.
- (3) In this article, the focus is neither the population that constitutes the *flow* nor the many violent operations targeting them on a daily basis. In 2022, the *flow* was expelled from the blocks targeted by the urban intervention in question, causing its concentration to dissipate throughout downtown São Paulo. The point here is to highlight how the implementation of PPP projects, the eviction of the population that lived in the region, and the dispersion of the *flow* and the consequences are all part of the same process and have a direct relationship. And this was not the first time that property demolitions and expelling of the *flow* occurred in a combined and escalated manner in the region – this has been made into a political strategy of urban intervention and restructuring of this territory.
- (4) About the mega operation, see Basso (2017). About the demolition of properties with people inside using a tractor, see “Vídeo... (2017).
- (5) The municipal Master Plan establishes and delimits the *Zeis*, which are city areas that must be preserved, prioritized or designated as popular housing, having therefore to either preserve or improve the conditions of those who already live in the area, or build new residences and allocate them for social housing, in theory. The *Zeis* located in central areas are called *Zeis 3*, populated and equipped with urban infrastructure. As a rule, once again according to the municipal Master Plan, all interventions, projects, and services offered to the population living in a *Zeis* must be discussed and approved by a participatory local *Zeis* council, a joint body made of public authorities and civil society, elected by the population living in the *Zeis*.
- (6) Marino et al. (2020). The mapping of evictions produced by the Evictions Observatory refers to, above all, the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo. Despite this effort to monitor and map cases of threats and evictions, we recognize that the numbers are still under-reported. There is not a complete reading of reality, but only partial and momentary cutouts and portraits, circumscribed temporally and geographically, or according to the reach of established networks and partners. Forced evictions have always been characterized by their invisibility, in the sense of the inexistence of precise information, of never having the exact dimension of what is being done, the procedures used, where the evicted ones go and what happens to them, of a constant lack of traces. In this sense, the work of monitoring evictions carried out by the Evictions Observatory can be understood as part of an effort to produce and reconstitute data and traces.
- (7) Violações... (2020); ONU... (2020).
- (8) <https://www.campanhadespejzero.org/>. Due to the political and legal action and influence of the Campaign and its partners, a few anti-eviction laws (at municipal, state, and even at the federal level) have been approved during the pandemic. There was also the political and legal construction for pushing forward the Claim of Non-Compliance with Fundamental Precept (in Portuguese, ADPF) number 828, approved by the Federal Supreme Court, which suspended evictions in the country until March 2022. In practice, evictions continued to occur, but the importance of the achievement is undeniable: it was widely mobilized and applied as a resource and precedent by defense movements and partner networks in disputes regarding cases of threat of evictions that insisted/insist on happening.

- (9) The relationship with the state in conflict events, in disputed territories, and in episodes of violence against bodies and populations has an important dimension (and challenges) which shapes the existing reality faced by the strategies described: in the vast majority of situations, the state is present, either as a source of threat, or as a regulator and mediator. Negotiation and confrontation practices also resort to institutional spaces and to the dialogue with the state and its agents – which reinforces its “gravitational force” and reveals that state authority is evoked even though it is the perpetuating source of violence (Das, 2004, p. 229).
- (10) As in the case, for example, of the *milícias* in Rio de Janeiro, which, among many businesses and services performed and charged by them, are involved in housing developments (Araújo, 2017): on the one hand, the residents find shelter and housing; on the other, they are subjected to forms of extortion in exchange for “protection” and “peace of mind” (Araújo, 2022).
- (11) At the heart of illegalisms and their different management are the play and strategic use of law, understood not as gaps or flaws to be overcome, but in their productive dimension that establishes and organizes relationships with the law – whether seeking to circumvent, ignore, whether seeking to apply, reinforce or enforce.

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