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V!23
REVISTA V!RUS
V!RUS JOURNAL

issn 2175-974x
dezembro . december 2021



ÁGORA
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PELA DECOLONIZAÇÃO DAS OCUPAÇÕES URBANAS: "A NOVA FÁBRICA É O BAIRRO"
FOR THE DECOLONIZATION OF URBAN OCCUPATIONS: "THE NEW FACTORY IS THE NEIGHBORHOOD"
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<http://lattes.cnpq.br/9094745284365149>

How to quote this text: Burnett, F. L., 2021. For the decolonization of urban occupations: "the new factory is the neighborhood". Translated from Portuguese by Brenda Veneranda Fernandes Silva. *VIRUS*, 23, December. [online] Available at: <<http://www.nomads.usp.br/virus/virus23/?sec=4&item=9&lang=en>>. [Accessed: 21 December 2021].

ARTICLE SUBMITTED ON AUGUST, 15, 2021

Abstract

The illusion of an egalitarian space under peripheral capitalism is expressed in the reformist terms of the "city for all". We understand it here as a colonized inclusion that intends to subject popular resistance to the disciplinary norms of systemic urbanism. This text starts from the decolonial notion of the Global South to rethink popular occupations in Brazil. It aims to contribute to the critical review of the urban reform project. From a methodological point of view, it contrasts subordinate processes of participatory urban planning with resistant initiatives of urban and rural collective self-production. Popular occupations are understood as an affirmation of the marginalized and proper identities of the inhabitants of the South. As real conquests of the oppressed in colonized and dependent countries, such territories reproduce self-control over social and political life. Traditional communities concerning the land and its produce also exercise this control. The results indicate the potential of the notions of the Global South to rethink popular occupations as urban praxis of collective and decolonial insurgency. Such countercurrent resistances struggling for freedoms and rights suggest considering the regional references of the South in the academic reflections on the peripheral space.

Keywords: Peripheral capitalist city, Domination, Resistance, Popular occupations

The fragility of the achievements of urban struggles in Brazil can be perceived through the continuity and worsening of precariousness. This is especially true for those who participated in recent struggles demanding the right to the city through materialities such as housing, infrastructure, and public services. Expanded throughout the country in the last decade (IBGE, 2020), popular occupations prove the impossibility of systemic inclusion and the indispensability in the lives of the dispossessed. Collective productions originated in the needs, interests, and abilities of the residents should be recognized as construction spaces of the popular rights to the city. In these spaces of cultural diversity, young people lead communication groups, disputing narratives with the mainstream press, and solidarity networks face daily threats as unemployment and hunger. Popular occupations are exercises of resistance and autonomy. Unlike the social anomia of other urban areas, facing living conditions under systemic crisis, aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Stimulated by these dynamics, courses linked to the peripheral neighborhoods appear in universities. Advisory services resume practices of self-managed joint effort. Stronger relations between popular movements and academia expand, consolidating a network of militants with organic contacts in the local movement.¹

To contribute to this set of actions, this text brings to the debate, historically dominated by architects and jurists, issues discussed in geography and sociology from the perspective of the decolonial movement. Under the notion of the Global South, the international capitalist characteristic reshaped the idea of the "Cold War" Third World. Decolonial movement builds references that enable new understandings from different scales of the peripheral and dominated reality. The decolonial theories are a collective construction of many decades, which revisits the Marxist understanding of the world from the perspective of colonized nations. They were constituted against the homogenizing movement (Marx and Engels, 1982) and supposedly inevitable of the Capital (Quijano, 2005). Decolonial discussions enable renewed approximations of the movements of the State, Capital, and Labor by developing perspectives from the socio-spatial diversity of the Global South. Regarding the understanding of the urban space of neoliberalism, decolonial ideas revise and reinvigorate Eurocentric studies (Harvey, 2004; Lefebvre, 2006), focusing on the contradictions of the peripheral capitalist cities.

New reflections from the decolonial angle allow revisiting the understanding of urban popular occupations. Considering the peripheral neighborhoods as an expression of "a population marginalized by the whole social body" (Quijano, 1973, p. 340, our translation), decolonial theory challenges the possibilities of subordinate inclusion from such spaces. Identifying modes of productive insertion, housing conditions, and forms of state control, which they are subjected, Quijano (1973) highlights the role of the woman-mother in the family organization of marginal groups. Considering the marginalization of broad social sectors in Latin America as structural to the societies of peripheral countries, the author agrees with Milton Santos (2018). Santos understands the impossibility as an urban economy characteristic of the "divided space" in peripheral cities. According to Francisco de Oliveira (1990), this is the political reason for serving social classes, equally divided between clientelism and patrimonialism on the Brazilian State. Based on this, the proposal of "legalization" of the "illegal city" is inscribed in an idealized and vain attempt of inclusion, through urban planning and bourgeois law, of the residents of popular occupations (Baldez, 2003; Pazello, 2018). Without their assimilation by the system, would it be plausible to understand them as inherent to the peripheral city, reviewing preconceptions about "legality" and "illegality"?

A version of this text was presented at the 3rd SIALAT - International Seminar from Latin America: Conflicts and Contemporary Policies, in Belém, the estate of Pará, in the northern region of Brazil. This paper is part of the post-doctoral research regarding urban and rural popular spaces in the Cerrado and Amazonia region in Brazil. This project is an extension of investigations on urban planning and participatory master plans (Burnett, 2009). Later, studies on the self-production of occupations and popular housing in Maranhão proved identities in the practices of the dispossessed in the countryside and in the city that express, through autonomy exercises, generational resistance to systemic pressures (Burnett, 2021). The paper starts from the third-world reading of Milton Santos (2018). Pass through the decolonial thinking of Anibal Quijano and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. It is complemented by the theoretical-methodological axis of Zibechi (2003) reflections on peripheral insurrection. Analyzes of the law in the urban space are based on Baldez (2003). The paper also adopts Pazello (2018) ideas regarding Marxism, decoloniality, and insurgent law.

The article is organized into five sections. Sections 2 and 3 discuss contradictions and possibilities of freedom and rights in the city, historically a space of domination and control. The fourth section debates the potential for resistance of territories built outside the established powers, under dynamics that combine alliances and transgressions in the construction of new political decolonial practices. The conclusion suggests that evaluations of recent experiences of urban struggles in Brazil should reconsider previous readings and radically review the perspective and the relations established with urban occupations. Beyond the social marginality and material precariousness, it is necessary to understand them as the nuclei of decolonizing opposition of the subordinate modes of capitalist life and spaces of marginal rebelliousness where we have much to learn about living in the (Global) South.

2 Is the city a space of freedom?

There is a historical myth, which propagates that the "city air" is a factor of freedom, and considers living in urban space as a condition of ascension to a "better life". These expressions referred, respectively, to the medieval servitude and the material and intellectual indigence of the rural. In opposition to that myth, "what seemed to be a salvation turned out to be, in reality, a mirage, because in the incipient urban environment there was also the oppression of the poor" (Custódio, 2015, p. 1, our translation). The servitude and urban penury are invisible by the (political, real estate, touristic, etc.) media that creates the selective seduction of places. Moreover, they are often much deeper and more dramatic than those in the countryside of yesterday and today (Federici, 2004). The possibilities of promotion to more qualified posts by the urban economy – the rise to a "better life" – have always been linked to meritocracy. That is the basis of individualism, which even for the middle classes constitutes a family history of traumatic lives sacrifices (Souza, 2018).

Since its origin, the city has a differentiation between the general production, the political-civil and religious power, produced by the intellectual and manual division of labor for its expropriation. Thus, the city origins in Prehistory are linked to positions of strength and exercises of violence. The result of the alliance between the nomads wandering and violent life with the farmers' sedentary and peaceful daily life, "an earlier union between the paleolithic and neolithic components" (Mumford, 1961, p. 21). First, by providing them protection services against predators, so that "the villages protected by the hunter flourished better" and so "the very prosperity and peaceableness of the neolithic village may have caused its protectors to exchange the watchdog's role for the wolf's, demanding 'protection money,' so to say, in an increasingly one-sided transaction" (Mumford, 1961, p. 23).

The establishment of compulsory work in the space of the ancient city made possible several constructions - dikes, aqueducts, walls, palaces, temples (Mumford, 1961). This process of millennia of the village consolidates and erects elements of the "embryonic structure of the city" (Mumford, 1961, p. 19). In this way, the city – this "peculiar combination of creativity and control, of expression and repression, of tension and release" (Mumford, 1961, p. 30) – should be seen as the power center of a minority and understood as a form of space colonization (Quijano, 2000). According to Castells (2000), a condition that crosses history points to an intrinsic "nature" of the City (space), which persists, permeates and survives socioeconomic and spatial metamorphoses thanks to "a class system" and "a political system that allows both the functioning of the social whole and the domination of a class" (Castells, 2000, p. 42-43, our translation).

The disruption of feudalism and capitalist accumulation exponentially boosted by the discovery of the New World (Quijano, 2005) points to a historical worsening of the city's domination-exploitation binomial, which led to the enclosure of common fields. Preventing and criminalizing free labor, intentionally impoverishing rural populations and autonomous practices of the working classes were indispensable measures to discipline minds and bodies, which would be agglomerated in cities. For submission to factory work, the long and persistent process that characterized the constitution of the Enlightenment relied on a "set of strategies used by English lords and wealthy farmers to eliminate the common use of land and expand their properties" (Federici, 2004, p. 69). The deterritorialization of rural communities in nascent capitalism in Europe renewed, in an aggravated way, in the colonies, as an expedient of primitive accumulation provides labor for wages, seen as 'instruments of slavery' (Federici, 2004, p. 72) as soon as access to land came to an end.

As a result, the physical enclosure operated by land privatization and the hedging of the commons was amplified by a process of social enclosure, the reproduction of workers shifting from the open field to the home, from the community to the family, from the public space (the common, the church) to the private.

The social path that goes from servile work to wage labor coincides with the workers' path "from the open country to the home, from the community to the family, from the public space (the common, the church) to the private" (Federici, 2004, p. 84). Despite the resistance in various parts of Europe, the bloody peasant insurrections (Federici, 2004) ended with the workers "submitting to the world of mercantilization, either by selling their labor force or by selling the products of their labor (C-M-C) to survive" (Gonçalves, 2016, p. 239). The result of the impoverishment of their conditions of physical and social reproduction, with deep consequences for their class identities, wage-earning implied disciplining workers under the ideology of individualism. In the countries of Europe, the city resulted from industrialization under colonialist and imperialist bases, but the reading "on the periphery" is opposed to Eurocentrism. Limited to the sale of the labor force in exchange to physical reproduction, the freedom of the peripheral bourgeois city will result in the configuration of informality in living and working, composing "two circuits" (Santos, 2018) of reflex and reverse worlds, functional and dependent. Thus, peripheral urbanization results from the colonized and exclusionary economy, typical of peripheral-dependent countries, because "modernity, capital, and Latin America were all born on the same day". Bearers of the "instrumental rationality" – proper to Capital and the

State –, Eurocentric modernity is always confronted with the "historical rationality", inherent to traditional communities, whose struggles for freedom question their power (Quijano, 1991, p. 44).

3 Is the city a space of rights?

From the point of view of rights, with the origin of the city during antiquity, the traditional respect "for custom and customary law", the exercise of the "Councils of Village Elders", gives way to the institutions of "organized morality, government, law, and justice" (Mumford, 1961, p. 19). Contrary to the usual, constituted and consolidated by the concrete work among equals in the field, the city will be the arena of the law established based on inequality and private ownership of the means of production. The access right to the goods of nature and the self-control of time will be violently replaced by the abstract freedom of access to money, an indispensable basis for social and individual reproduction under collective discipline for profit (Federici, 2004; Gonçalves, 2016). With the capitalist system and its monetized relations, "which divides man between the need to live and, therefore, consume, and not to be, existing only as a labor force", the urban worker becomes "a commodity that, as a legal subject, starts to be sold in the labor market" (Baldez, 2003, p. 72).

Defined by Boaventura Sousa Santos as "a mediation that is simultaneously external and superior to both political and economic", the law will allow the state to operate the "expression of common interest" to meet the "expression of particular interests" (Santos, 1982, p. 18-19). For Marx, these interests refer to the "legal relationship that is innate to the process of the circulation of goods" and "whose form is the contract". Being "legally developed or not, it is a relationship of will, in which the economic relationship is reflected" and the "content of this juridical relationship or will is given through the economic relationship" (Marx, 1983, p. 79-80, our translation). Baldez says that these legal relationships will be instituted in urban Brazil "since the 1930s" when domination "was made through individualizing and atomizer legalism of struggles". By staying "in their most immediate perspective, absorbed by bourgeois ideology", "the urban leaderships ended up diverted, often by tactical option, to the arena of legalism" (Baldez, 2003, p. 80, our translation).

The situations between the "irresponsibility of denying the right given the need to resort to it in the face of disputes and criminalization" and the "excessive ingenuity" in "believing that this is a linear path to modify the social relations of oppression and exploitation typical of capitalism" (Pazello, 2018, p. 1577, our translation), led to impasses and frustrations. This is evident "in the years that followed the promulgation of the new constitution" when the "ideology" of the urban reform movement "takes a very technical and juridical direction" (Maricato, 1997, p. 312, our translation). The militant efforts proved to be limited and "even the few but significant experiences of the democratic and popular municipal administrations face considerable resistance to operationalize Urban Reform guidelines" (Maricato, 1997, p. 313-314, our translation).

This tactical option, when "the law appears as a strategy from which the required social changes would be achieved" (Pazello, 2018, p. 1584, our translation), is the mark of the political and ideological limitations of many critical law theories in Brazil. In the "search for new and more efficient rights, some even achieved", it is ignored that their "execution would depend on power, which the oppressed never had" (Baldez, 2003, p. 80, our translation). During the moment when urban struggles approached law in an orderly manner through popular amendments, the "essential and predominantly juridical elaboration ended up representing, by the dispersion of political action, the main mechanism of mobilization of the people". Thus, "the struggle ceased to be political or political action, to restrain itself in the proper and historical field of class domination, the legal field" (Baldez, 2003, p. 81, our translation).

Considering the discussion above, which addresses decisions to hegemonic groups, the construction of other rights by the dispossessed is fundamental. Urban occupations have been the privileged place of eruption to affirm the recognition of the right to diversity and difference. According to Pazello (2018), the attempts to oppose the workers' interests to the capitalist legal framework finds their expression in the "insurgent law", articulation of the Marxist critique of the right to Latin American critical thinking, producing the "true basis of its theoretical support" (Pazello, 2018, p. 1559). As, "in Latin America in particular, the most extended forms of labor control are non-salary", outside the contract form, "the relations of exploitation and domination have a colonial nature" and demand their decolonization (Quijano, 2005, p. 114, our translation). The homogenizing process of society members happened in Latin America southern countries caused by the mass elimination of some of them (indigenous peoples, blacks, and mestizos) and not through the decolonization of social and political relations among the various components of the population (Quijano, 2005, p. 122).

Unable to be included in the "patriarchal/capitalist/colonial/modern world system" (Pazello, 2018, p. 1561, our translation), the dispossessed people from the peripheries face daily threats to their rights. A condition that sets "critical, insurgent or found in the streets" as the "possible mediation for a Marxist and Marxian critique of the legal form structure" that "from a dependent, decolonial and committed to popular movements perspective" will enable strategic uses for law in contexts of not yet social revolution" (Pazello, 2018, p. 1593,

our translation). Therefore, the construction of the possible freedom in the city of peripheral capitalism has in the insurgent right one of the resistance camps of the dispossessed, strengthening exercises of political autonomy by another city.

4 Is the city a space for resistance?

The denial of the capitalist city to the workers of the colonized peripheral nations, leading them to the occupation and self-production of their living spaces, is the socio-spatial basis on which the collective struggles for freedom and rights historically take place. "Conquered and defended in the face of power", such spaces are constructions of the "hidden transcript" that "practiced, articulated, enacted, and disseminated within these offstage social sites" represents "an achievement of resistance" (Scott, 1990 p. 119). Since "the territory is neither an external substance nor a basis on which society stands", but "is constituted by society itself in the process in which it weaves together its social relations and power", it becomes a decisive space conquest for the exercise of insurgency (Gonçalves, 2002, p. 13, our translation). In the materialization of this statement, typical of territorialities, the identity of the different peoples of Latin America is in a close relationship with their places of life and work, an assertion of possession and struggles on different fronts for land and its natural resources (Quijano, 2005). Despite that, before the State and the capitalist interests, how do the residents of the occupations proceed in their resistance processes? According to Moreno, "residents do not despise or reject the city, but neither magnify it" and "do not perceive its autonomy as marginalization or exclusion, but as a natural way of practicing coexistence" (Moreno, 2005, p. 91, our translation).

Inside the cities, in self-constructed territories, many of them with secular trajectories, the peripheral urban areas express identities similar to the rural ones. In an apparent systemic insertion, the weakness of systemic inclusion ties leads urban workers in peripheral countries to exercise "survival strategies" of (Romanelli and Bezerra, 1999) physical reproduction practices originated in rural spaces, reinvented in cities, form the basis of popular resistance and demand to establish relationships with the public and private boundaries. From the experience of the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, in the southeast region of Brazil, during the 1950s, Cunha (2016) analyzes the first contacts of local leaders with sectors of the Church and State, later the "alliance between Science and State" promoted by "Sociologists of the Society of Graphic and Mechanistic Analysis Applied to Social Complexes (SAGMACS)". Showing that "more than resisting, many favelas sought to go further", Cunha (2016, p. 29, our translation) refers to the emergence of public agencies for actions with the Rio occupations that, together with the expansion of struggles, instituted welfarism and clientelism. Through such practices, "they moved along the border, projecting themselves on it", thus "claiming the urbanization of favelas instead of removals or even simple improvements". To this end, "they moved in society as a whole, calling into question the stigma that surrounded them" (Cunha, 2016, p. 38, our translation).

In this way, the favelas have built "approximations of political or ideological views, but also alliances around a common enemy". Resisting "the planned destinies", seeking to "assert themselves as part of the city", the relations with the other agents of the border were fundamental (Cunha, 2016, p. 38, our translation). Quijano (1973, p. 155) pointed that such relations entailed interests and risks of political control since the elites "learned the lessons of certain electoral experiences in many Latin American cities where the marginal colony voted massively in a conservative way". From the struggles of the associations and federations of favelas against evictions, for public services, and social recognition during the dictatorship period, the occupations became the object of the city's urban planning and "development". The positivist fragmentation of science (Gonçalves, 2002) and the architects' attribution as social planners (Lefebvre, 2006) contributed to this end. Despite these long and different trajectories of resistance, mixing processes of autonomy and dependence, resistance and clientelism (Souza and Rodrigues, 2004), the right and left power mainstream almost always understood urban occupations as spaces of disorder and penury (Santos, 1981) to be disciplined, uninterested in their character of "social space".

Regardless of the political control and interference of the space divided between masters and slaves, today housed in the superior and inferior circuits of the economy and of life (Santos, 2018), the insurgent aspects of marginal practices persisted and were reinforced. "In social spaces dependent on global conditions, collective identities are being constructed in unprecedented ways, through a complex articulation of sources of identification such as religion, territoriality, race, class, ethnicity, gender and nationality". An articulation practiced by "universal discourses of human rights, international laws, ecology, feminism, cultural rights and other means of making respect for differences within equality" (Coronil, 2005, p. 59, our translation). According to Souza and Rodrigues (2004, p. 89-92, our translation), "the demagoguery and authoritarianism of municipal administrations, cooptation of leaders and party manipulation, *caciquismo* and personalism, clientelism, the influence of economic difficulties, and drug trafficking" would have been the "causes of the crisis" of such movements in Brazil. These issues aggravate the contradictions between "precariousness-illegality" – as a phenomenon – and "autonomy-rights" – as the essence –, demonstrating that popular

occupations coexist with internal and external alliances that empower them, but they also threaten their processes of building autonomy and identity.

With the constitution of the new world order, the national states reversed the priorities of production and consumption, internal and external imperialisms were renewed. Colonization processes worsen, strengthening various forms of criminality and expanding the expropriations of surplus-value, but also diversifying the connections of fragmented struggles (Quijano, 2005). Removing the factories protagonism and making "new characters" visible on the public scene, the productive restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s was a political, economic, and ideological response to the social crisis of production and resulted in the questioning of traditional left strategies and the strengthening of social democracy (Harvey, 2004). Adding other characters, coming from factory struggles under neoliberal offensive, the popular neighborhoods became more than "a natural way to practice coexistence". Adding to that territoriality proper to their ways and needs of life, the role of reconstituting class identity, an Argentine urban leadership recognizes that today the new factory is the neighborhood:

The factory or workplace where we lived, where we learned history, where we built and recovered the identity and memory as a worker no longer exists... It was a very difficult time and even though the resistance to privatization and exclusion has had some defensive victories, the most important thing is that we began to see that our comrades: former metallurgists, former textiles, former workers began to approach and organize themselves as precarious workers (Ceceña, 2001, p. 63, our translation).

Due to the pressures of productive restructuring, bringing old and new characters to occupation, Zibechi (2003) understands that, since the late 1970s, Latin American social movements have assumed a new meaning. Sharing their "roots in physical spaces recovered or conquered" with the "new role of women", the movements seek "autonomy from the state and political parties". The seeking that takes place for the "reevaluation of the culture and identity of peoples and social groups" and for the "ability to form their own intellectuals" aiming at "organizing work and relating to nature" (Zibechi, 2003, p. 185-186, our translation). The youth presence in the "new social activism" of occupations leaves no doubt that, like the recent rural movements, urban resistance has gained generational legitimacy. However, the social and political visibility of this new collective construction of the right to resistance does not only challenge the system: outside parties and unions, also historical partners of popular occupations are called to reinvent themselves.

5 Final considerations

Freedom and Law have always been human attributes understood as inherent to the City – the former as opposed to the insecure, arduous and unpredictable field in the face of the forces of nature; the second as a legal guarantee of equality before the powerful and the State. However, both are, in class societies, selective and demanding of diverse capitals. In peripheral and colonized countries, these limitations/prohibitions affect significant portions of the population, which both support and depend on the system. In this context, the Resistance stands, as a questioner of those two terms, and its renunciation – previous and compulsory – has always been an inescapable condition for the dominated and exploited to enter and remain in the city.

From decolonial thinking, and considering the Global South as "the place where we are and from where we learn", this text sought to unveil aspects of our cities, indecipherable and unacceptable to the knowledge of Eurocentric base. Contrary to such episteme, popular occupations must be understood as "other spaces" than those that contradict the class city and make possible, thanks to its inherent Resistance, the construction of different degrees of Freedom and Law. Also based on decolonial thinking, the article argues that collective urban constructions are the works of those whose system is unable to offer any other life alternatives. Subjects can only accomplish such (herculean and utopian) spaces with their own historical rationality, substantially opposed to the instrumental logic of the State and the market.

These are the reasons why popular occupations constitute the space in our cities where Resistance, Freedom, and Rights have emerged before the structural condition of marginalization of its residents under an environment of exploitation and domination. In June 2013, after the collapse of national development proposals, the successive defeats of popular interests dissolved the legal achievements of re-democratization. While the "motherland" was being "subtracted in dark transactions" under astonished and passive looks of the majority, marginalized groups of the countryside and cities made themselves heard and felt in multiple ways in different parts of the country against an announced destination.

The different territorial histories of occupations and the diversity of ethnicity, gender, creed, and productive ties of the residents, break paradigms and arise the unpredictability and spontaneity of popular movements.

In these varied contexts and paths, the new meetings between militant and marginalized academics from the peripheries refer to the analysis of Santos (1981), Souza and Rodrigues (2004), and Cunha (2016) on interclass relations. It brings the following reflection: What do new and old partners have to exchange/offer to the residents of the occupations, in exchange for the occupation/offer of their times and tasks?

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¹ In parallel to the new generation of associations of residents and peripheral collectives, which are active throughout the country, the practices and co-management courses in technical advice, the trajectory of research groups and militant networks open to socio-diversity space of precarious urban areas, are just a few examples of that urban movement e *pur si muove*.

Through the hidden transcripts "domination is constantly evaluated, judged and criticized by those who are the object of it, feeds not only a passive and clandestine resistance, but it is also a site of 'active' resistance that harbors a potential for a revolt that makes it extremely effective in circumstances conducive to its disorganization and expression" (Ferreira, 2013, p. 10, our translation).