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Institutionalization and depoliticization of the right to the city: changing scenarios for radical social movements. The case of the *Movimento dos Sem Teto da Bahia* in Salvador, Brazil

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Abstract

The right to the city, a concept previously associated with radical social movements, has been accepted by several governments, and has inspired new public policies. However, some authors see this process of institutionalization as involving a loss of a significant part of the radical origins of the concept.

This paper approaches this process and the new opportunities and limitations that it may entail for social movement organizations with a more radical perspective on the right to the city. We explore the paradigmatic case of Brazil, and the action of a particular organization, the *Movimento dos Sem Teto da Bahia* (MSTB, Homeless Movement of Bahia) in the city of Salvador.

Drawing on the discussion of the politics of the right to the city, and on an original combination of social movement theories and critical discourse analysis, we analyse the political-institutional and discursive changes regarding urban reform in Brazil and Salvador. We then analyse how the MSTB moves within this new context, navigating the tensions and contradictions whilst advancing a radical project of transformation of urban reality within a reformist context. We also reflect on the relevance Lefebvrian ideas to understand and inspire contemporary struggles for the right to the city.

Keywords

Right to the city; depoliticization; social movements; critical discourse analysis; Brazil.

1. The new “turn” for the right to the city and urban social movements

In recent years we have seen how the concept of the "right to the city" has become an increasingly fascinating slogan (Mayer, 2009). The idea gained interest with the work of Lefebvre (1969, 1974, 1976), who called for a “radical restructuring of socio-political and economic relations, in cities and beyond” (Purcell, 2002: 101), and has inspired the struggles of urban movements since the 1960s (Mayer, 2009). More recently, authors such as Harvey (2008), Marcuse (2009) and Purcell (2013), have reclaimed the idea as a “cry and a demand” and as a motto in the struggle to transform urban reality.

Nevertheless, the concept has been increasingly adopted by a wide variety of actors, which has led to a broad institutionalization of the term. At the international level, it was adopted by several UN agencies; at the national one, some governments, particularly in Latin America, have introduced the idea into new laws and policy agendas (Mayer, 2009; Brown, 2010).

However, new institutionalized ideas on the right to the city seem to draw on an essentially legalistic and technical perspective (Evans, 2005) within a liberal-democratic framework (Purcell, 2014). For some authors (Mayer, 2009; Lopes de Souza, 2010; Purcell, 2014), this process of institutionalization has involved a loss of the originally radical content of the right to the city, as well as the co-optation of social movements.

This process may be considered as part of wider trends in urban policy and development: namely, the new centrality of rights-based discourses (Uvin, 2007), associated with the depoliticization and de-radicalization of these discourses (Evans, 2005). Along with this, many social movements have changed their strategy from confrontation to cooperation with public institutions, professionalizing themselves, implementing state-supported programmes, moderating protest, and participating in policy making (Mayer, 2009).

In the debates about the relation between the right to the city and urban social movements (Lentidou, 2010), one group of authors has placed emphasis on how social movements foster political reform and become part of decision-making structures (see, for example, Taylor, 2007; Weinstein and Ren, 2009; Smith and McQuarrie, 2012). Another group has focused its emphasis on the role played by social movement organizations (SMOs) who do not seek

political reform but the radical transformation of the social world (see, as examples, Fenster, 2005; Chatterton, 2010; Lentidou, 2010; Novy and Colomb, 2012).

In this study, we propose a connection between the issues and approaches of these two trends, a connection that has been little explored. We analyse, on the one hand, changes in the institutional and discursive context in relation to the right to the city in the last decades. On the other hand, we examine how these changes might have affected the action of SMOs which are not focused on political reform, but on deeper transformations, drawing from a more radical and politicized perspective on the right to the city. We will show how the institutionalization of a certain depoliticized and de-radicalized discourse on the idea has created new opportunities, but also limitations for the action of these SMOs. For these aims, we focus on the case study of a particular SMO, the *Movimento dos Tem Teto da Bahia* (MSTB, Homeless Movement of Bahia), in the city of Salvador, in the context of Brazil, a paradigmatic national case of institutionalization of the discourse on the right to city.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section explores the ideas of Lefebvre in order to introduce the discussion on the politics of the right to the city, characterize a radical-political approach to the idea, and identify key issues when approaching the process of struggle for the transformation of the city. We then introduce other theoretical and methodological elements for our study, drawing on social movement theories and on critical discourse analysis. In the third section, we explain the evolution and characteristics of the context of the MSTB, by analyzing the process of production and the content of three key texts: the Constitution of Brazil, the City Statute and the Urban Development Master Plan of Salvador. In section four, the ideas posed on the right to the city will help us to explore the discourse, strategy and action of the MSTB in its struggle for the radical transformation of the city. In the conclusions, we draw lessons from the MSTB regarding how to navigate the new ambivalent context. We also reflect on the relevance of the work of Lefebvre to understand contemporary urban struggles, and on how it can be rethought drawing on MSTB's experience.

2. Theoretical and methodological framework: The politics of the right to the city, social movements and discourse

2.1 *Excavating Lefebvre and the politics of right to the city*

Broad ideas and principles on the right to the city

In this section, we first present key ideas on the right to city posed by Lefebvre, which may be relevant for understanding the perspective of the MSTB. Specifically, we approach Lefebvre's ideas on the meaning of transformation; on the model of social relations pursued; and on rights-holders and the meaning of citizenship.

On the first issue, the right to the city is, in Lefebvre's thought, a call for overcoming both capitalism and State socialism. According to Lefebvre, "the right to the city is like a cry and a demand, a transformed and renewed right to urban life" (Lefebvre, 1996: 158). But rather than locating this renewed right in the tradition of liberal-democratic political thought, Lefebvre's right to the city has to be understood in a broader framework of social transformation, beyond liberal perspectives and centralized and bureaucratized socialism. It is "a critique of existing society in order to open up a path to another society, a possible world beyond capitalism, the State and consumer society" (Purcell, 2014: 144). However, this new society, called the *urban society*, is an open-ended utopian project: "the urban [society] can therefore be defined not as an accomplished reality, situated behind the actual in time but, on the contrary, as a horizon, an illuminating virtuality" (Lefebvre, 1970: 17).

Regarding social relationships, the right to the city aims at restructuring the underlying power relations in the production of space. Lefebvre poses a radically democratic project, oriented towards collective *self-governing* of urban space and society, and towards the control of the majority of society of every decision which affects the community (Purcell, 2013). In his critique against a concentration of power, Lefebvre calls for a radical practice of participation, for the central role of people habiting the city in all decision-making processes in the production of space (McCann, 2005).

All the above implies the complete reorientation of the production of space: “the realization of urban society claims for a way of planning oriented to social needs, the needs of urban society (Lefebvre, 1969: 166). This idea is also at the heart of Lefebvre’s understanding of socialism, as it “can only be conceived as the production oriented to social needs” (Lefebvre 1969: 150). It implies overcoming the “industrial city”, the contemporary capitalist city, in which private property and exchange value are the dominant ways for organizing urban space, in order to put people and not profit at the centre (Brenner et al., 2012).

These needs are the needs of what Lefebvre calls the *inhabitants*, those who inhabit the city (Attoh, 2011). All the inhabitants who daily use the city are entitled with this “new” right to the city. This idea radically transforms the liberal notion of citizenship. Through reshaping political community, Lefebvre’s citizenship is not derived from a legal status gained from membership to a nation-state, but from the very idea of inhabiting the city (Purcell, 2003). Given that the “misery of habitat” is a new misery—different from the old “proletarian misery”—and that it does “not forgive other social classes and layers” (Lefebvre, 1969: 166), the right to the city is “significant” for all classes of inhabitants (Lefebvre, 1969: 167). Moreover, the notion of inhabitants poses an alternative, comprehensive and complex entity at the centre, beyond the working class .

It is also of key importance to consider that, as inhabitants exert their right to the city, as they build the self-management of urban space, they experience intense political *learning processes*, an awakening, recognizing the need to struggle against the industrial city and for the urban society (Purcell, 2014).

The politics of the construction of the right to the city

Connected with these principles, we can identify in the literature key issues for understanding the politics and drivers of the processes of construction of the right to the city. We will mention the role of social struggle; the transformation of everyday life; overcoming compartmentalization, private property and exchange value in the urban; building class alliances without a leading vanguard.

The right to the city cannot be fulfilled through the recognition of legal rights or through policy reform. It is a right to be gained through social struggle, as inhabitants claim, organize and transform capitalist processes and the role of the State (Kuymulu, 2013). According to Lefebvre, effective inclusion in the right to the city is not granted by the State, which is the “institutional condensation of social power” (Kipfer et al., 2103:123), but gained in social transformation of the power relations underlying the production of urban space (Purcell, 2002), through the progressive “withering away of the State in practices of self-management” (Kipfer et al., 2012). These revolutionary processes are not necessarily violent, “but violence is not necessarily excluded on them” (Lefebvre, 1970:5).

As a key issue for these processes to take place, Lefebvre emphasizes the lived experienced by city inhabitants through their *everyday life*: “there can be no socialist revolution without an urban revolution, no urban revolution without a socialist revolution, and neither without a revolution in everyday life” (Goonewardena, 2011:60). Even though Lefebvre considers that space has some autonomy, and that “the new system of production, cannot be achieved without the transformation of the existing space itself” (Lefebvre, 1976:126), he goes well beyond a strictly materialistic approach to urban space. He advocates for a holistic understanding of social life that considers the “teeming multitude of different desires and drives that are not reducible to economic imperatives” (Purcell, 2013: 145). In fact, individuals have to go beyond the the desires and of the consumption patters imposed to collective life under capitalism, and find ways for alternatives inspired in the utopia (Lefebvre, 1947). This implies a “permanent cultural revolution” (Lefebvre, 1971: 194).

Self-governing processes are open-ended process in which the city is conceived as a collective and creative oeuvre (Lefebvre, 1996), that is both the result and the context of inhabitants’ everyday life, of collective daily and the interaction of multiple differences. The emphasis is therefore placed on the right of inhabitants to use the city through their daily lives, rather than the right of economic agents to exploit the exchange value of urban space.

The confrontation between use value and exchange value emerges for Lefebvre as one of the main contradictions of capitalist social relations in which “inhabitants who ‘use’ the city are marginalized in favour of those who seek to realize ‘exchange’ value of urban space” (Baris,

2013). Consequently, appropriation of urban space by urban dwellers for a “full and complete usage” (Lefebvre, 1996: 179) is one of the key political concepts of Lefebvre’s thought. In the process of construction of the right to the city, as inhabitants appropriate the city, use value would substitute the exchange value of the urban space. “The right to appropriate urban space involves the right to live in, play in, work in, represent, characterize, and occupy urban space in a particular city. These are rights of use rather than rights of exchange” (Purcell, 2003:577-578).

However, in the industrial city, the functional separation of uses and the residential separation of users prevent encounter and interaction. Compartmentalization and private property rights alienate urban space from inhabitants and “abstract land from the web of urban connections” (Purcell, 2014: 149). It is parallel to the specialization, compartmentalization and alienation of the capitalist division of labour. This is why appropriation has to overcome alienation of urban space, compartmentalization and liberal property rights based on ownership (Purcell, 2014). As Lefebvre points out, “transformation of society presupposes a collective ownership and management of the space” (Lefebvre, 1974).

Finally, Lefebvre offers us considerations on the key groups to promote change in the city. The groups which most suffer the “misery of habitat” and segregation—not just the working class but inhabitants from different groups—are the “social and political forces, classes, fractions of classes, regroupings and class alliances” (Lefebvre, 1969: 169) able to produce the transformation of the city towards the urban society. The imagination and transformation of the city cannot be entrusted to “civil servants, experts or specialists” (Lefebvre, 1969: 145), even if we assume that the working class may look for alliances with other groups and classes, which have to “indicate their social needs (...) open the horizon and claim the future, which will be their oeuvre” (Lefebvre, 1969:145). These considerations go beyond the centrality of working class in the transformation of the city, and calls for alliances and regroupings.

Finally, the process of transformation led by these groups cannot be imposed or led by a vanguard. On the contrary, the majority of society, inhabitants of different classes—not just the working class—should progressively and spontaneously assume control (Lefebvre, 2009), in processes built from below, without the need for guidance from a revolutionary elite (Purcell, 2014)

2.2 Drawing on social movement theories and critical discourse analysis

In this section, we try to introduce theoretical and conceptual elements to address a comprehensive analysis of the action of a particular SMO¹ in their pursuit of a right to the city project similar to that of Lefebvre, within a particular context. For this aim, we follow the recent strand of theorists in social movement literature who try to connect elements from both political processes and framing theories (Stekenburg and Klandermans, 2009). This may help us to consider and interlink the political-institutional and discursive aspects of the context, which are both of key importance when addressing the right to the city.

On one hand, we consider that a certain political opportunity structure (POS) limits the range of strategies and the types of demands posed by social movements that have the potential to prosper in certain contexts (Kitschelt, 1986; Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). Tilly and Tarrow (2007) identify key properties of the POS of a regime: the multiplicity of independent centres of power, the regime's openness to new actors, the instability of current political alignments, the availability of influential supporters for challengers, the repression or facilitation of collective claim-making, and decisive changes in these items. However, we can broaden this notion of POS to include a discursive dimension, which also determines institutional structures and power configurations (Koopmans and Statham, 1999). Drawing on Hajer (1995, 2005), we consider that certain political discourses can become dominant and then part of the discursive POS when they are frequently used by actors in the search for credibility, or when they become institutionalized in normative texts. As we will see, this would be the case of an emerging reformist dominant discourse of the right to the city in the changing POS of the Brazilian context.

On the other hand, we do not deny social movement organizations as active and creative agents in mobilization processes (Diani, 1996). We consider that SMOs interpret and construct their political opportunities (Gamson and Meyer, 1996), and that the way in which the POS constrains collective action depends on how it is "framed" by the SMO (Benford and Snow, 2000). However, there exists a dominant perception of the context (Snow and Benford, 1992), what Diani (1996) calls the "master frame", considered as the most credible and realistic frame, which hampers the effective development of any "counter-frames" by SMOs. This would be the

case of the MSTB, which articulates not only a radical discourse different from the dominant reformist one, but also, being close to Lefebvre's ideas on the construction of the right to the city, frames the POS differently from the majority of the stakeholders in the context.

As discourses may turn into cognitive structures that determine the framing generated by SMOs (Sandberg, 2006), we can understand discourses as being not only representations of "reality", but also "regimes of truth" or acceptable formulations of problems and solutions (Foucault, 1977). Following the insights of critical discourse analysis, discourses are not only modelled by social processes and political relations, but also model them (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997).

Methodologically speaking, each "instance" of discourse can be considered simultaneously as a text (a fragment of written or spoken language), a discursive practice (the process of producing a text) and a social practice (Fairclough, 1992). It is necessary to refer to the changing relations at the various scales of social organization (global, national, sub-national), to establish "the different ways in which discourse is received, appropriated and recontextualized" (Fairclough, 2001: 8). This model "illuminates social change from multiple levels of analysis, highlighting tensions between dominant and alternative discourses and highlighting power relations through an analysis of hegemony and resistance" (Martson, 2004:7). In our case, we refer to the tension between the dominant discourse and MSTB's radical one, and to MSTB's related practices of resistance. This takes place in a context of connected and changing relations and discourses on the right to the city at different scales, from the elaboration of the global charters for the right to the city, to local processes regarding master plans in Brazil.

2.3 Methodology

Our analysis focuses firstly on the configuration of the POS in the reforms driven by demands for the right to the city in Brazil since the 1970s. This analysis explores both the political-institutional and the discursive dimension of the POS, as well as the master frame of the context. Inspired by critical discourse analysis, we use secondary sources to examine how key texts—the Constitution of Brazil, the City Statute and the Urban Development Master Plan of Salvador—were produced and disseminated both at the national and the local level in Salvador, in the broader international context. We then analyse the content of the texts.

Secondly, the paper examines the social practice of a given SMO, the MSTB. We analyse how the organization articulates a counter-dominant discourse, and how it frames the POS and acts, driven by its ideas on the processes of construction of the right to the city. In addition to a set of secondary sources—websites, written texts produced by the MSTB, academic bibliography and articles from the press—the analysis relies on primary sources obtained from fieldwork, which included participant observation, individual and collective semi-structured interviews and participatory workshops². The participatory methodology employed in the workshops was inspired by the “web of institutionalization” (Levy, 1996). This method allowed the participants to visually connect and relate ideas, expectations, resources, procedures, allies and capabilities of their organizations or institutions regarding the right to the city.

3. The political-institutional and discursive context of the MSTB

3.1 *The political-institutional context*

In Brazil, the 1970s witnessed the emergence of neighbourhood associations, whose ultimate aim was to transform urban reality (Avritzer, 2010) through direct action against the military regime (Gohn, 2004). With the constitutional process of the 1980s, features of the POS changed dramatically. The system moved gradually, in the terms of Tilly and Tarrow (2007), from repression to the facilitation of collective claim-making and the participation of new actors. Many urban SMOs accepted the new rules as a way to advance their demands on the social appropriation of urban spaces, limitation of property rights and cities’ democratization (Da Silva, 2003). SMOs found new supporters in the ever-growing number of NGOs, professional and academic organizations and in some political parties. Movements and other organizations joined together in the National Movement for Urban Reform (MNRU), created in 1982.

The movement decided to participate in the spaces opened by the Constituent Assembly in order to influence the Constitution. The MNRU took part in gatherings and technical-legalistic debates (Da Silva, 2003), where NGOs and professionals became the key interlocutors, gaining a prominence that they had not enjoyed in the past. This led to a decreased intensity of

mobilizations of grassroots organizations, and a decline of their influence in comparison with NGOs (Maricato, 2000).

The MNRU managed to introduce the ideas of “democratic management of cities” and “social function of property” in the final constitutional text (Brasil, 1988). Nevertheless, it left the development of these issues to future national laws and also to municipal master plans—thus producing a new key change in the POS, as the local became a key autonomous centre of power regarding urban management. This opened new fields of action for urban movements.

At the national level, the City Statute was the key national law developed to regulate these issues. The first proposals were well received by the National Forum for Urban Reform (FNRU)—the new name given to the MNRU—but rejected by the real estate industry, which considered them confiscatory (Bassul, 2010, Avritzer, 2010). The project was blocked until 1994, when a new bill was introduced, which substantially underdeveloped concepts and instruments for the democratic management and social function of property claimed (Avritzer, 2010). Even with some internal disagreement, the FNRU decided to accept the proposal (Da Silva, 2003), and later on was able to reintroduce some of the instruments, which were accepted by the real estate industry (Bassul, 2010). In 2001 Congress unanimously approved the project.

The FNRU’s partial success contributed to the creation of a certain master frame, which highlighted the need for realism, dialogue, alliances with NGOs and the centrality of technical capacities (Avritzer, 2010). This replicated what happened in the same period at the international level, where professionalized NGOs gained prominence over grassroots organizations in the elaboration of the “global charters” of the right to the city (Mayer, 2009; Purcell, 2014), “aimed to construct instruments that could be adopted by the UN system, regional Human Rights systems and governments” (Ortiz, 2008: 20).

However, some authors consider that FNRU’s “success” lay in the real estate sector’s shifting perceptions. After an initial rejection, they soon acknowledged that the proposed management models and tools could be a way of legitimising and broadening the markets, without risking property rights or their role in the city’s processes of production (Bassul, 2010).

With the approval of the City Statute, local urban development master plans began to emerge. They were accompanied by local mobilizations demanding real participation in their production (Rodrigues and Barbosa, 2010). However, local governments tended to use technocratic arguments against massive participation.

The case of Salvador was especially problematic. The first master plan, promoted by the conservative Liberal Front Party, was declared null, as it did not fulfil public hearing requirements (Avritzer, 2010). In 2005, the Democratic Labour Party initiated a new process that, as in many other cities (Bassul, 2010), was criticized for neither offering the training nor the information required for real participation in the hearings, and for the use of highly technical language. Moreover, the demands that were incorporated in the final text were essentially those proposed by the real estate lobbies (Pereira, 2008).

This analysis identifies key properties of the political-institutional dimension of the POS relevant for the action of the MTSB: the renewed importance of the local level in urban management, the opening of invited spaces of participation, the relevance of new actors such as NGO and professional organizations, even though traditionally powerful actors (such as real estate and construction companies) kept their influence. The dominant frame considered that SMOs should be realist, willing to dialogue, participate in policy-making and make alliances with NGOs.

3.2 *The discursive context*

In order to address the discursive context of our case study, we draw on two key concepts with which to explore the right to the city: the social function of property and the democratic management of cities.

The social function of property is considered in the City Statute as the use of property to cover the “needs of citizens in terms of quality of life, social justice, and economic activity” (Art. 39, Law No. 10.257/2001). This idea is developed in Salvador's Master Plan as “the right to urban land, housing, basic sanitation systems, physical and psycho-social safety, infrastructure and public services, urban mobility, (...) education, work, culture and leisure, the right to worship freely and the right to economic production” (Art. 7, Law No. 7.400/2008).

The Plan sets out criteria to determine when a property is fulfilling its social function and includes a series of distributive and re-distributive instruments (Ribeiro, 2003), such as regulation of possession, delimitation of priority urbanization areas, physical improvement of degraded areas or reduction of residential segregation and speculation (Fernandes, 2007, 2010). Even though we can consider these instruments as having some transformative potential (Lopes de Souza, 2006), the social function of property is framed in a technocratic manner which puts the State and bureaucracies at the centre. It does not challenge capitalist logic, but points to market regulation to balance the use value and exchange value of land. It recognizes a number of already existing rights, and does not challenge individual private property or compartmentalization logic. The plan essentially supports the provision of individual property and housing via State intervention in the market (Bassul, 2010). This perspective is reinforced by an underpinning “vision” of the city, whose primary objective is to “consolidate Salvador as one of Brazil’s national metropolises (...) in the vanguard of research and technical-cultural experimentation, business opportunities, enterprise and employment” (Art.8, Law 7.400/2008).

On “democratic management” the City Statute establishes that this can be achieved “through participation of the public and associations representing the various sectors of the community, which formulate, execute, monitor urban development plans, programmes, and projects” (Art.2, Law No. 10.257/2001). It also mentions the importance of social control over instruments that involve an “outlay of resources of the municipal government” (Art.4, Law No. 10.257/2008) in terms of access to information, transparency, and accountability. The Master Plan includes this concept under similar terms, and develops a series of specific instruments for participation, such as the creation of forums, committees, consultations and popular initiatives for bills, plans, programmes and projects.

However, the State is again at the centre of the idea of management. Emphasis is placed on collaboration and participation in “invited” spaces, and not on those claimed or created by civil society itself. Focus is on consultation, deliberation, or—at most—proposals from civil society, far from the radical ideas of self-governing posed by Lefebvre.

As we can see, the institutionalized discourse on the right to the city is far from the Lefebvrian perspective, and moves within a liberal reformist and technocratic perspective. It is also far from the MSTB discourse, as we will explore below.

4. The MSTB's discourse and action

4.1 *Salvador and the MSTB*

Salvador, capital of the State of Bahia, is the third-largest city of Brazil, with 2,700,000 inhabitants, and one of the most racially and culturally diverse cities in the continent. Squatter settlements have continued to proliferate since the 1940s, and represent the main housing solution available to a number of classes, leaving an indelible mark on urban development. According to the latest census, 880,000 persons live in 242 informal housing settlements in the city (IBGE, 2010), which lack access to basic services.

The MSTB, born in 2003, defines itself as a “popular organization whose fields of action are urban spaces, mobilising homeless workers to fight for their right to housing (...) To achieve this goal, it pressures the government through mobilization and the occupation of buildings and land that are abandoned and accomplish no social function” (MSTB website, 2010). Under the slogan “Organize, Occupy, Resist”, the organization affirms to act under the principles of “autonomy, spirit of struggle, horizontality and solidarity” (MSTB website, 2010).

The majority of people who join the MSTB initially do so with the expectation of meeting their basic needs—such as shelter, security and basic services. By promoting occupation, the movement offers a way to meet these demands while simultaneously producing deeper transformations. Once land is occupied, MSTB coordinators supporting the occupiers promote democratic organization, the election of leaders, and the emergence of self-managed initiatives—community centres, libraries, kitchens, nurseries, school-support workshops, cultural and productive undertakings (for example, urban agriculture cooperatives or small weaving workshops). In parallel, the MSTB pressures the public administration through negotiations, advocacy, demonstrations and mobilizations. The movement demands the implementation of

urban management tools recognized in the Statute, in the Master Plan and in local regulations to improve occupied areas: to regularize occupied land, to build housing and infrastructure, or to improve degraded and environmentally-risky areas.

The MSTB is organized into three kinds of spaces. First, the *nuclei*, which are the entry points to the movement for homeless families. These are spaces for participation and preparation where people begin to organize before occupying a place or joining an occupation. Here they seek out empty buildings to occupy, debate common issues and organize protest actions and marches—approximately 36,000 homeless persons participated in six *nuclei* in 2010. Second, “occupations” are abandoned private or public buildings or empty lots where families self-build houses, and which are still not legally recognized. Around 5,000 families lived in 24 occupied MSTB sites in 2010 (Zibechi, 2010). Third, “communities” are established squatter sites which have received some kind of intervention from public authorities to improve physical conditions, regularize the property and/or provide public services and housing.

These spaces are organized autonomously, but coordination structures exist at the neighbourhood, municipal and state levels. The MSTB Congress is the highest decision-making space, celebrated every three years.

Profiles of people joining the movement vary greatly: usually, they are rural migrants arriving to Salvador; new families who want to move from the over-occupied houses of their parents, but have no access to formal housing; families who have lost or had to sell their houses in other neighbourhoods or occupations; homeless people previously living on the streets and, to lesser extent, migrants from other cities or countries. They are mostly black, with very low incomes and frequently working in the informal sector. The proportion of each profile depends on the specific occupation.

4.2 *MSTB's discourse on the right to the city*

To explore MSTB's discourse on the right to the city in relation to that of Lefebvre, we address the key issues posed in 2.1: the meaning of the transformation of the city; the model of social relations pursued; the notion on right-holders and citizenship.

Regarding transformation, at its core, the MSTB affirms to seek a profound change in urban reality: "we do not want to become a part of their city; we want to create our own" (MSTB, 2010). Echoing Lefebvre, for the MSTB, transformation means overcoming capitalism and a commodified society:

"We use occupation as a means to ensure the resolution of pragmatic problems, such as the need for housing. But occupation is also the result of a wish to create the conditions that will help people overcome this society (...) In reality, we are fighting for another society, a society characterized by new relations and where people can overcome the logic of market forces" (interview with MSTB leader³, 2010)

The model proposed by the State, allied with the capitalist logic, is also to be overcome:

"(...) [the State] proposes reforms and a model of the city tied to speculation and to the logic of the city as a commodity [...] State intervention is carried out according to financial needs and without real participation" (MSTB, 2010).

Looking into the model or logic of social relationships proposed, the MSTB highlights the need to build "the logic of the needs of people" (MSTB, 2010) in the city, aligning again with the radical ideas on the right to the city described. The transformation of social relations through the promotion of collective life, is the path by which to build a model of urban life which may substitute the current logic for a new one:

"[We want to] create a new form of sociability, new types of relations, a collectivization process (...) to replace the market logic of the city with the logic representing the needs of people (...) The idea is to create new relations and cultural patterns between people accustomed to making decisions on an individual basis" (MSTB, 2010)

All this shows a radical democratic perspective on social relations and participation, which echoes the idea of self-governance. Illustrative of this is the fact that the MSTB considers the self-managed initiatives they promote as ways for essaying and building what can be

considered the self-governing of society: for the Movement, community kitchens “are not just alternative forms for service supplying or income production” (MSTB, 2010); community assemblies are not just ways of making decisions; demonstrations are not just ways of lobbying. They are also all spaces to make the people “take their decisions collectively to decide everything that has to do with their lives, outside of the State or market (...) removed from individualist perspectives, which have to be overcome” (MSTB, 2010). They are “spaces for the emergence of a new sociability (...) to make a new conscience emerge, as people enter into and build a logic of collectivization” (MSTB, 2010).

Regarding rights-holders and the idea of citizenship, the people at the centre of MSTB's idea of the right to the city are “the vast majority of inhabitants of Salvador, who are marginalized by the system” (MSTB, 2010). These include “favela inhabitants”, “homeless people”, “black people”, “peasants arriving in the city” and “all those who suffer abuse and share rebellion against poverty and the system that marginalizes them” (MSTB, 2010). It is, in reality, a constellation of groups who share a situation of dispossession, those who suffer the “misery of habitat” (Lefebvre, 1969: 166) posed by Lefebvre. All them are the rights-holders, as they are “the people who have needs” (MSTB, 2010), no matter what their nationality. These rights, which “are not granted by the State”, are won and exerted when people “use, occupy and manage the space” (MSTB, 2010). This, again, reflects the Lefebvrian ideas posed on rights rather than a liberal perspective. This idea of active citizenship also connects with the idea of learning process: as Lefebvre also identifies, it is through the exercise of citizenship in the struggle that people obtain the necessary consciousness to advance in self-governing:

“The idea is to broaden people’s horizons, so that they can see that housing is more than just four walls, that it is a means for freedom. People must build consciousness; they need to become active subjects” (MSTB, 2010).

4.3 MSTB action: moving in the political-institutional and discursive context.

The MSTB tactically uses the dominant rhetoric and the new institutions, spaces and tools for urban management inspired by the right to the city, in order to advance its radical project. This implies a number of key tensions and contradictions.

To address these tensions, and the success or failure of the MSTB when moving into them, we examine the key issues on the politics of the construction of the right identified before: the role of social struggles as a driver of transformation; the processes of revolution in everyday life; challenging compartmentalization and private property; substituting exchange value for use value; building class alliances without a vanguard. We do so considering the context, the key features of the POS and the features of the dominant discourse and the master frame described earlier.

Building the right to the city through social struggle in a technocratic, institutional and discursive context

We shall first examine the tensions derived from the fact that the MTSB focuses on conflict and social struggle against capitalism and the State, whilst trying tactically to take advantage of existing participatory spaces and instruments, based on a technocratic perspective.

As mentioned, several spaces for invited participation were created during and after the approval of the Statute and the Master Plan of Salvador, when the regime opened to new actors. Civil servants, aligned with the master frame, see these as spaces to “listen to the demands [of grassroots organizations] and jointly construct a new reality” (Interview with a civil servant, 2010). In contrast, the MSTB, which sees the city as “a political space under dispute” (MSTB, 2010), considers these participatory spaces as spaces of “political dispute”: “you can’t hold a dialogue with the State (...) you can only negotiate with them” (MSTB, 2010).

For the Movement, participation in these spaces can be a dangerous way of legitimizing government actions, and a form of co-optation. However, it believes that it is useful and necessary to take part in these spaces for tactical reasons, “to retain our legitimacy and to ensure that they will never be able to say that we are unwilling to negotiate” (MSTB, 2010). This participation may also be helping the MSTB in two other ways: by providing access to information on local plans and policies, and by obtaining commitments from authorities—“concrete commitments, whose non-compliance (...) can be denounced” (MSTB, 2010). All this seems to facilitate tactical decision-making, to foster informed debates and arguments to

maintain social mobilization in the occupations, and then to promote learning in their social base.

To navigate this tension, the MSTB participates in these spaces of negotiation but, at the same time, makes a great effort to make it clear to its support base (in assemblies and meetings) and to public opinion (with public statements) that their collaboration with institutions is purely tactic. It is not clear whether this communication strategy has a significant influence on MSTB's social base, as the impact of negotiations in the occupations seems to depend mainly on the results: when occupations achieve positive and visible results from participation in negotiation spaces (for example, an agreement to regularize the area), the social base usually moves to a more collaborative and less conflicting attitude, sometimes losing its more combative spirit. The opposite happens in occupations which receive less attention from the State. Apart from this, success in negotiations which are not as visible to the social base—for example, obtaining some important information on local plans—do not seem to have an impact on the motivation of squatters.

Another key obstacle the MSTB faces when interacting with public institutions is associated with the technical language and knowledge required to navigate bureaucratic procedures. This is partially because the MSTB prioritizes political-ideological education over the technical training of its members. Squatters experience intense processes of political learning in their day-to-day practice of participation—in discussing, meeting, mobilising. However, they do not learn much about technical issues in these practices (such as the technical language of regulations or the elaboration of projects). The opposite occurs in other SMOs, in which leaders spend time learning about technical issues, or are already selected on the basis of their technical capacity. Beyond this, the MSTB intentionally frames their demands and discussions with civil servants in political and confrontational terms. Finally, the fact that the MSTB uses horizontal decision-making procedures creates another situation of disadvantage vis-à-vis other SMOs which feature vertical, quicker and more flexible decision-making systems, which are preferred by public institutions.

Politicians and civil servants often seem to employ technocratic arguments, legitimized by the dominant frame and discourse, in order to give priority to other organizations that are more

efficient, boast greater technical knowledge, put discussions in technical terms, have more allies and are less conflictive. For example, a civil servant states:

“The MSTB doesn’t worry about technical aspects. They should make proposals like this [project for 54 homes developed by an NGO], but they are not interested. The costs are low and the houses are good! (...) They are always confrontational, they have to understand that we’re on their side, but they have to offer us proposals” (Interview with civil servant, 2010).

It seems clear that MSTB’s frames, positions and practices are significantly limiting access to public intervention. The MSTB considers that it is “a price to pay” to put social struggle at the forefront, and avoid co-optation. The only strategy to mitigate this is to rely on the very few skilled allies they have (mainly a few very politicized NGOs and scholars), to receive technical advice. However, it is not enough to offset MSTB’s lack of technical capacities.

These limitations in accessing public intervention may discourage occupiers. The MSTB try to face these situations by creating political awareness and appealing to the spirit of struggle and solidarity. However, awareness-raising processes take a long time, so while relying on them may be a good strategy for the medium-long term and for older occupations, this is not the case in newer occupations, where motivation can quickly dwindle.

Transforming everyday life, in the logic of projects and urban planning instruments

Most of the time, the State finally intervenes in the occupations to improve the areas, regularize land or provide housing and infrastructure, but only after long processes of pressuring, mobilization, negotiation, compromise and delay. These processes may take anywhere from 2 to 5 years or more, may be exhausting for MSTB’s bases, creating frustration and causing some people to withdraw. To manage this frustration, the MSTB tries to achieve small, partial “victories” to create a sense that the process is advancing. These may include having an audience with public officials and making specific commitments.

Apart from that, a key strategy of the movement is to make the most of these long periods of mobilization and expectation, in order to calmly develop changes in the everyday life of the squatters, skills and habits for organization and self-management. This is a key process for the MSTB in order to build the right to city. Squatters develop critical awareness and political

consciousness; alternative desires; habits for democratic participation, mutual support and strategic planning; common views and community plans for the occupations. They begin to collectively produce and manage the built space (public spaces and the community equipment and self-managed initiatives mentioned), in the logic of mutual care and collective ways of daily living (collective care of children or urban farming, for example). To sum up, the MSTB tries to change culture, mentalities, and everyday life, and to advance in the collective control of space during these periods of waiting. In Lefebvre's terms, they try to advance in self-governing. It could be said that the MSTB seems to be quite successful in this sense, as a number of people in the occupations take part in self-managed initiatives, assemblies, working groups and other collective processes. Collaboration and solidarity in MSTB's occupations is perceived to be much stronger than in others in the city.

All this is partially possible due to these long waiting times. With shorter waiting times, people may get the individual benefits they were looking for when they joined the MSTB, without any change in their mentalities or ways of everyday life, and therefore subsequently abandon the collectivization processes.

However, long waiting times are usually followed by quick interventions, such as the distribution and inscription of lots, or building of houses. Usually, once interventions begin, the community has no time or space to discuss details such as typology of houses, urban configuration, and the distribution of land among families, so conflicts, individualist attitudes and frustrations with the results may arise. This is another reason why, for the MSTB, occupations have to be organized, to have community plans in place and political maturity before interventions begin.

A frequent successful strategy of the MSTB is to influence, when possible, to control the time and duration of the interventions. Usually, it is easy to postpone the beginning of the projects, or to ask the government for more time in order to better organize the community and its demands and proposals. However, it is much more difficult to delay the times when the interventions begin, as the private companies building the houses and equipment or urbanizing the areas only follow the times that are most convenient to them. Little can be done by the MSTB in this regard beyond asking the government to directly manage urban interventions—so far without success.

Promoting collectivization and use value in a logic of compartmentalization and exchange value

Another key issue faced by the MSTB is the difficulty of overcoming the logic of private property, compartmentalization and exchange value, present in the dominant discourses of the right to the city, instruments and regulations.

On the one hand, housing typologies and urban configuration of public and private spaces set out in regulations are inspired by the logic of compartmentalization described by Lefebvre: functionally, social houses conserve the classic individualistic typology of the housing unit (Fiori and Fix, 2009), made for a single family, which integrates every “private” functionality - sleeping, dining, caring for children, enjoyment, etc. At the urban level, this logic prioritizes the maximization of private spaces over public spaces. For the MSTB, this “promotes individualism and destroys community-building” (MSTB, 2010). Following the logic of collectivization, interaction and transformation of every-day life, the Movement tries to propose housing typologies with reduced private spaces and more common areas, where neighbours may collectively develop activities which are usually conceived of as “private”, such as childcare, laundry, cooking and cultural activities. Coherently, at the level of urban planning, the MSTB proposes more public spaces and infrastructure, at the expense of private spaces.

However, the MSTB is not able to influence the configuration of private spaces—houses—as social housing typologies have to follow the rigid legal parameters in the distribution and dimensions of units. Moreover, officials and companies building social housing are reluctant to negotiate with the MSTB, as they prioritize the minimization of efforts and maximization of benefits, something which is not compatible with MSTB’s proposals.

However, the MSTB can sometimes be more successful when negotiating the configuration of public spaces. They may negotiate some small changes in the projects, when they fit into the regulations and do not involve greater costs. For example, people in an occupation may renounce some green space in the project, but in exchange introduce a place for a community nursery or for urban agriculture. These changes, however small, can be of key importance to

prevent the dismantling of, existing collectivisation processes and self-managed initiatives, and serve to reinforce them,

Promoting exchange value, in a logic of private property and use value

As posed, the property rights regime of the regulations is based on private and individual property. Even if the MSTB has demanded—aligning with Lefebvre’s perspective—the consideration of community ownership of land and housing in the regulations, this has not been taken into account. The system seems to promote individualism in squatters and to demobilize previously active individuals once they get their property titles, improved plots or houses. Moreover, the plots and houses are subject to market logic, as individuals can sell their property (on the informal market, as these properties cannot officially be sold until 20 years after the intervention). In fact, when affected by severe economic problems, families often sell their new houses or regularized plots and move to a new occupation. It is not easy to eliminate the exchange value of land and housing.

It seems that the MSTB is only able to maintain “collectivization process” and the collective logics and spirit after interventions in the cases of occupations that were already very well organized before—with a large number of occupiers engaged in collective decision spaces, self-management activities, etc. Moreover, it is always very difficult for the MSTB to avoid people selling their houses and moving if they decide to do so. The only thing the MSTB does is to promote self-help groups to attend to families in very serious economic situations to prevent them from selling their houses, but this not often successful.

Building political alliances of classes and factions, in a context of depoliticized relations and conflicting perspectives

As has been explained, for Lefebvre, alliances between classes and factions of classes are key for the construction of the right to the city. For the MSTB, this becomes difficult, given that its perceptions of the new institutions and instruments differ from those of most of the city’s organizations, which are more aligned with the master frame. Most local SMOs consider the State as central for the construction of the right to the city, and have focused on the construction

of instrumental alliances with other social organizations, NGOs and professionals, to gain more influence and capacity for dialogue with public institutions.

The MSTB, however, rejects any collaboration with what they consider co-opted organizations, and restricts alliances to “organizations which may bring real transformation, and which have a tradition of autonomy and horizontality” (MSTB, 2010). That means organizations with similar political perspectives, which do not collaborate with the State, which are deeply democratic, and oriented to the construction of self-governing. Most of the few SMO allies the MSTB has are part of the *Frente de Resistencia Urbana*, formed by homeless, black, cultural (such as hip-hop) and women’s organizations. For the MSTB, these groups “are different in some aspects, but share a situation of oppression” (MSTB, 2010)—in Lefebvre’s words, they are groups who share “the misery of habitat”.

This self-imposed restriction in its alliances may have led the MSTB to a situation of certain self-isolation, and thus reduced the MSTB’s capacity of influence and of access public resources. However, this isolation seems to be successful in terms of political learning. The MSTB focuses on its limited alliances, which are very intense. For example, the organizations of the *Frente* share a great number of spaces of exchange. For people living in MSTB occupations, intense interaction with these groups seems to have entailed a significant learning process, as they have realized that they all share the same situation and are part of, echoing Lefebvre, the social and political force which may transform urban reality.

Conserving a transformative perspective without a “vanguard”, in a context of pressures for immediate needs

The MSTB constantly faces the tension of not losing a radical orientation, but to democratically respond to its social base. Even if differences within the movement were not the focus of our study, it is clear that we cannot consider the MSTB as a monolithic organization. Tensions are frequent between MSTB leaders or older members and newer MSTB members. The first group is usually much more politicized and holds a clearer radical perspective on the right to the city. The second group, more driven by immediate needs, would prefer the movement to adopt a more "realistic", "pragmatic" and “friendly” attitude towards institutions.

Older and politicized leaders of the MSTB do not seem to believe in the need of a vanguard to guide the movement, and try to respect the decisions and priorities of each occupation or community. However, they do not renounce the creation of wider perspectives of transformation in the occupations. To manage the tensions arising from neither accepting a vanguard nor renouncing a more radical project of the right to the city, they employ several strategies:

For example, they facilitate meetings between people in more recent occupations and people in older and more politically mature occupations or with other groups—such as organizations of the *Frente* with extensive experience of social struggle. Another strategy is to continuously encourage the emergence of new leaders in the occupations and in MSTB's social base, and to provide them with an intense political formation. To do so, they participate in a number of formal and informal spaces of learning to politicize them: attending workshops, meetings with other organizations, etc. Leaders usually have more authority, so this strategy usually works to keep the discussions very politicized, and ensure radical perspectives in the occupations. However, this strategy can create problems and may be incoherent with MSTB principles, as it creates power imbalances between some selected members of the occupations and the rest of the social base.

5. Conclusions

Our study throws some new light on the sense and implications of Lefebvre's key ideas for understanding contemporary struggles of radical urban social movements in a reformist context. At the same time, the MSTB experience may give rise to new reflections on rethinking Lefebvre's ideas.

The case illustrates that a radical project of the right to the city cannot be conducted by the State. But it also highlights that Lefebvre is not specific on how the forces building the right to the city should deal with the State, while it "withers away". The MSTB experience suggests an inspiring answer: the forces building the right to city may demand that the State meet immediate needs, but should use these processes of struggle and the expectations created in order to the promote social organization and self-management.

The MSTB experience also illustrates the importance of another key idea from Lefebvre: transforming the city is possible by transforming the everyday life of inhabitants. Radical movements can build the right to the city by promoting small, progressive changes in people's life: MSTB squatters may not have control of some spatial decisions (such as the configuration of urban spaces), but can control a number of issues of their daily life (how they take care of their children, or what and where they eat). These have key implications for the progressive transformation of the space, for self-governing. The MSTB would thus demonstrate that revolution is slow and continuous. However, it must be said that the MSTB case does not reveal much about how people in the occupations may change their daily life regarding other groups or other spaces beyond MSTB occupations (for example, how they may appropriate central spaces in Salvador). That is a key question in Lefebvre (see Lefebvre, 1969, for example), which may be considered by the Movement.

Regarding issues on property and urban regulations, the case shows that even though the transformation of the city may take place autonomously from the State, institutions and regulations may impose critical limitations on transformative processes. Specifically, the case suggests that, for a radical project to advance more easily in a reformist context, regulations should at least allow common property of urban land and housing, as well as alternative configurations of social housing and of urban forms, more aligned with collective ways of living. Moreover, the fact that the private sector plays a key role in providing public and social services seems also to be a major limitation for radical projects to advance.

On the key actors in the transformation of urban life, the case shows the relevance of the concepts of *inhabitants*, and the centrality and connections of the very diverse groups who suffer the "misery of habitat". These notions help provide an understanding the diversity of collectives struggling in Salvador for the right to the city. Beyond this, the case expands and complements these ideas: for the Salvador of the 21st century, those who suffer the misery of habitat are not just a diversity of classes and fractions of classes, as Lefebvre poses, but also a diversity of groups in terms of gender, race, religion and origin.

Finally, we know that Lefebvre challenged the idea of the need of an avant-garde, and believed that self-organization will substitute the State in processes arising spontaneously, from below. The case shows that this affirmation may require some nuances. For example, the need for the leadership of more “awakened” inhabitants may be of key importance in some contexts, such as that of the MSTB, in order to avoid the depoliticization of social struggles, but without controlling processes or limiting genuine participation.

To sum up, the study reveals that the work of Lefebvre is still valid to understand and inspire contemporary radical processes of transformation in the city, that Lefebvre’s ideas can be discussed by drawing on the practice, and that further research in this direction is needed.

Footnotes

¹ From the theoretical perspective we draw on, a social movement (for example, the movement for the right to the city in Brazil) would be a group of actors that, drawing on a common identity, interact around a common conflictive issue (Diani, 1992). An SMO would be a single organization—which can be part of a social movement—that have informal and participative organizational structures and that, drawing on ideology and solidarity, engage their social base to operate in a particular territory (Diani, 1992). In this work, we consider SMOs as essentially different from other non-profit organizations, NGOs or interest groups.

² One workshop and four interviews were held with MSTB leaders; two interviews with NGO members; a workshop with the squatters of a site occupied by the MSTB; one workshop and six interviews with officials from Brazilian federal institutions, the State of Bahia and the City of Salvador; an interview with a conflict facilitator; and two interviews with workers from the private sector (construction sector). Fieldwork was carried out from March-April 2010, during the international workshop organized by Architecture Sans Frontières – United Kingdom in 2010

³ Statements from the various interviews and workshops conducted with members of the MSTB are identified here under the common term of “MSTB”.

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