

Weak Foundations:

Public Housing and the Pursuit of Citizenship in Brazil

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ABSTRACT:

The Minha Casa Minha Vida (MCMV) public housing program, established under President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2009, aims to address Brazil's housing deficit and stimulate the civil construction sector through the creation of large-scale, subsidized, public housing. Despite the apparent failures and flaws of the program as evidenced by poor construction quality, poor access to job opportunities, and the high indices of organized crime, and its similarities to past housing failures like the infamous Cidade de Deus, MCMV construction continues to churn out housing units with support from both the political elite and the working class. This article examines the rhetoric surrounding Minha Casa Minha Vida, looking at key social actors like the federal government and the Homeless Worker's Movement (MTST) and the apparent alliance between the two actors to back the continuation of MCMV, as both groups plan to use MCMV as a stepping stone towards starkly different realities of citizenship for Brazil's working class. Through a study of Janice Perlman's work regarding the myth of marginality, I am able to identify subtleties in government dialogue that demonstrate how government elites frame formalized homeownership (through MCMV) as a critical step in achieving legitimate citizenship for the poor. I claim that the emphasis of MCMV housing as "dignified" housing, automatically codes favelas¹ as undignified housing, and the "progress" Brazil makes through MCMV colors residence in favelas as contrary to progress. Thus I argue that the government regards the favelas as marginal to poor working class citizenship. Alternatively, I engage Holston's concept of insurgent citizenship to examine rhetoric from the MTST website and protests, revealing a call for a citizenship that works from the margins of society inward, rejecting the bureaucratic avenues of protest while etching a new citizenship out of the urban periphery. MCMV appears on the surface level to unite working class and government interests, as both groups continue to support production of MCMV housing. I argue that once we begin to question what function MCMV serves in each group's plan for ideal citizenship, MCMV reveals itself as a site of division: part of a longstanding antagonism between the working class and the governing elite.

¹ Favelas are informally constructed housing, historically built without legal rights to the land, on areas overlooked by the real-estate market, including steep mountain faces, swampy areas, and locations that are more exposed destruction by natural elements.

Arriving at a point of departure: A first acquaintance with Minha Casa Minha Vida

According to Google Maps, Santa Cruz da Serra sits a mere one hour away from Copacabana. This estimate, however, excludes 59% of *cariocas* who do not own a car,² as travel via public transportation spans upwards of three hours. As newcomer to Rio de Janeiro, my invitation to visit a friend's home in Santa Cruz da Serra resulted in a daunting three-leg relay via metro, train and public bus. My extracurricular adventure reflected the slow and costly commute of many working class *cariocas* who, priced out of residences closer to their workplaces, must question whether it costs more to work than to find local informal alternatives.³

I descended from the bus near the entrance of the *condomínio*, a gated housing complex. Rows of identical, single-story houses with red tile roofs branched to the left and right of a central asphalt road that split the condominium in two, like the spine between the facing pages of a book. Children dominated this central paved area, chasing each other, some tossing a tennis ball while still others teetered around on a full-sized bike, their energy contrasting with neighborhood dogs who sulked around the parked cars.

From the Caixa Econômica plaque on the outer wall, I quickly gleaned that the condominium was a part of Brazil's Minha Casa Minha Vida (MCMV) public housing program. Only months later--when a rival faction shot the *bandido*⁴ who commanded the condominium—did I become privy to the knowledge of the illegal administration of this housing establishment.

² *Carioca*, is a Portuguese term to refer to people from the state of Rio de Janeiro. G1. 2013. "Mais Da Metade Dos Domicílios Têm Carro Ou Moto, Diz Ipea." *Brasil*. Retrieved December 14, 2017 (<http://g1.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2013/10/mais-da-metade-das-casas-no-brasil-tem-carro-ou-moto-diz-ipea.html>).

³ The trip cost nearly R\$20 one-way, in comparison with the daily income at the minimum wage of R\$31.23. The minimum monthly wage beginning in 2017 is R\$937. Although employers are required to cover transportation costs in addition to the worker's salary, employees may not receive this compensation until the end of the month, making it impossible for them to pay for transportation to work.

REGULAMENTA A LEI nº 13.152, DE 29 DE JULHO DE 2015, QUE DISPÕE SOBRE O VALOR DO SALÁRIO MÍNIMO E A SUA POLÍTICA DE VALORIZAÇÃO DE LONGO PRAZO, **DECRETO Nº 8.948, DE 29 DE DEZEMBRO DE 2016** (2016)

⁴ "Bandido" translates to bandit or gangster.

As a latecomer to what was local knowledge, I began to wonder whether the local police and federal government were savvy to this occupation and, if so, whether they cared. A quick consultation via Google revealed that organized crime's take-over of MCMV housing projects was both widespread and widely reported in major publications like Globo, Estadão, and Istoé.⁵ In addition to crime, news reports covered unfinished or rapidly deteriorating construction: camera crews filmed residents in nearly new houses indicating gaping cracks in concrete foundations, unfinished electrical wiring, or even lack of running water.⁶

Government promotional videos for the expansion of MCMV in 2017 showed the government's blatant disregard for the pressing issues that affect resident safety. The videos promote MCMV as dignified housing, while panning over CGI images of more soulless housing structures constructed in an isolated area. In my search to identify popular objection to the MCMV program and to the government's impunity, I was astounded to find articles of fierce efforts by the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto* (MTST), the Homeless Workers Movement, urging the government to continue to build houses through MCMV.⁷ I pondered why such an influential social rights group would back a housing program proven to generate neglect and vulnerability. Upon a recommendation to read James Holston's theory of insurgent citizenship, I realized that in completely discounting the benefits of the program, I had

⁵ "Todos os condomínios do 'Minha casa, minha vida' no Rio são alvos do crime organizado," [All of the condominiums of 'My house, my life' in Rio are targets of organized crime], "Minha Casa Minha Vida tem denúncia de tráfico, milícia e invasão," [My House My Life has accusations of trafficking, militia and invasion] and "Minha casa minha vida sob o domínio do crime" [My house my life under the control of crime].

⁶Jornal da Gazeta. 2013. "Minha Casa, Minha Vida: prédios com problemas" YouTube Video File. Retrieved November 15, 2017. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DhmNR60IG10&feature=youtu.be>).

TV ITAIPUAÇU WEB. 2016. "Moradores reclamam da falta de água na minha casa minha vida de Inoã" YouTube Video File. Retrieved November 15, 2017. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCVGeDyIpyo>).

tvbrasil. 2016. "Moradores de apartamentos do programa Minha Casa Minha Vida reclamam dos locais." YouTube Video File. Retrieved November 15, 2017. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzfgrcPIddU&feature=youtu.be>).

TV Unesp. 2016. "Moradores reclamam de problemas em apartamentos do MCMV em Bauru" YouTube Video File. Retrieved November 15, 2017. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzbstcb8irU&feature=youtu.be>).

⁷ Rede TVT. 2017. "MTST afirma que vai manter ocupação por MCMV para famílias mais pobres." YouTube Video File. Retrieved November 10, 2017. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyACSEs7-4Y>).

overlooked how continuation of MCMV could serve as a tool for working class citizens. I engaged with additional scholarship on citizenship to critically interpret what the rhetoric of each group (the government and the MTST) reveals about the type of citizenship that each group envisions for the most vulnerable in society. I argue that the government discourse and the working class discourse reveal conflicting principles and aims of citizenship, that the support for MCMV from each group does not stem from cooperation but stems from the fact that both sides use MCMV program as a means to further their pursuit of opposing ideals of citizenship. Once we begin to question what function MCMV serves in each group's plan for ideal citizenship, MCMV reveals itself as a site of division, part of a longstanding antagonism between the working class and the governing elite.

Minha Casa, Minha Vida: Flawed by design

The nationwide Minha Casa Minha Vida (MCMV) public housing program, launched in 2009 under the government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva or “Lula,” introduced a renewed effort to address the housing deficit in Brazil. The program subsidizes the purchase of homes for families with monthly income of up to R\$9000. The participants and their respective housing options are divided into *Faixas*, or bands, with Faixa 1 forming the category of housing for families with the lowest income. Although 84 percent of the demand for housing is concentrated in the lowest income category,⁸ the government continues to unveil plans pledging the creation of disproportionately more housing for families with higher incomes.⁹

⁸ Consultoria de Orçamentos, Fiscalização e controle - SF, Consultoria de Orçamento e Fiscalização Financeira - CD. 2017. *Avaliação de Políticas Públicas: Programa Minha Casa Minha Vida*. Web. (http://www2.camara.leg.br/orcamento-da-uniao/estudos/2017/InformativoAvaliacaoPoliticPublicasPMCMV_WEB.pdf).

⁹ *The new plan released in 2017 pledged 170 thousand houses for Faixa 1, 60 thousand for Faixa 1.5, and 380 thousand units for Faixas 2 and 3*
Agência CAIXA de Notícias. 2017. “*Minha Casa Minha Vida 2017: Entenda o Que Muda No Programa.*” Brasil. Accessed December 13, 2017. (<http://www20.caixa.gov.br/Paginas/Noticias/Noticia/Default.aspx?newsID=4550>).

Created as an approach to stabilize the Brazilian economy during the 2008 global financial crisis, the project continues to privilege an economic agenda over a social justice agenda.¹⁰ In Brazil's current economic crisis, President Michel Temer¹¹ continues to promote the program based on the growth opportunity the program affords to the civil construction industry.¹² To achieve the large scale production of housing, Minha Casa Minha Vida, the government partners with private developers who manage the construction of these large scale housing complexes. While the program has produced many affordable housing units throughout Brazil, it has always deferred to neoliberal market interests, thereby sacrificing sustainable housing development in favor of market interests.¹³

News broadcasts and numerous studies expose rushed, low-quality construction work as residences only a few years old reveal large foundation cracks, falling plaster, infiltration of moisture, mold, lack of water and faulty electrical wiring.¹⁴ Many residents who want to file a complaint are directed along a bureaucratic goose chase to file a claim, others receive directions from MCMV to take the issue up with the specific housing developer, or with the local police. Another suggestion residents receive is simply to have patience for the problem to be resolved. Along with reporting structural problems, residents testify about the rampant crime and joblessness which is due in part to the poor execution and negligence of the housing projects.

With their appearances hidden and their voices digitally changed, yet still risking their personal

¹⁰ Rufino, Maria Beatriz Cruz., Lúcia Zanin Shimbo, and Caio Santo Amore. 2015. *Minha Casa...E a Cidade?* Rio de Janeiro: Letra Capital.

¹¹ In contrast to the populist Lula of the Worker's Party (PT), Temer is part of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), which despite its name is conservative and staunchly neoliberal. It should not come as a surprise therefore that Temer allegedly tried to exclude the cheapest category of housing, destined for the poorest income group, from future MCMV plans.

Boito Jr., Armando, and Tatiana Berringer. 2013. "Brasil: Classes Sociais, Neodesenvolvimentismo e Política Externa nos Governos Lula e Dilma." *Revista de Sociologia e Política*, 21(47):31-38.

¹² TVNBR. 2017. "Michel Temer Anuncia Mudanças No Programa Minha Casa Minha Vida." YouTube Video File. Retrieved November 15, 2017. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Obf9ZAunLbY>).

¹³ Klak, T.1993. "Contextualizing State Housing Programs in Latin America: Evidence from Leading Housing Agencies in Brazil, Ecuador, and Jamaica." *Environment and Planning A*, 25(5):653-76.

¹⁴Estadão. 2017. "Quase 50% das casas do Minha Casa Minha Vida têm falhas de construção." São Paulo: SP: Retrieved November 15, 2017. (<http://economia.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,quase-50-das-casas-do-minha-casa-minha-minha-vida-tem-falhas-de-construcao,70001654211>).

safety to discuss realities of MCMV housing, some residents feel driven to give interviews with the press. As of November 2017, authorities approved plans for tens of thousands more housing units with the same faulty program blueprint.¹⁵

While residents come forward with undeniable evidence of the social, structural and security issues inside the housing projects, the elites and even influential international humanitarian entities promote the upsides of MCMV. From an elite perspective, MCMV provides positive economic stimulus for the civil construction industry. Politicians congratulate themselves on the sizable quantity of low-income housing units already produced as an indicator of success. The UN Habitat report on MCMV in 2012¹⁶ corroborated the image of Brazil's success in public housing policy, and held Brazil up as a guide to other countries as a model for housing program design and execution. In Brazil's current swing towards conservatism and cuts to social spending, the MTST advocates for continued production through MCMV, regarding flawed production through MCMV as preferable to no production of low income housing at all.¹⁷

Navigating the Discourse of Citizenship: The Road Map

In order to provide a base for my examination of the citizenships pursued by the MTST and by the federal government, I will give a historical overview of housing and the housing shortage in Rio de Janeiro from the nineteenth to twenty first century.¹⁸ This historical context

¹⁵ EBC AgênciaBrasil. 2017. "Governo Autoriza Contratação de 54 Mil Unidades Do Minha Casa, Minha Vida." Brasília, Distrito Federal. Retrieved November 8, 2017. (<http://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2017-11/governo-autoriza-contratacao-de-54-mil-unidades-do-minha-casa-minha-vida>).

¹⁶ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). 2013. *Scaling-Up Affordable Housing Supply in Brazil: The 'My House My Life' Programme*. Retrieved November 8, 2017. (mirror.unhabitat.org/pmss/getElectronicVersion.aspx?nr=3453&alt=1).

¹⁷ Evidenced as a real threat in the transition from former, impeached president Dilma Rousseff to current president Michel Temer, wherein Temer froze MCMV construction for Faixa 1, the category of housing for the poorest families. Only after occupations and protests by the MTST and pressure on politicians did Temer announce the construction of more housing for Faixa 1.

¹⁸ My historical and present day analysis centers on Rio de Janeiro for several reasons. The geographical limitations create a finite area for real estate development and therefore the supply of the housing stock drastically fails to meet demand, and prices of housing rapidly continue to climb even in traditionally poor favelas. As the capital of the Brazilian empire, the city was the site

will provide a general orientation to the housing deficit in Brazil, as well as establish a framework to better understand the tensions between government and MTST ideals of citizenship. I will compare the *Cidade de Deus* housing program of the 1960s and the MCMV housing construction leading up to the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics, to highlight similar polemic usage of public housing in conjunction with favela removal. Both historical events help us to get a glimpse of the government's longstanding abuse of favelas and favela residents as a war on "marginality," a theory contested by scholar Janice Perlman in her quantitative 1969 research *The Myth of Marginality* and in her subsequent follow-up research in 2005.¹⁹ I will examine the messages conveyed in MCMV promotional videos and in statements made by President Michel Temer and other important government figures, in an attempt to show how current government rhetoric reveals the function of MCMV as citizenship-cultivating, in direct contrast to the marginality of favelas as direct threats to citizenship.

Following my analysis of the dominant government discourse of MCMV, I introduce Holston's theory on insurgent citizenship, a form of self-created citizenship created by disadvantaged populations living on the urban peripheries. I will use this notion of insurgent citizenship to analyze the beliefs of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto, as necessarily self-created by workers on the peripheries of society in defiance of existing power structures. I will reinterpret the MTST support for MCMV not as compliance with a flawed program, but as a form of practicing citizenship. In contrast to this forecast of a dystopian Brazil, I include a

of intense remapping and development in the nineteenth century in preparation to receive the royal court of Portugal. After the capital was moved in 1960 Rio maintained prestige as one of the most famous cities in Brazil, continuing to be an important economic and cultural center. Rio is perhaps the most iconic city in Brazil in the international imagination with regards to its stunning backdrop of beaches and the proximity of millionaire housing and mountainside favelas--made internationally famous in the film *Cidade de Deus* and *Tropa de Elite*. Rio has also been the center of international scrutiny for its implementation of "Police Pacification Units" to purge the favelas of organized crime, and its forced removals of entire favela neighborhoods to clear land for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics. In addition there is more comprehensive documentation of the development of housing and housing policy in Rio de Janeiro over the past few centuries.

¹⁹ Perlman, Janice E. 1976. *The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio de Janeiro*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

promising approach to public housing, through the Mega Cities project, masterminded by Janice Perlman as an initiative that emphasizes the role of the community members as the innovators and implementers of projects aimed to improve the lives of the community. Reminding us that those whose daily lives require innovation in order to claim the rights that they are not provided, possess the most expertise in creative solutions that are affordable and attainable.²⁰

A Sickly Stock: The Housing Shortages from the Nineteenth to Twenty-First Century, Rio de Janeiro

In the nineteenth century, Rio de Janeiro experienced a rapid increase in economic prosperity and recognition due to its privileged role as capital of the Empire of Brazil, and in receiving the royal court became the center of attention, culturally, politically, and economically. The opportunities in the city drew more people to Rio and in the 1850s, as savvy property owners perceived the ever growing demand for affordable housing within the city, they began to rent subdivided properties, creating *cortiços* (tenements) to house the working poor.²¹ Following abolition in 1888, agricultural productivity continued to slow, spurring on rural to urban migrations in the search for work in the city center. Despite the squalid, cramped conditions, these *cortiços* were the only housing option workers could afford if they wanted to live in the city.

When epidemics swept through the city, the poor working population in the crowded *cortiços* consistently took the hardest hit. In response, the government declared *cortiços* a public

²⁰ Holston expresses this idea describing “slums” as “places in which residents use their ingenuity to create daily a world of adaptations, connections, and strategies with which to inhabit modern metropolises on better terms than those imposed by the powerful local and international forces that would have them segregated and servile.” (Holston, 2009:249)
Holston, James. 2009. “Insurgent Citizenship in an Era of Global Urban Peripheries.” *City and Society*. 21(2): 245-267.

²¹ According to this resource, the *cortiços* were already developing into an issue in the second half of the 19th century: Mapas temáticos Santana e Bexiga. “Visita aos *cortiços* do Rio imperial: *cortiços*-Rio de Janeiro, 1878.” Retrieved December 11, 2017. (<https://www.ifch.unicamp.br/cecult/mapas/corticicos/introcort.html>).

health concern, calling for “*Cirurgias Urbanísticas*” (urban surgeries).²² The poor urban populations were the cancer that dominant white elite wished to expel from its body.²³ Elite Brazilians viewed the urban poor as “dangerous masses,” vectors of disease and criminality (viewed as a contagious quality in and of itself).

Displaced groups of workers split in several directions. Some moved to the periphery to live as squatters on vacant land, some moved further away to the industrial North Zone of Rio, while a number of workers elected to stay closer to the city, turning to the hillside favelas as their only option.

White elites of Rio de Janeiro quickly formed negative attitudes towards favelas and their residents. Lack of scientific knowledge on the spread of disease along with deeply racist and classist tradition in Brazilian society associated the precarious living situation²⁴ with the “diseased” bodies of the poor, black, Brazilians.²⁵ The favelas, in the eyes of the elite, were lawless zones, where indigence bred indigence. Dominant powers predicted the immorality of the favela would eat away at traditional family values, an official report by the Fundação Leão

²² Souza, Angela Gordilho. “Breve histórico das formas de moradia e intervenções públicas no Brasil do século XX: dos sobrados, cortiços e vilas aos loteamentos, conjuntos e favelas.” in *Limites do Habitar: Segregação e exclusão na configuração urbana contemporânea, de Salvador e perspectivas no final do século XX*. Salvador: Editora da Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2000.

²³ The following passage comes from Aluísio Azevedo’s iconic novel *O Cortiço*, as an artistic representation of the way that the hygienists must have regarded the cortiços of Rio de Janeiro as an area conducive to filth and sickness.

“E naquela terra encharcada e fumegante, naquela umidade quente e lodosa, começou a minhocar, a esfervilhar, a crescer, um mundo, uma coisa viva, uma geração, que parecia brotar espontânea, ali mesmo, daquele lameiro, e multiplicar-se como larvas no esterco.”

[“And in that sweltering, steaming land, in that hot, muddy dampness, began to strike, to squirm, to grow, a world, a living thing, a generation, which seemed to spring spontaneously, right there, from that loam, and multiply as larvae in manure.”] [Aluísio Azevedo, *O Cortiço* (1890) p.11]

At the same time that Azevedo selects grotesque descriptions, likening the incoming residents to the larvae that multiply in manure, he crafts a description that is both enthralling and repulsive. This attraction and disgust, and overall perception of squalor, relates to the way in which Brazil’s elite and thus Brazil’s government view the favelas as “syphilitic sores on the beautiful body of Rio de Janeiro.”

²⁴ In contrast to the brick and mortar architecture of the present day favela housing, the first favelas built in Rio de Janeiro were constructed from wood, and perched upon steep granite mountainsides, high above the city.

²⁵ Robb Larkins, Erika. 2015. *The Spectacular Favela*. Oakland: University of California Press.

XIII claims that teenage girls would engage in promiscuity undermining the institution of marriage.²⁶ The constant visual reminder of the proximity of the hillside communities irked elites who strived to cultivate a public image as modern world citizens. Elites felt that the favelas thwarted this modernity, assuming the favelas slowed development and caused a social degeneration.

In an effort to “clean up” the city of Rio de Janeiro, the government began forced removals of the residents of various favelas around the city center, relocating them to the new public housing developments. In one fell swoop the government could wipe out evidence of the pre-existing favelas and distance the poor Brazilians from the center of the city. One of the most iconic public housing developments persists to this day, its name is the *Cidade de Deus* (City of God).

An Unsettling Resemblance: Cidade de Deus vs. Minha Casa, Minha Vida

Aerial photos of the 1960s Cidade de Deus housing development show neat rows of identical, single-story, red-roofed houses—revealing an uncomfortably close resemblance between the infamous public housing failure of the 1960s and Minha Casa Minha Vida. The housing designs are “uncomfortably close,” because with full knowledge of the failure of Cidade de Deus, fifty years after the fact, MCMV continues to implement the same failed design, or perhaps an even more poorly planned design, as MCMV excludes the positive, community-oriented elements of the 1960s design.²⁷

²⁶ As seen in Perlman, Janice E. 1975. “Rio’s Favelas and the Myth of Marginality.” *Politics and Society*. 5(2): 131-60.

²⁷ Cidade de Deus plans included paved roads, infrastructure services for water, sewage, public lighting, community centers, cinema, market, day care, kindergarten, schools, plazas, sports and leisure. It is hard to discern whether any or all of these things were provided. Additionally, the planners for Cidade de Deus placed houses on a city block layout, leading to some variation of the orientation of houses. Brito, Rosalina. 2011. “Historia da Cidade de Deus e de seus moradores.” Cidade de Deus. Retrieved November 30, 2017. (<http://cidadededeus-rosalina.blogspot.com/2011/05/verdadeira-historia-da-cidade-de-deus.html>).

In the case of both Cidade de Deus and MCMV settlements produced in Rio de Janeiro to resettle residents of demolished favelas leading up to the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics,²⁸ relocation aggregated groups of people who had been forced from their homes into the new housing developments. Abuses by the government and law enforcement, along with relocation to an unfamiliar environment meant a lack of social cohesion and lack of trust. The industrialized production of rows of identical houses presented an impersonal, monotonous environment, further impeding community development. In both cases, the locations of the public housing projects placed people into a geographic and social exile in the underdeveloped west zone of Rio de Janeiro—cutting off access to basic services and jobs concentrated in the city center. In both programs we can quickly identify problematic design features, including but not limited to (1) aggregation of poor, disaffected populations, (2) industrialized and impersonal housing, (3) geographical isolation from the city center, where jobs and services are concentrated.

Prior to discovering the origin of Cidade de Deus as a public housing project, my conception of the neighborhood came from the 2002 film *Cidade de Deus*. The film depicts a cruel, volatile world, where violence is random and frequent due to constant warring between rival drug traffickers. The film's emphasis on the figure of Lil Ze, one of the main drug lords in

²⁸ Vila Autodromo was one of the more frequently featured areas of dispute over eviction and demolition of the favela in order to clear way for the olympic park because of the organized and fiercely vocal protest to the government-mandated evictions. The Guardian. 2015. "Forced evictions in Rio favela for 2016 Olympics trigger violent clashes." Rio de Janeiro. Retrieved November 12, 2017. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/03/forced-evictions-vila-autodromo-rio-olympics-protests>)

According to international law, forced evictions are only allowed as a measure of "last resort" and that those suffering the evictions must be guaranteed compensation or an alternative housing option. Galiza, Helena Rosa dos Santos., Lilian Fessler Vaz, and Maria Lais Pereira da Silva. 2017. "Mega-Events, Public Works and Forced Evictions in Rio de Janeiro City from the 19th to the 21st centuries." in *Mega-events and the City - Critical Perspectives*. Carlos Vainer, Anne Marie Broudehoux, Fernanda Sánchez, Fabrício Leal de Oliveira. Letra Capital Editora LTDA.

Cidade de Deus, represents the way elite Brazilians and law enforcement perceive drug traffickers the favelas as ruthless and sadistic villains who delight in violence and intimidation.²⁹

For many upper class Brazilians, the Cidade de Deus film is likely the closet they will get to “entering” a favela. Therefore the culturally influential film serves to continue stigma and prejudice against favelas and their residents.

The decline of the City of God, as demonstrated cinematically to the Brazilian and international public as a gradual development with the passing of time. One of the main architects of the Cidade de Deus, blames that crime infiltrated the housing development when government negligence allowed the favelas to form nearby.³⁰ This viewpoint resonates with historical views of crime and poverty as a social disease, concentrated in favelas and contagious to surrounding communities. Using urban planning principles featured in critiques of MCMV, I identify many of the same planning flaws in Cidade de Deus to demonstrate that the project was unsustainable from the beginning. Given the influential role Cidade de Deus plays in popular culture³¹ and popular understanding of favelas as a whole, the false narrative of the “favelization” of Cidade de Deus has wide repercussions. Showing that the project was doomed to fail due to flawed planning is vital to combat the idea that the “favelization” process was due to a contagious marginality contracted from nearby favelas.

²⁹ Lil Ze proves to be a figure who delights in violence and intimidation and who is devoid of sympathy, he abuses his power to violate others, for instance forcing a man called “Knockout Ned” to strip naked in front of the whole town, and later leading the rape of Ned’s girlfriend. In another scene, Lil Ze directs a young initiate to the gang to shoot an even younger child who was caught stealing from a store in Lil Ze’s territory. Lil Ze’s character also provides symbolic representation of the absence of morality inside of the favela.

³⁰ Brito, Rosalina. 2011

³¹ “A booming national and international success” and “the most important film of the first decade in of the twenty-first century,” according to Franthiesco Ballerini in his book *Cinéma Brasileira no Século 21*; cidade de deus received Academy Awards nominations for best direct, best adapted screenplay, best cinematography, and best film editing

O sonho da casa própria: legal homeownership as the end goal

The classification of someone as marginal, or even marginalized, holds a sinister connotation in Portuguese as “marginal” can describe location at the edge of something or it can be translated to criminal. This principle of marginality transfers the blame of conditions like poverty, crime and social exclusion onto the poor themselves—as such conditions are seen as the natural tendency of unambitious, anti-social and amoral populations.³² Although purportedly out of style in academia, after a series of scholars in the 1970s, debunked the core principals of marginality theory, the government discourse promoting Minha Casa Minha Vida reflects a resilient stigmatization of the favelas as marginal. “Addressing the housing deficit” really means limiting and shrinking the proportion of the population that live in favelas.

The Myth of Marginality, a qualitative study interviewing a total of 750 residents of Zona Sul, Zona Norte, and the Baixada Fluminense was conducted by Janice Perlman in 1969. In this work, Perlman disproves ideas of favela residents as “marginalized” from society. Perlman unpacks main tenements of the theory of marginality under categories of social, cultural, economic and political marginality and uses her ethnographic research to refute each of these claims. The most relevant themes to my research are the ideas that favela residents are not integrated into the city, that they are unemployed and unmotivated, that they are prone to crime.

She elaborates that the favelas are remarkably socially integrated and from networks of social engagement and solidarity. Favela residents, who regularly traverse the city to access education, medical services, supermarkets, jobs, etc. have a greater familiarity with the city than do residents of higher socioeconomic status who often try to minimize their contact with public spaces.³³ However, it is crucial to realize that the social stigma against residents of favelas have

³² Perlman 1975

³³ (Perlman, 1976)

negative effects because of the treatment they face from others. In contrast with favela residents who are socially viewed as “apart” from the urban society, the residents of Minha Casa Minha Vida are “integrated” into society by joining the ranks of legitimate homeowners.

Political scientists Hunter and Sugiyama emphasize the potential of government social assistance programs to foster a “robust and meaningful experience of citizenship,” through raising self-confidence and self-efficacy of historically excluded groups, leading to feelings of inclusion and participation in society.³⁴ Hunter and Sugiyama reveal that such outcomes depend strongly on program design. They emphasize the importance of the rhetoric of the program; it must act to counter a sense of paternalistic clientelism.

Government discourse surrounding Minha Casa Minha Vida reveals a highly paternalistic tone. The government’s PlanAlto YouTube channel features countless videos of opening ceremonies where the president awards houses to the new batch of “beneficiaries,” framing the government as the benefactor that allows the poor to achieve the “sonho da casa própria” (the dream of one own house). The testimonies featured in the MCMV promotional videos overemphasize the favor that the government is granting the poor of Brazil, showcasing reactions of beneficiaries who reflect on how MCMV will change their life.

Analysis of the speeches delivered by many government officials at the “Ceremony to announce new measures for the program MCMV 2017” also reveals the extremely paternalistic attitudes of the men who hold positions of power within the program. President of the Brazilian Chamber of Construction states that the construction sector sees itself as an intermediary “entre o sonho da Maria e o emprego do João” (between the dream of Maria and the employment of Joao). He continues to congratulate the government and the construction sector for making it

³⁴ Hunter and Sugiyama study Brazil’s Bolsa Família program, a conditional cash transfer program enacted by Lula in 2003, engaging focus groups to understand whether the program is in fact creating this social inclusion and self-efficacy. Their interviews with participants revealed that the program indeed promoted “heightened feelings of belonging and agency.”

feasible for Brazilians to own their own homes and thus fully realize their dreams. The stress placed on home owning therefore communicates that people who are not legally recognized homeowners, are incomplete, and have not achieved the most important things in life.

Ronaldo Nogueira, the Minister of Labor, emphasizes this two part necessity of employment and a home states that there are two “endereços dignos” (dignified addresses) for each citizen, one where they live and one where they work. We must question, therefore the use of the “endereço digno” or “dignified address.” Many of the people relocated to MCMV housing have been originally from favelas, which inherently codes favelas as “undignified” housing. Nogueira, emphasizes that the government hold responsibility for providing homes because the public funds “belong to the worker.” Nogueira’s emphasis on the rights of the “worker” does not necessarily include all parts of the working class. While the “worker” contributes to the economy through hard work as partaking in the generation of these public funds or deserving of houses, favela residents are historically seen as unemployed and unproductive.

Michel Temer, president of Brazil, emphasizes that MCMV is a project for the people, and for the future of the country. Temer emphasizes the function that MCMV serves in the process of *regularização fundiária urbana* (urban land regularization). Temer’s emphasis on the progress towards the future via the MCMV program and the importance of urban land regularization reveals that reduce irregular use of land by the favelas is contrary to progress towards the future.

The promotional video “Novas Medidas do MCMV,” opens with upbeat music as a digital simulation of a MCMV housing project flashes to the screen. The camera cruises slowly over the rows and rows of identical, compact, single-story houses, with red, tile roofs. The houses sit on red, leveled earth. In a backdrop of a dry desert-like area surrounded by a few brush

covered hills and a sprawling undeveloped horizon. This video, produced in 2017, reflects the exact planning design that urban planners have repeatedly analyzed as wholly unsustainable, placing the promotion of the new plans for 2017 communicates that the new projects will continue to be produced in the exact same style as previous years. Words flash across the screen, “é a casa própria mais próxima dos brasileiros.” (it’s the closest home to Brazilians), introducing a confusing claim, perhaps that the homes are the most attainable for low income Brazilians. This statement could also be interpreted to identify MCMV housing as “Brazilian” whereas other forms of illegal housing are “un-Brazilian.” The video features a young white woman, wearing a black blazer and white shirt, the screen reads Sonia Maria Silva, vendedora, giving us context about her profession. She states “é um desejo, um sonho pra realizar, né? Da casa própria.” (It’s a desire, a dream to achieve, right? That of one’s own house). This expression of the “sonho da casa própria” features in many materials surrounding Minha Casa Minha Vida, implying that homeownership is one of the greatest achievements that all Brazilians strive to achieve. This discourse is troubling because it ignores those who had their own houses and were forced to move into MCMV, or perhaps disregards houses in the favelas as legitimate houses.

Thus we can observe in government discourse and promotional materials that MCMV is key to providing “dignified” housing as opposed to “undignified” housing in the favelas. Discourse surrounding the “sonho da casa própria” implies that owning a home in a favela is not the end goal that one should aspire to, or even ignores favela housing as homes. Although MCMV is the right of the “worker,” favela residents are often viewed as people who do not contribute to society and therefore are even leaching from this social program. Finally Temer’s emphasis on the program as a step towards the future and a step towards urban regularization places irregular land occupation by favelas as contrary to Brazil’s future.

Working Class Movements, the MTST and concepts of Insurgent citizenship

Holston defines insurgent citizenship as a form of citizenship created in the periphery by working class people who create their own rights.³⁵ Holston frames this discourse within the context of the historical shift to democracies in highly urbanized countries ruled by capitalist ideals. Holston argues that this form of citizenship emerges in the day to day practices of these groups who are not guaranteed access to services or protections by the government, and thus invent methods to secure these rights for themselves. Through organizing and advocacy these groups on the periphery can pressure the dominant powers on their own grounds, refusing to navigate the channels in place to hope to secure their rights.

The Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto (MTST) manifests this insurgent citizenship. In fact their own official website describing “who we are” reflects much of Holston’s argument. They identify themselves as workers who are from the “bairros periféricos” (peripheral neighborhoods) who unite along the lines of common demands. The MTST differentiates itself from other urban movements who chose to try and effect change through partnership with the government. The MTST rejects this approach, applying pressure to the government through direct action and pressure like marches, occupying central spaces in the cities, and blocking highways. In this sense, the citizenship that the MTST promotes is one that is in constant conflict with the established structures of power and government. As opposed to an interest in being integrated into society, the MTST see themselves as separate and seek to build up a worker’s force strong enough to dismantle the political and social hierarchy.

³⁵ Holston, James. 2009. “Insurgent Citizenship in an Era of Global Urban Peripheries.” *City and Society*. 21(2): 245-267.

Scholars Boito (2013) and Garay (2017) emphasize the significant influence that the working class wields over politicians, originating from both social mobilization and their voting power in elections. The authors refer to this group as the “*massa marginal*” or “outsiders,” respectively, these categories indicate the unemployed, underemployed, those living from precarious work, and those living on their own account. According to Garay, the growing competitiveness of PT presidential candidate Lula between 1989 and 2002 pressured other politicians in office to plan social initiatives to appease the popular classes and diffuse Lula’s popularity. Boito goes so far as to attribute the social organizing and demands of this organized “marginal mass” with the eventual triumph in the form of the Minha Casa, Minha Vida program. The analysis of the bottom up influence by both scholars reinforces the importance of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto, who engage in *ação direta*, direct action, and also reveals that the very creation of Minha Casa, Minha Vida was the result of pressure from such organized movements. This context helps us to understand the twenty-two day MTST occupation of the Avenida Paulista in São Paulo, demanding that the government promise to fund houses in Faixa 1 of MCMV³⁶ as part of continuous popular pressure on the government to provide housing for the poor.

More important than the small gains in rights that the MTST secures through their protests, the MTST identifies the powerful message that their triumphs send to the rest of society that an united front of working class Brazilians can make the powerful cede to their demands. “Podemos fazer o governo recuar, a polícia recuar, o dono da construtora e da terra serem derrotados.” (“We can make the government back down, the police back down, the owner of the construction company and the land be defeated.”) Therefore, fully conscious of the flaws in the

³⁶ G1. 2017. “MTST encerra ato na Paulista após o governo liberar verba de moradia.” São Paulo. Retrieved December 10, 2017. (<https://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia apos-22-dias-de-acampamento-mtst-consegue-liberacao-de-recursos-para-moradias-de-familias-de-baixa-renda.ghtml>).

MCMV program, the “right to rights”³⁷ and the demonstration of power over the traditional authorities is a strong incentive to protest in favor of MCMV. Additionally, through the practice of insurgent citizenship, the working classes who are pushed to the urban peripheries have the means to organize an advocate for themselves when the MCMV properties do present issues. We see examples of these manifestations in news reports that show MCMV residents protesting the lack of water, many times by blocking roads or highways to demand a response. The citizenship of the MTST advocates for the continuation of MCMV as part of their movement to build up the power of the working class, in opposition of the government itself.

Where do we go from here?

Although the continuation of the public housing program Minha Casa, Minha Vida, at first seems to indicate the union of government and popular interests, upon closer examination of the discourse surrounding MCMV, we uncover evidence of a two opposing visions of citizenship. History informs us that state view on the popular classes has consistently been one of disdain, viewing the popular classes as diseased in a medical and moral sense, and opting to destroy working class neighborhoods and push these populations farther away from the city center. The dubious practice of favela demolition and forced eviction of residents into the urban periphery continues today, as we can see from examples of forced evictions leading up to the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics. The evictions, coupled with provision of poorly designed public housing have called international media attention, and scholars have identified glaring issues with the execution of the program in continuously building unsustainable housing projects that consistently show structural flaws and are taken over by organized crime.

³⁷ Holston, 2009.

When examining what sustains the continuation of such a flawed program, we run into two central actors who support MCMV: the state and the MTST. Considering state mistreatment and criminalization of the urban poor in the past, an analysis of the promotion of MCMV reveals the promotion of a citizenship and legitimacy for the urban poor through involvement with MCMV. The idealization of homeownership and the right to “dignified” housing pits the MCMV housing against residence in favelas that are subtly coded as “undignified.” The government communicates a prevailing perspective of the favelas as marginal, and contrary to the progress of Brazil. On the other hand when we examine the MTST principles, we identify their conception of citizenship as a empowerment of the working class that works to oppose the state. MTST advocacy for MCMV is related to a value of showing their power in forcing the state to back down and grant their demands.

As opposed to bringing the government and the working class together, MCMV proves to be a battlefield between the interests of the two. This is critical to understand as the international community identifies MCMV’s flaws but presents the housing model as an example for other countries to implement.³⁸ Therefore a program viewed as relative success is actually contributing to the antagonism and distancing of the working class and the government, used as a tool for the government to continue its campaign against the urban poor living in favelas, and serving as another reason for the working class to develop a workers front in opposition to the state.

What is the future of Brazil if social programs are just drivers for deeper division between the rich and the poor? What can be done to begin to improve the history of housing in Brazil from a social justice perspective? I encountered a promising approach started by none other than Janice Perlman called the Mega Cities project. Implemented in 1987, the project privileges the knowledge of local communities—using them as an educational resource in

³⁸ UN-Habitat, 2013.

addressing ways to improve housing, job creation and overall life opportunities and achievement. Perlman emphasizes the importance in looking for local knowledge in global south to find this ideas and strategies.³⁹ Along with this showing a symbolic respect for communities usually forced to accept European and north American norms and practices, the people in the global south are, by necessity, more resourceful when inventing solutions that are not high tech, and are not complicated. Organizing meetings between community leaders from twenty-three megacities across the globe allowed each city to present the approaches they were taking and gave them the opportunity to ask their own questions to the other cities involved in the program. The Brazilian government currently neglects the wealth of knowledge that its population possesses, particularly held by those who practice insurgent citizenship, who invent and implement feasible solutions in their everyday lives. In order to truly act in the best interest of the future of Brazil, the government could do well by valuing the urban poor and listening.

³⁹ UN-Habitat Worldwide. 2014. "Janice Perlman - Urban Informality." YouTube Video File. Retrieved December 11, 2017. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utvz7j1IUfk>).

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