



Permanent transitoriness and housing policies: inside São Paulo's low-income private rental market

Felipe Villela de Miranda

Observatório de Remoções, Universidade de São Paulo

Raquel Rolnik

Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo, Universidade de São Paulo. Coordinator Observatório de Remoções.

Renato Abramowicz Santos

Observatório de Remoções, Universidade de São Paulo

Regina Dulce Lins

Universidade Federal de Alagoas

Abstract

Felipe Villela de Miranda is M.Sc. in Urban and Regional Planning and Researcher at the Evictions Observatory. **Raquel Rolnik** is Professor of Planning and Architecture at the University of São Paulo (USP), former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, Coordinator of the Evictions Observatory. **Renato Abramowicz Santos** is M.Sc. in Sociology, Researcher at the Evictions Observatory. **Regina Dulce Lins** is Professor of Planning and Architecture at the Alagoas Federal University. **Contact:** flipvillela@gmail.com

In São Paulo, Brazil, housing policies and planning shape and boost highly precarious and exploitative private rental markets. This is the case of a housing public-private partnership (PPP) that is seizing land since 2017 in a very stigmatized central neighborhood known as *Cracolândia* or Crackland. This paper covers the first two years of the PPP's implementation. Based on the life trajectories of tenants and squatters of buildings targeted for demolition, looking at both their living conditions and their encounters with governments, we demonstrate how policies and planning not only fail to meet the housing needs of people repeatedly forced to move but also deepen the permanent transitoriness which marks their housing experiences and struggles of everyday life. The paper also provides historical context to the housing PPP by highlighting the sequence of demolitions induced by various urban interventions that targeted the area since the late 1990s. The findings presented here stem from action research embedded in an ongoing process of resistance to government-led displacement – a process in which the authors intervene as advocates for adequate housing, and document and analyze as researchers.

Keywords

eviction, permanent transitoriness, housing policies, low-income private rental markets, resistance

Introduction

‘If I move again in this area, I will have the same problem. So, you have to move, you have to move, and the problem follows you,’ said Pedro after learning that he was living in another intervention zone from where he would be displaced for the fourth time in just eight years. One month earlier, in May 2017, bulldozers sent by the city administration drove down Pedro’s street and, without any previous notice, demolished the ruins of what was once a low-budget hotel. The machines damaged a neighboring building, destroying ten rooms and injuring three people with the debris (G1, 2017). This was the beginning of a government-led displacement process that would affect almost 600 families. The first official meeting between residents and the City Secretariat of Housing happened three weeks after the first demolition, but on the fourth encounter –when Pedro voiced his concern– it was still unclear why the area would be demolished, when the collective eviction would be carried out, and if residents would ever be compensated.

Pedro lives in the central area of São Paulo, Brazil, where the squatting of abandoned buildings and the informal subletting of overcrowded and precarious dwellings are widespread practices that the state and the municipality have repressed in multiple experimental ways. A housing public-private partnership (PPP) is the most recent planning experiment to threaten such low-income spaces. Proposed by the state government and implemented by both São Paulo state and city administrations, this financialized model of urban redevelopment takes advantage of planning instruments originally based on the idea of right to the city –such as Zones of Special Social Interest (ZEIS in the Brazilian acronym)– to seize land and unleash demolitions.

This paper tracks the process of government-led displacement as faced by three unrelated neighbors to expose the gap between financialized housing policies and actual housing needs, and the role of governments in making eviction a recurrent reality.

Always on the verge of homelessness, our interlocutors have been forced to move several times throughout the city centre. Two of them were tenants in private rental buildings, subjected to extortionate prices and to landlords’ violence. They were increasingly burdened by the cost of rent, a pressing issue many tenants face as the rental cost burden is the fastest growing housing problem alongside the broader housing deficit in Brazil and the major need for housing assistance in the São Paulo Metropolitan Area (Fundação João Pinheiro, 2018). Despite living in buildings labelled informal and illegal by local authorities, the price they paid was directly related to housing policies, as we provide evidence of here. Our third interlocutor stayed in squats, another kind of tenure that also includes monthly contributions although not exactly rental agreements.

The uprooting process exposed here is one more case adding to those documented by Raquel Rolnik (2019) around the world of low-income areas managed by local governments as zones of indeterminacy vulnerable to radical interventions and legislation shifts. The ambiguity of such areas in terms of legality and legitimacy marks the geography of all sorts of housing tenures available to low-income and vulnerable groups, keeping residents and their territories in ‘permanent transitoriness’ (ibidem). By investigating the low-income

private rental market in the city's central area and relating it to official planning, we intend to explain how housing policies deepen situations of housing insecurity and make 'permanent transitoriness' both a way of governing and of living.

From above, the transitoriness of such territories is produced by the state through development projects and discourses of 'othering' that contest low-income territorialities, among other processes that maintain what could be called 'gray spaces' (Yiftachel, 2009). Spaces trapped between the dynamic boundaries of approval and elimination, safety and eviction. Territories where the life of unwanted or displaceable groups is framed by the management of time through recurrent threats of displacement, keeping people, spaces and activities in 'permanent temporariness –concurrently tolerated and condemned, perpetually waiting "to be corrected"' (ibidem, p. 89).

Tenants and landlords are protagonists of 'communitarian moments' and 'moments of brutal exploitation', borrowing the expressions used by Verónica Gago to refer to 'neoliberalism from below' (Gago, 2017, p. 17). They shape low-income rental markets and trace geographies of transitoriness while moving through temporary dwellings. The informal economies and low-income territories that stem from this movement cannot be understood as simply generated by vulnerable people nor by inadequate policies. Discontinuity and partial integration are central features in informal economies. Among people affected by the housing PPP in central São Paulo, for instance, the ones that accessed a relocation benefit such as rent vouchers used the money to rent rooms in precarious informal dwellings or to contribute to the maintenance of squats. For them, displacement and dispossession are experiences of everyday life even when enjoying some kind of governmental support.

To explore the transitoriness in government practices, 'from above', this paper narrates the recent history of planning and policies that induced demolitions in central São Paulo. Looking 'from below', through life trajectories and first-hand accounts of the 'everyday brutalities' (Brickell et al., 2017) of government-led displacement and low-income rental agreements, we can see how demolition threats and actual evictions affect people on the ground. People facing intersecting issues –insecurity of tenure, unstable income, racism, and gender inequalities– that contribute to the experience of 'ontological insecurity' or never feeling safe (Madden & Marcuse, 2016, p. 72).

We are in *Cracolândia* or 'Crackland,' a portion of São Paulo's downtown area where the gathering of homeless people and users of crack-cocaine and other drugs in public spaces is so large that cars cannot drive on some streets. In 2017, approximately 1,860 people floated around a single street corner, an increase of 160 per cent if compared to the previous year (State Secretariat of Social Development, 2017). This agglomeration is popularly known as *fluxo* –'flux' of 'flow' in English.

However, this is also the oldest planned neighborhood in the city. Developed in the late 1890s for affluent coffee planters, it is officially named *Campos Elíseos* after the Parisian *Champs-Élysées*. The historical mansions that dominate the landscape became rental buildings

known as *cortiços* or *pensões*.¹ These are temporary and improvised dwellings, commonly overcrowded, precarious, and expensive if compared to formal market rental prices.² Nevertheless, they are the options available for those who cannot meet the requirements of a formal rent agreement.

Abandoned buildings in the neighborhood were also converted into *ocupações* – ‘occupations’ or more commonly ‘squats’ – where residents paid a monthly ‘contribution’ that cost about a quarter of the cheapest rental price. Although there are numerous organized housing movements managing squats in the city center (Earle, 2012), here they are mostly self-organized.

Among crack users residing in temporary accommodations in the area, 68 per cent self-describe their skin color as black (Rui et al, 2016), whilst 37 per cent of the city’s population declared as such in the 2010 census. Regarding gender, 48 per cent of people affected by the housing PPP were female, including adults and children (City Secretariat of Housing, 2018). From our observation we can tell that there is a prevalence of single men living alone and women living with their children. Such impression is confirmed by the 33 structured interviews we did in November 2017 with heads of households in three *pensões* threatened with demolition. There were three times more households with single men living alone than single women, and one-third of households occupied by families were headed by single women. The majority of interviewees, 64 per cent, were migrants from the north and northeast of Brazil, the poorest regions in the country.

It is important to note that not all residents are substance users. Many have been there since before the *fluxo* arrived and even support governmental actions to push rough sleepers away. Although this divide is repeatedly stressed by some long-time residents, they too face the consequences of ‘territorial stigmatization’ (Wacquant, 2007). These overlapping layers of stigma in *Cracolândia* justify and are reified by exceptional governmental measures that generate a kind of experimentation field for policies (Das & Poole, 2009; Sanchez & Broudehox, 2013).

PPPs drive the most recent chapter in the history of attempts to radically transform the area. The demolitions tracked in this paper were justified by the construction of housing projects and a new public hospital, all built through PPP. The housing PPP, however, is the major intervention. It stems from an institutional innovation that brought significant changes to São Paulo’s housing policy. In 2011, the state government launched a new agency dedicated exclusively to produce housing through partnerships with private investors, sidelining the public company that used to design, build, and manage all the state’s housing provision.

¹ Residents prefer the term ‘*pensões*’ to avoid the stigma implied in the century-old word ‘*cortiço*’, and we follow their preference. Both terms in Portuguese refer to what in English could be a ‘tenement.’

² The average rent in *Cracolândia* was around 22 US dollars per square meter per month in 2017, as we found out from interviews with residents. This was more than the average price in *Pinheiros*, an upper-class neighborhood in southwest São Paulo where the mean price was 17 US dollars per square meter in the same period, according to real estate market index FipeZap.

The housing PPP created a new waiting list for housing subsidies in the city and the state of São Paulo, excluding people already in the queue for housing assistance – some since the 1980s. Besides that, it added eligibility criteria such as proof of formalized work in the downtown area and a monthly income of at least one minimum wage³ –these were the requirements of the bank in charge of financing the mortgages. Those requirements exclude most of the population displaced by the housing PPP, showing that the aim is to attract higher income residents. On top of this, those applicants who qualified would also need to be lucky because they had to win a lottery with 190,000 applicants (State Government, 2018).

This PPP targets Zones of Special Social Interest (ZEIS), a zoning instrument generated by participatory urban planning experiences in the 1980s (Rolnik & Santoro, 2013) that should foster the upgrading of livelihoods, promote affordable housing developments, and assure the residents' right to stay put even when real estate developers dispute the land. Any project proposal in a ZEIS has to be preceded by discussion and approval by a local ZEIS council. The latter must be organized by the City Secretariat of Housing and have an equal number of representatives from the government and from the civil society. In central neighborhoods, these zones should also advance equitable access to urban infrastructure, public services, and work opportunities. Nevertheless, from a zoning instrument originally inspired by ideas around the right to the city, ZEIS has been recently used to capture collective assets and dispossess low-income families.

As land in the downtown area became more valuable following Brazil's real estate boom between 2006 and 2014 (Rolnik, 2019), the pressure to erase stigmatized territories that supposedly disturbed the real estate market in its vicinity also grew. Given that ZEIS designates areas where low-income dwellers live in precarious conditions, the real estate value is low. The PPP's developments take advantage of that and of the exemption of payment for additional building rights, and the exceptional high density allowed for apartment blocks.⁴ Instead of providing security for very low-income tenants and squatters, in the financialized era of capitalism ZEIS became reserves of land to be mobilized as new frontiers of the real estate financial complex (Fernandez & Aalbers, 2016). However, as we will see in this paper, ZEIS are still a powerful instrument to support the resistance of affected residents.

Methods of resistance and research

As a police operation and a demolition surprised and injured residents in May 2017, the Evictions Observatory⁵ turned its attention to *Cracolândia*. The authors of this paper are part of the Observatory, thus engaged in documenting processes of forced displacement in São Paulo's Metropolitan Area, reporting human rights violations, and helping organize

³ The minimum wage in Brazil was 296 US dollars or 937 Reais per month in 2017.

⁴ All over the city, the floor area ratio is 1. It is possible to build more by paying for additional building rights up to the floor ratio limit of the zone. In ZEIS there is no charge to build up to the higher ratio.

⁵ The Evictions Observatory was created in São Paulo in 2012 as a partnership between LabCidade in the University of São Paulo and LabJuta in the ABC Federal University. Three other university-based groups are presently connected to the project: Praxis/UFMG, Lehab/UFCE and Instituto das Cidades/UNIFESP.

resistance. Our action research group is part of a wider anti-eviction network that includes housing movements, neighborhood associations, and human rights activists.

Our first action in *Cracolândia* was to study its real estate dynamics and urban planning history and publicize the findings. It became clear that the area was attracting real estate developers that for decades preferred to invest elsewhere (Mendonça et al, 2017).

Besides the Observatory, other groups were galvanized to action after the police intervention. Advocates for harm reduction in substance use, art collectives, social workers, public defendants, urban planners, architects, members of housing movements, activists, and residents formed an autonomous space to foster the anti-eviction resistance: the Open Forum *Mundaréu da Luz*. This group, the Observatory included, instigated the Prosecutor's Office to demand a ZEIS council in the area under siege, a mandatory participation mechanism that should be arranged by the City Secretariat of Housing as most of the disputed area was in ZEIS. At the same time, the Public Defendants Office issued an injunction to guarantee that the government would offer housing and social assistance before carrying out evictions. The early litigation paused the demolitions, buying time for the residents to organize.

The initiative to push for the creation of a ZEIS council drew from a previous experience that managed to halt the redevelopment of the neighborhood where the first crack-cocaine *fluxo* appeared, very close to the area targeted by the housing PPP. The 'New Luz Project' proposed by the city administration would concede a large area next to the Luz Railway Station to a private company, giving it the right to expropriate land and build corporate towers. However, the mobilization of residents, civil society organizations, and retail owners acting both inside and outside the first ZEIS council in the central area, created in 2011, stopped the project (Gatti, 2015) –although not in time to prevent the demolitions that marked the publicization of the New Luz Project.

While the implementation of the housing PPP was still uncertain, we visited the area regularly to follow meetings between public servants and residents in preparation for the election of the ZEIS council and to inspect voter registration. We also campaigned door-to-door with the Open Forum to raise awareness that ZEIS can be a resource to enforce rights and avoid displacement.

This was the context in which we started to build relationships with the residents. When the election for the ZEIS council came, in late June, we decided to run for one of the two seats for universities and institutions of architecture and planning. The Evictions Observatory was elected, thus becoming an official councilor of the zone along with two residents, one real estate owner, a local business association, two housing movements, and three non-profits which were also part of the Open Forum.⁶

After the creation of the ZEIS council, the Open Forum launched an alternative process of planning that included several events on the streets. Collective mapping, poetry slams,

⁶ Besides the ten resident and civil society representatives, the state and city administrations name ten councilors from various government departments to form part of the ZEIS council.

happenings and theatrical performances, parties, cultural heritage and oral history workshops, mutual aid group talks, open classes with experts in diverse topics, and demonstrations. Figures 1-3 illustrate some of such activities.

Figure 1

Residents demonstrate in front of a court to put pressure on the judge analyzing their eviction, downtown São Paulo, 26 March 2018. Source: Open Forum *Mundaréu da Luz*



Figure 2

Collective mapping workshop, Helvetia Street, *Campos Elíseos*, Open Forum *Mundaréu da Luz*, 28 October 2017. Source: Fernando Tulio Franco



Figure 3

Performance washing gentrification away, Gleite Street, *Campos Elíseos*, Open Forum *Mundaréu da Luz*, 03 April 2018. Source: Fernando Banzi



The alternative plan⁷ was launched in April 2018, although it is still a work in progress. It includes propositions such as subsidized hotels, subsidized rental flats, housing units with additional therapeutic services, facilities for supervised substance use, subsidized retail spaces for local businesses, shared workshops, a communal kitchen, and subsidized restaurants, among other ideas.

This alternative plan fueled a campaign that effectively influenced public policies and official planning. As a result of this mobilization, more residents accessed housing assistance and the government acknowledged the need for public housing among the new PPP units – making an exception in the all-private-property housing PPP⁸ (City Secretariat of Housing, 2018). Nevertheless, it is not clear yet if social housing will indeed be included in the PPP. It depends on how rental housing could fit into the financially performative logic of PPPs by providing high interest to investment capital (Chiapello, 2015).

Written in the midst of an ongoing process filled with tensions, conflicts, and uncertainties, this paper does not refrain from nor try to solve the methodological, epistemological, and political challenges of action research. We not only track displacement processes as researchers but also actively engage in the anti-eviction resistance, intervening while documenting. Even our position in the field is not fixed as we embody diverse roles depending on the situation. Shifting from scholars to activists, experts, reporters, we produced videos, reports, maps, plans, and leaflets. We engaged with the judiciary, lawmakers, journalists in major news outlets, and other scholars.

The findings presented here come from a diverse database which is still growing through a range of research methods. Much of the residents' life stories, for instance, come from informal chats and ethnographic fieldnotes –their names are fictional to protect them from retaliation. We also used questionnaires to guide structured interviews. Having a seat at the ZEIS council provided us access to sensitive documents. Through the Open Forum *Mundaréu da Luz* we engaged in a multidisciplinary discussion that transgressed the housing struggles in *Cracolândia*, connecting us with debates on mental health, work precarity, political art, and grassroots organizing.

The experience of collectively elaborating and experimenting alternative ways of policymaking and planning eventually expanded the focus of our research from processes of displacement to insurgent planning (Miraftab, 2009). This paper is one more way to share methods that could be used to bridge the gap between official planning and actual needs of people in vulnerable situations elsewhere.

⁷ Campos Elíseos Vivo urban and social project. Available in English at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RbScRLaUGadLoGuYOC1xpK-PvkR4yvtw/view>

⁸ In Brazil, the vast majority of housing policies and programs promote homeownership through decades-long loans, and excludes people earning less than one minimum wage per month. The housing PPP is no exception. Social housing is still very limited in the country and in São Paulo.

Planning displacement

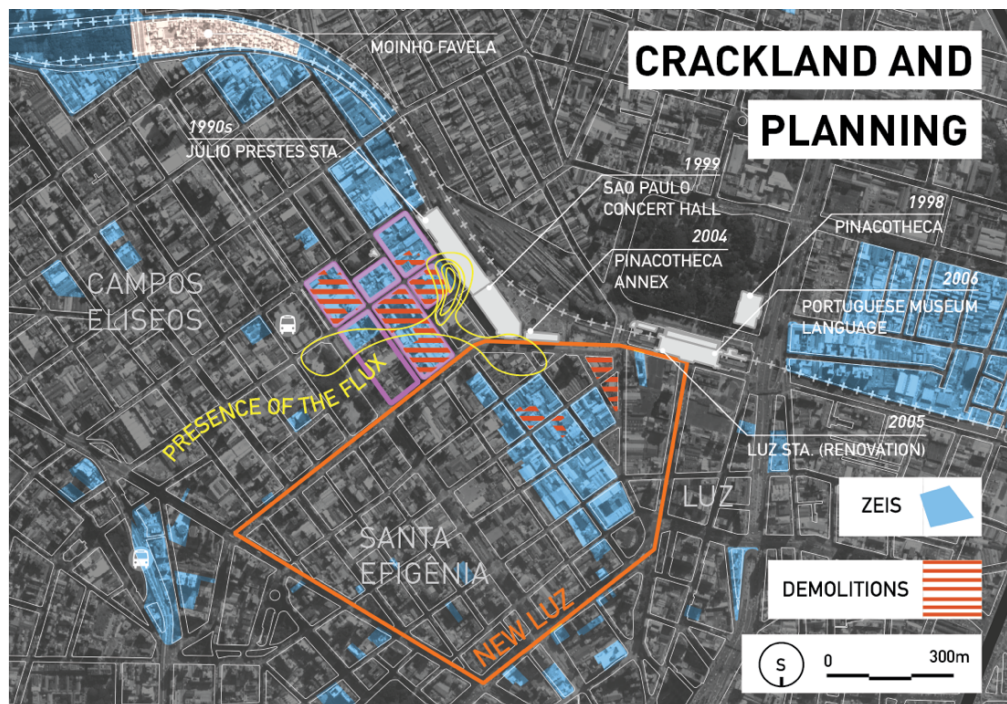
Since the term ‘*Cracolândia*’ reached the headlines in the mid-1990s, homeless substance users and residents are continuously forced to move, blurring the area’s boundaries. Constantly repressed, the ‘psychotropic territory’ (Fernandes & Pinto, 2004) of crack-cocaine, liquor, and other drugs is best understood through the ‘itinerant territoriality’ (Frugoli Jr. & Spaggiari 2010) of its regular goers. While the first *fluxo* appeared around the Luz Railway Station, since the mid-2000s it is located in *Campos Elíseos*. This is where we met Pedro, Rosana, and Margarida, unrelated neighbors but with similar trajectories of transitoriness.

From the early 1990s to 2006, the state government attempted to bring back higher-income residents and investors that had fled downtown during the late 20th century. Despite the state’s effort, which converted cultural heritage buildings into three museums and one concert hall, real estate developers hesitated to invest in an area that grew more stigmatized.

The city administration joined the efforts in 2005, when the mayor decreed the expropriation of 105,000 square meters around the Luz Station.⁹ The area under eminent domain more than doubled two years later.¹⁰ This was the beginning of the ‘*Nova Luz*’ or ‘New Luz’ Project. Even though it was never fully implemented, the policymaking phase prompted demolitions –as seen in Figure 4. Demolitions and police operations pushed the *fluxo* towards *Campos Elíseos*.

Figure 4

Cracolândia and Planning. Source: Martim Ferraz, LabCidade (USP)



⁹ Decree number 46.291/2005.

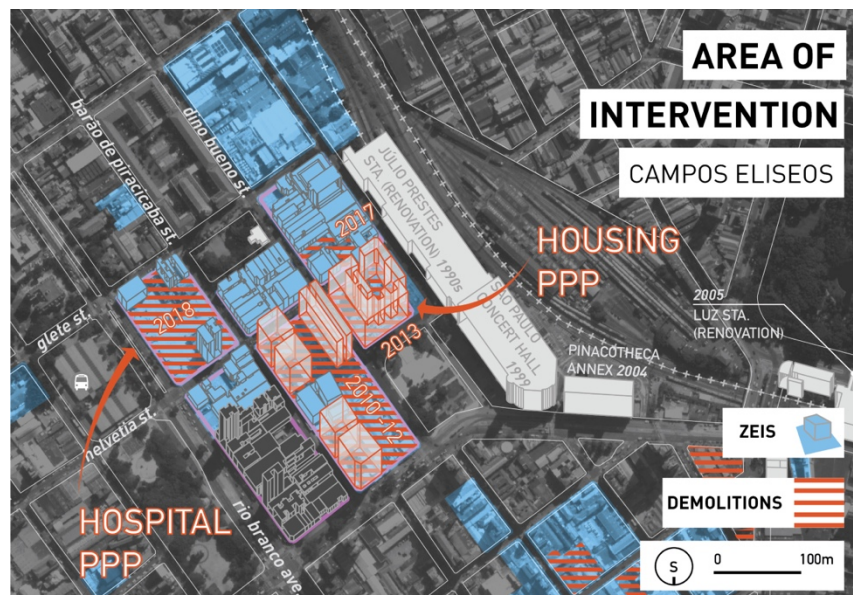
¹⁰ Decree number 48.349/2007.

In 2010, our interlocutor Pedro was one of the first affected by the forced purchase and demolition of real estate in *Campos Elíseos*. By then, the state Secretariat of Culture was seeking land for the Luz Cultural Complex: a theater and an opera house designed by star architects Herzog & de Meuron that was never built.¹¹ He moved to a rented room across the street in a building right beside a low-cost shopping mall that was once the city's major bus terminal. When those buildings were demolished also because of the Luz Cultural Complex, Pedro crossed the street again to live in another *pensão*. In 2013, the bulldozers reached him again, pushing him to move for the third time.

The land expropriated for the Cultural Complex remained vacant for almost six years until the state government decided to build almost one thousand housing units there. In 2017, as soon as the construction of the housing PPP started, the new mayor signed a 'public utility decree'¹² to expand the project by expropriating surrounding land, as seen in Figure 5. That is how Pedro found himself on a displacement list for the fourth time in the same neighborhood.

Figure 5

Housing PPP area of intervention. Source: Martim Ferraz, LabCidade (USP)



On the one hand, the shift from cultural to housing developments indicates the irresolution or indefiniteness of policies that put demolition first. On the other hand, it marks the end of attempts to 'requalify degraded and devalued spaces' (State Secretariat of Housing 2012, p. 2) through public museums and art venues.

Resistance to previous projects in the area have leveraged enough power to stop interventions by organizing around housing claims. This led the state government and the city administration to change their strategy. The PPP is the first example of 'affordable housing opportunities' being used to drive urban regeneration (State Secretariat of Housing,

¹¹ Renderings of the Luz Cultural Complex available at: <https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/index/projects/complete-works/326-350/343-sao-paulo-cultural-complex-luz/image.html> (Accessed 02 November 2018).

¹² Decree number 57.697/2017.

2012, p. 2) in the central area. However, it does not tackle the housing needs of people displaced by the construction work.

The housing PPP makes low-income housing developments profitable to private contractors by mobilizing subsidies such as the use of public land and selling flats to higher-income buyers. Its initial plan was to build more than 20,000 units in ZEIS across 12 central districts.

After several redraws, the state government eventually reached a deal with the only company that bid for the PPP. In 2014, Canopus Unlimited signed a contract to build more than three thousand units on public land. Most of it would be sold below-market-rate and almost 40 per cent of units could be sold at market-rate. For two decades the company may profit from the lease of commercial units located at the street level of the new buildings and by receiving public funds to manage the condominiums. In late 2018, the company had finished five buildings and 347 flats were in use in *Campos Elíseos*.

Around the new buildings, approximately 370 families awaited eviction. The city administration had notified them and 42 retail tenants that their lots would be ‘cleaned up’ to be made ‘ready for construction work.’ An estimated 681 housing units could be built there (City Secretariat of Housing, 2018).

In the meantime, 200 more families were displaced from the area by another PPP. This time the land was requested by the State Secretariat of Health allegedly to build a new public hospital.

Regardless of the residents’ rights to stay in the ZEIS and to take part in the elaboration of any urban intervention addressing the area, they were evicted only two days after voting to create a ZEIS council for the hospital’s damaged area. Although most of the neighborhood affected by the housing and the hospital PPPs is in the same ZEIS, thus should be part of a single zone council, the city administration insisted there should be one council for each intervention.

The evictions took place between April and June 2018 and the dwellings were immediately demolished. The Open Forum *Mundaréu da Luz* tracked where half of the displaced went. Sixty per cent went to squats and *pensões* in central districts, 14 per cent to *favelas* in central, north and south São Paulo, and four per cent moved to the area threatened by the housing PPP (Labcidade, 2018) –see Figures 6 and 7.

Although this eviction process happened under intense litigation due to the illegal absence of public participation, the only immediate compensation offered by the state were rent vouchers. Popularly known as ‘*cheque despejo*’ or ‘eviction voucher,’ this direct cash transfer of 105 US dollars is only offered by the state or the city administration to those displaced by governmental projects, in alleged risk of environmental hazards or areas affected by environmental disasters. According to the municipality, in May 2018 almost 29,000 people received vouchers, some since 2008. Those vouchers became a key index of prices in São Paulo’s informal rental markets –exactly the cheapest rent for the smallest private room in *Cracolândia* in late 2017.

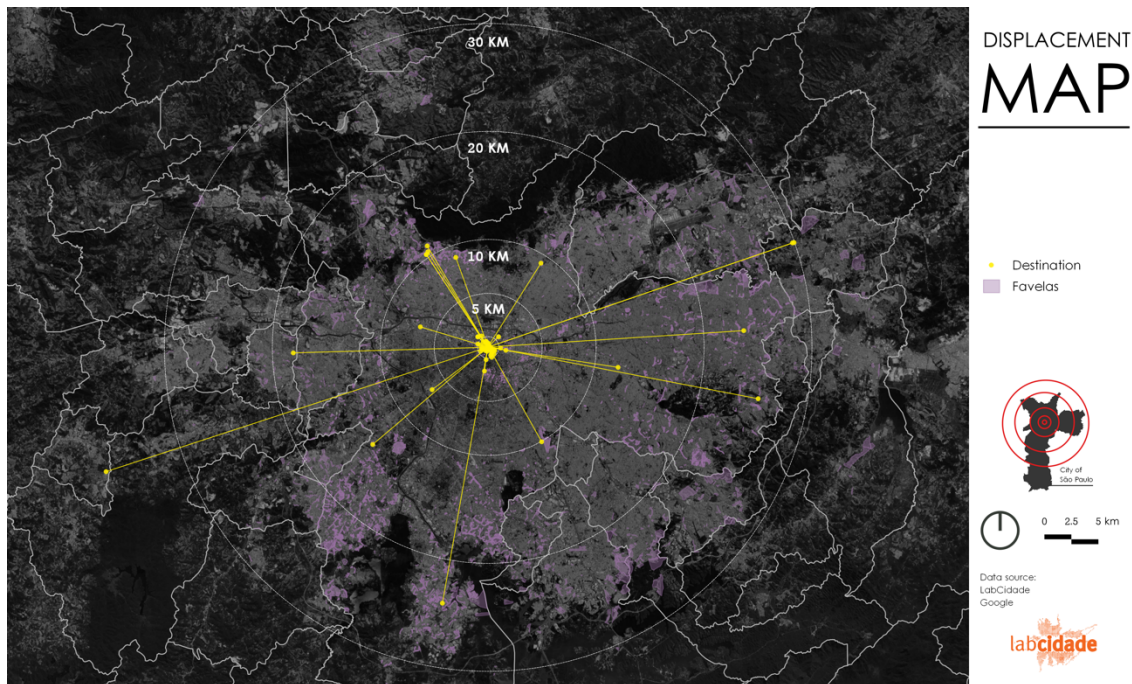
Figure 6

Displacement map showing where people evicted moved to on their own in one-kilometer range. **Source: Aluizio Marino, LabCidade (USP)**



Figure 7

Displacement map showing where people evicted moved to on their own in a 30 kilometers range. **Source: Aluizio Marino, LabCidade (USP)**



Rent and Livelihoods

Rosana, one of the 33 heads of household we interviewed in November 2017 in three *pensões*, paid approximately 200 US dollars per month for a single room flat with an improvised kitchen and an attached bathroom. She lived with three dogs and seven cats. Her husband had been imprisoned a few years earlier.

Rosana had several jobs to secure her rent. She worked as cleaner in middle class homes and as janitor in *pensões*. She also received a state pension.

She moved there because it was close to a HIV treatment center. Like her, 15 per cent of respondents mentioned easy access to health services among the reasons that attracted them to the neighborhood. Nevertheless, the most cited reasons were proximity to family and friends (27 per cent), low-cost housing (24 per cent), and work opportunities (18 per cent). The main reasons for the last change of address were the need to live closer to job opportunities (40 per cent), eviction (18 per cent), cost burden (12 per cent), and family conflicts (nine per cent), although 21 per cent of respondents chose not to answer this question. About 73 per cent said they had been living there for more than two years and nine per cent had been there for more than a decade.

Rosana lived in the same building where we met for three years until the manager violently evicted her. They had been arguing since the city administration registered voters to elect the ZEIS council. The manager accused her of inciting the tenants to stop paying rent. She reported being assaulted by him in the building on New Year's Eve 2018.

She avoided moving as much as she could to keep her place on the waiting list for housing assistance. But in February 2018 all the rooms on the ground floor were destroyed, including Rosana's, to convert the *pensão* into a snooker bar while the rooms on the upper floor would be rented per hour. She heard about the building's renovation one day and moved in the next morning to another rental building on the same street. The new room was better, with a kitchen and bathroom, even though it had no windows and the rent was more expensive.

Rosana was among the 48 per cent of interviewees that spent more than two-thirds of their income on rent. The monthly income of 66 per cent of households in our inquiry was between 295 and 890 US dollars,¹³ 33 per cent earned less than 290 US dollars, and only one family earned more than 890 US dollars. Almost 60 per cent were unemployed and 30 per cent received some kind of state pension like the anti-poverty cash transfer *Bolsa Família*. The most common employment was cleaning and street vending, and approximately 75 per cent did not have a formalized work contract.

The neighborhood changed significantly right after the eviction threat spread through the area, despite the fact that a year and a half later most of the buildings were still standing. 'Should we save money for when the police kick us out or to buy an apartment?' Rosana asked at one ZEIS council meeting. 'How can we live under this uncertainty?' she insisted.

¹³ One to three minimum wages is Brazil's lowest range of income eligible for housing subsidies.

As for the residents in the way of the hospital PPP, eviction came very fast. Margarida and her five children were some of the displaced. They lived in an improvised plywood room in a squatted warehouse along with approximately 70 families. Some installed gas cylinders in their rooms to be able to cook although running water was only available in the three bathrooms shared by all the residents. The wood structure of the ceiling bore marks from the last fire.

The squat had been resisting for two years when the state Secretariat of Health acquired the building to install hospital facilities in the future. Margarida paid her 26 US dollars monthly contribution with the rent voucher. She accessed the voucher in 2011 when a fire destroyed her shack and hundreds of others in the *Favela do Moinho*. After being evicted from *Cracolândia*, in April 2018, she moved to another squat in the city center where she stayed less than three weeks.

On the dawn of Labour Day 2018, she woke up to the sound of blasts. The 26-story building was on fire. Margarida could only get the backpack where she kept important documents (always packed in case she needed to run), gather her children, and run down the stairs. Her mother, sister, and nephews lived on lower floors and also survived. The building burned to the ground, displacing almost 430 people, causing seven confirmed casualties, and leaving at least two people missing –although the exact number of squatters was uncertain (G1, 2019). After the fire, Margarida and her family spent more than one month sleeping rough on the street like ‘urban refugees’ along with dozens of other survivors (Telles, 2018).

Planned transitoriness

In downtown São Paulo, contradictory as it may seem, housing policies are deepening housing insecurity by, on the one hand, displacing tenants and squatters to make way for an exclusionary housing PPP and, on the other, by providing evictees with rent vouchers that feed the market for squats and *pensões*.

As narrated in this paper, market-oriented policies interact with low-income territories, informal economies, and social practices of the urban poor reproducing permanent transitoriness ‘from above’ and ‘from below.’ The former through dispossession-based policies designed to provide the expected financial returns of the capital invested in urban regeneration, and the later in highly exploitative private rental markets.

A state of permanent transitoriness is at the same time the condition and the outcome of extractive operations. The way low-income spaces are organized to provide the materiality of everyday life to its inhabitants is constantly maintained under a status of ambiguity –vis-à-vis planning and other administrative norms– between the legal/illegal, legitimate/illegitimate, depending on the specific coalition of interests who support eviction or tolerance over time. The decision to displace reinforces the creation or densification of zones of indeterminacy. The result is a social group that keeps moving through temporary dwellings, navigating housing policies and negotiating inclusion.

Planning instruments are important gears in this machinery and, at the same time, resources for resistance. In the case of São Paulo, urban struggles in the 1990s were able to redefine zoning in order to improve low-income territories in the city center while also protecting residents from displacement pressures. The resistance against large-scale urban interventions was organized around Zones of Special Social Interest (ZEIS) and its councils. ZEIS were effectively used to resist displacement, demand inclusion, and to open spaces for participation. As housing issues were on the forefront of such mobilizations, the state and the city governments changed their discourse in the 2010s to allegedly espouse that of the housing movements and promote housing instead of spectacular art venues. When the first initiative in this sense –the housing PPP– was launched, it became clear that this was another round in the history of attempts to capture low-income territories and assets. As we have addressed in this paper, ZEIS also work as reserves of land to be mobilized as new frontiers of the financialized capital, providing means for processes of land grabbing.

The housing PPP is not only inaccessible for much of the population affected by the construction work. It is also a housing policy that, combined with planning instruments and rent vouchers, helped reproduce and amplify the instability of informal housing arrangements. Even before actual evictions were carried out the threat posed by the housing PPP unleashed violent events in the neighborhood, as highlighted by our interlocutors. Their narratives connect inadequate housing policies, residential struggles and personal crisis (Madden & Marcuse, 2016).

The contradictions presented in this paper show how low-income private rental markets interact with housing policies and planning. However, those relationships cannot be understood through binary schemes that disregard the complexity of people’s strategies to manage time and space in a state of dispossession and displacement. Informal economies produce heterogeneous territories by both challenging and incorporating the ‘exploitation-dispossession’ (Gago, 2017, p. 5) logics of financialized capitalism. São Paulo’s low-income private rental markets are rooted in ambiguity, born and blooming in permanent transitoriness.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the referees of this journal for the insightful comments, and the residents of central São Paulo for sharing their life stories with us. We are also glad to be part of the Open Forum *Mundaréu da Luz* and grateful for its members collaborative work of gathering much of the data that informs this paper.

Funding details

This work was supported by the Ford Foundation under grant title: ‘Land squats, forced removals, evictions, and resistance: territorial interventions in the production of metropolises.’ The Open Society Foundations provided additional funding under grant title: ‘Strengthening democracy through the network of local actors in the Luz and Campos

Elíseos area.' Additional funding for students' scholarships provided by CAPES, CNPQ and FAPESP.

References

- Brickell, K., Fernández Arrigotia, M., & Vasudevan, A. (2017) Geographies of Forced Eviction: Dispossession, Violence, Resistance, in: K. Brickell, M. Arrigotia Fernández, & A. Vasudevan (Eds) *Geographies of Forced Eviction: Dispossession, Violence, Resistance*, pp. 1-23 (London: Palgrave Macmillan).
- City Secretariat of Housing. (2018) *Diretrizes de intervenção: Quadras 37 e 38 – Campos Elíseos* Report, São Paulo: City Administration.
- Chiapello, E. (2015) Financialization of Valuation. *Hum Studies*, 38, pp. 13-35.
- Das, V., & Poole, D. (2009) State and Its Margins: Comparative Ethnographies, in: V. Das, & D. Poole (Eds) *Anthropology in the margins of the state*, pp. 3-33 (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press).
- Earle, L. (2012) From Insurgent to Transgressive Citizenship: Housing, Social Movements and the Politics of Rights in São Paulo, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 44, pp. 97-126.
- Fernandes, L., & Pinto, M. (2004) El espacio urbano como dispositivo de control social: territorios psicotrópicos y políticas de la ciudad, *Monografías Humanitas*, 5, pp.147-162.
- Fernandez, R., & Aalbers, M. (2016) Financialization and housing: Between globalization and Varieties of Capitalism, *Competition and Change*, 20(2), pp. 71-88.
- Frugoli Jr., & H., Spaggiari, E. (2010) Da cracolândia aos núas: percursos etnográficos no bairro da Luz, *Ponto Urbe*, 4.
- Fundação João Pinheiro (2018) *Déficit Habitacional no Brasil 2015* Report, Belo Horizonte: Diretoria de Estatística e Informações.
- G1. (2017) Três ficam feridos na Cracolândia após prefeitura demolir muro, *G1*, May 23, Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/desabamento-fere-pessoas-na-Cracolandia.ghtml> (Accessed 13 October 2018).
- G1. (2019) Incêndio e desabamento do prédio no Largo do Paissandu completam um ano, *G1*, May 1, Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2019/05/01/incendio-e-desabamento-do-predio-no-largo-do-paissandu-completa-um-ano-veja-o-que-se-sabe-sobre-o-caso.ghtml> (Accessed 27 April 2019).
- Gago, V. (2017) *Neoliberalism from below: popular pragmatics and baroque economies*, Mason-Deese, L. (Trans) (Durham and London: Duke University Press).
- Gatti, S. (2015) Entre a permanência e o deslocamento. ZEIS 3 como instrumento para manutenção da população de baixa renda em áreas centrais. O caso da ZEIS 3 C 106 (Sé) inserida no perímetro do Projeto Nova Luz, Doctoral dissertation, University of São Paulo, 2015.
- LabCidade (2018) Para onde foram as famílias removidas da quadra 36? Available at: <http://www.labcidade.fau.usp.br/para-onde-foram-as-familias-removidas-da-quadra-36/> (Accessed 10 October 2018).
- Madden, D., & Marcuse, P. (2016) *In Defense of Housing: The Politics of Crisis* (London/New York: Verso).
- Mendonça, P., Lima, P., Martin, I., Brito, G., & Rolnik, R. (2017) Região da Luz em disputa: mapeamento dos processos em curso, LabCidade, June 9, Available at: <http://www.labcidade.fau.usp.br/regiao-da-luz-em-disputa-mapeamento-dos-processos-em-curso/> (Accessed 05 November 2018).
- Miraftab, F. (2009) Insurgent Planning: Situating Radical Planning in the Global South, *Planning Theory*, 8(1), pp. 32-50.
- Rolnik, R. (2019) *Urban Warfare: Housing Under the Empire of Finance*, Hirschhorn, G. (Trans) (London: Verso).

- Rolnik, R. & Santoro, P. F. (2013) *Zonas Especiais de Interesse Social (ZEIS) em Cidades Brasileiras: Trajetória Recente de Implementação de um Instrumento de Política Fundiária*, Working Paper, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.
- Rui, T., Fiore, M., & Tófoli, L. F. (2016) *Pesquisa preliminar de avaliação do Programa 'De Braços Abertos'*, Report, São Paulo: Plataforma Brasileira de Política de Drogas (PBPD)/ Instituto Brasileiro de Ciências Criminais (IBCCRIM).
- Sanchez, F., & Broudehous, A. M. (2013). Mega-events and urban regeneration in Rio de Janeiro: Planning in a state of emergency, *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development*, 5(2), pp. 132–153.
- State Government. (2018) PPP da Habitação promove sorteio de mais 961 apartamentos na capital, March 21, Available at: <http://www.saopaulo.sp.gov.br/spnoticias/ultimas-noticias/ppp-da-habitacao-promove-sorteio-de-mais-961-apartamentos-na-capital/> (Accessed 10 November 2018).
- State Secretariat of Social Development (2017). *Levantamento do Perfil de Usuários de Drogas na Região da Cracolândia*, Report, São Paulo: State Government.
- State Secretariat of Housing. (2012) *Chamamento Público n. 004/2012*, São Paulo: Casa Paulista Agency, State Government.
- Telles, V. (2018) Refugiados urbanos – Espaço urbano em tempos de urgência: ressonâncias... in: Redondo, T. (Ed) *Do guia para os habitantes da cidade. Poema e Comentários* (São Paulo: Fundação Rosa Luxemburgo).
- Wacquant, L. (2007) Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality, *Thesis Eleven*, 91, pp. 66–77.
- Yiftachel, O. (2009) Theoretical Notes on 'Gray Cities': The Coming of Urban Apartheid?, *Planning Theory*, 8(1), pp. 87-99.