

– INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND DEPOLITICIZATION OF THE RIGHT TO THE CITY: Changing Scenarios for Radical Social Movements

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Abstract

The right to the city, a concept previously associated with radical social movements, has been accepted by several governments and has inspired new public policies. However, some authors see this process of institutionalization as involving a loss of a significant part of the radical origins of the concept. This article approaches this process and the new opportunities and limitations it may entail for social movement organizations with a more radical perspective on the right to the city. We explore the paradigmatic case of Brazil and the action of a particular organization, the Movimento dos Sem Teto da Bahia (MSTB, or Homeless Movement of Bahia) in the city of Salvador. We draw on the discussion of the politics of the right to the city and on an original combination of social movement theories and critical discourse analysis in order to analyse political-institutional and discursive changes in urban reform in Brazil and Salvador. We then analyse how the MSTB moves within this new context, navigating its tensions and contradictions while advancing a radical project of transformation of urban reality within a reformist context. We also reflect on the relevance of Lefebvrian ideas for understanding and inspiring contemporary struggles for the right to the city.

The new 'turn' for the right to the city and urban social movements

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

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

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

This process may be considered to be part of wider trends in urban policy and development: namely, the new centrality of rights-based discourses (Uvin, 2007), associated with the depoliticization and de-radicalization of these discourses (Evans, 2005).

The translation of this article was funded by the Universitat Politècnica de València (Spain). We are very grateful to the people and organizations we interviewed for this article, especially the members of the MSTB and inhabitants of the occupations. We are also grateful to the three anonymous IJURR reviewers for their very relevant comments and suggestions.

In addition, many social movements have changed their strategy from confrontation to cooperation with public institutions, professionalizing themselves, implementing state-supported programmes, moderating protest and participating in policymaking (Mayer, 2009).

In the debates about the relation between the right to the city and urban social movements (Leontidou, 2010), one group of authors has emphasized how social movements foster political reform and become part of decision-making structures (see, for example, Taylor, 2007; Weinstein and Ren, 2009; Smith and McQuarrie, 2012). Another group has focused on the role of social movement organizations (SMOs) that do not seek political reform but the radical transformation of the social world (see, for example, Fenster, 2005; Chatterton, 2010; Leontidou, 2010; Noy and Colomb, 2013).

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

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

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

– Excavating Lefebvre and the politics of right to the city

In this section, we present key ideas on the right to the city posed by Lefebvre that may be relevant for understanding the perspective of the MSTB. Specifically, we consider Lefebvre's ideas on the meaning of transformation, on the model of social relationships desired, and on rights holders and the meaning of citizenship.

BROAD IDEAS AND PRINCIPLES ON THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

Regarding the first issue, the right to the city, according to Lefebvre, is a call for overcoming both capitalism and state socialism: 'the right to the city is like a cry and a demand, a transformed and renewed right to urban life' (Lefebvre, 1996: 158). But

rather than locating this renewed right in the tradition of liberal-democratic political thought, Lefebvre's right to the city has to be understood within a broader framework of social transformation, beyond liberal perspectives and centralized and bureaucratized socialism. It is 'a critique of existing society in order to open up a path to another society, a possible world beyond capitalism, the State and consumer society' (Purcell, 2014: 144). However, this new society, called the *urban society*, is an open-ended utopian project: 'the urban [society] can therefore be defined not as an accomplished reality, situated behind the actual in time but, on the contrary, as a horizon, an illuminating virtuality' (Lefebvre, 2003 [1970]: 17).

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

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

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

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

THE POLITICS OF CONSTRUCTING THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

Based on these principles, we can identify key issues in the literature for understanding the politics and drivers of the construction processes of the right to the city. These are the role of social struggle, the transformation of everyday life, overcoming compartmentalization, private property and exchange value in the urban, and the building of class alliances without this being instigated by a 'vanguard'.

The right to the city cannot be fulfilled through the recognition of legal rights or through policy reform. It is a right to be gained through social struggle, as inhabitants claim, organize and transform capitalist processes and the role of the state (Kuymulu, 2013). According to Lefebvre, effective inclusion in the right to the city is not granted by the state, which is the 'institutional condensation of social power' (Kipfer *et al.*, 2013: 123), but gained through social transformation of the power relations underlying the

production of urban space (Purcell, 2002), through the progressive ‘withering away of the State in practices of self-management’ (Kipfer *et al.*, 2013: 123). These revolutionary processes are not necessarily violent, ‘but violence is not necessarily excluded from them’ (Lefebvre, 2003 [1970]: 5).

As a key issue for these processes to take place, Lefebvre emphasizes the lived experiences of city inhabitants through their *everyday life*: ‘there can be no socialist revolution without an urban revolution, no urban revolution without a socialist revolution, and neither without a revolution in everyday life’ (Goonewardena, 2011: 60). Even though Lefebvre considers that space has some autonomy, and that ‘the new system of production cannot be achieved without the transformation of the existing space itself’ (Lefebvre, 1976: 126, translation by authors), he goes well beyond a strictly materialistic approach to urban space. He advocates for a holistic understanding of social life that considers the ‘teeming multitude of different desires and drives that are not reducible to economic imperatives’ (Purcell, 2014: 145). In fact, individuals have to go beyond the desires and the consumption patterns imposed on collective life under capitalism to seek alternatives inspired by the concept of utopia (Lefebvre, 2013 [1974]). This implies a ‘permanent cultural revolution’ (Lefebvre, 2000 [1971]: 194).

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

The confrontation between use value and exchange value emerges for Lefebvre as one of the main contradictions of capitalist social relations in which ‘inhabitants who “use” the city are marginalized in favour of those who seek to realize “exchange” value of urban space’ (Kuymulu, 2013: 929). Consequently, appropriation of urban space by urban dwellers for ‘full and complete usage’ (Lefebvre, 1996: 179) is one of the key political concepts of Lefebvre’s thought. In the process of construction of the right to the city, as inhabitants appropriate the city, use value would substitute the exchange value of urban space. ‘The right to appropriate urban space involves the right to live in, play in, work in, represent, characterize, and occupy urban space in a particular city. These are rights of use rather than rights of exchange’ (Purcell, 2003: 577–78).

However, in the industrial city, the functional separation of uses and the residential separation of users prevent encounter and interaction. Compartmentalization and private property rights alienate urban space from inhabitants and ‘abstract land from the web of urban connections’ (Purcell, 2014: 149). It is parallel to the specialization, compartmentalization and alienation of the capitalist division of labour. This is why appropriation has to overcome alienation of urban space, compartmentalization and liberal property rights based on ownership (Purcell, 2014). As Lefebvre points out, ‘transformation of society presupposes a collective ownership and management of the space’ (Lefebvre, 2013 [1974]).

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

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

– Social movement theories and critical discourse analysis

Here, our aim is to introduce theoretical and conceptual elements to address a comprehensive analysis of the actions of a particular SMO¹ in its pursuit of a right to the city project similar to that of Lefebvre, within a particular context. In order to do so, we follow the recent strand of theorists in social movement literature who try to connect elements from both political processes and framing theories (Stekemburg and Klandermans, 2009). This helps us consider and interlink the political-institutional and discursive aspects of the context, both of which are of key importance when addressing the issue of the right to the city.

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

On the other hand, we do not deny that SMOs are active and creative agents of mobilization processes (Diani, 1996). We posit that SMOs interpret and construct their political opportunities (Gamson and Meyer, 1996) and that the way in which the POS constrains collective action depends on how it is 'framed' by the SMO (Benford and Snow, 2000). However, a dominant perception of the context does exist (Snow and Benford, 1992), which Diani (1996) calls the 'master frame'. This 'master frame' is considered the most credible and realistic frame by most stakeholders and public opinion. This is why it hampers the effective development of any 'counter-frames' by SMOs. This is true in the case of the MSTB, which articulates not only a radical discourse that differs markedly from the dominant reformist one, but also, being close to Lefebvre's ideas on the construction of the right to the city, frames the POS differently from the majority of the stakeholders in the context.

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

1 Based on the theoretical perspective on which we draw, a social movement (for example, the movement for the right to the city in Brazil) is a group of actors who draw on a common identity to interact around a common issue of conflict (Diani, 1992). An SMO is a single organization—which could be part of a social movement—that has an informal and participative organizational structure and that draws on ideology and solidarity in order to engage its social base to operate within a particular territory (*ibid.*). In this article, we consider SMOs as different from non-profit organizations, NGOs or other interest groups.

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

– Methodology

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

Secondly, the article examines the social practice of a particular SMO, the MSTB. We analyse how the organization articulates a counter-dominant discourse, and how it frames the POS and takes action, driven by its ideas on the processes of construction of the right to the city. In addition to a set of secondary sources—websites, written texts produced by the MSTB, an academic bibliography and articles from the press—our analysis relies on primary sources obtained in the course of our fieldwork, which included participant observation, individual and collective semi-structured interviews and participatory workshops.² The participatory methodology employed in the workshops was inspired by the ‘web of institutionalization’ (Levy, 1996). This method allowed participants to visually connect and relate the ideas, expectations, resources, procedures, allies and capabilities of their organizations or institutions regarding the right to the city.

Political-institutional and discursive context of the MSTB

– Political-institutional context

In Brazil, the 1970s saw the emergence of neighbourhood associations, whose ultimate aim was to transform urban reality (Avritzer, 2010) through direct action against the military regime (Gohn, 2004). With the constitutional process of the 1980s, the features of the POS changed dramatically. The system moved gradually, in the terms of Tilly and Tarrow (2007), from repression to facilitation of collective claim making and participation of new actors. Many urban SMOs accepted the new rules as a way to advance their demands regarding the social appropriation of urban spaces, the limitation of property rights and the democratization of cities (da Silva, 2003). SMOs found new supporters in the ever-growing number of NGOs, professional and aca-

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

demic organizations and in some political parties. Movements and other organizations joined together in the National Movement for Urban Reform (MNRU), created in 1982.

The movement decided to participate in the spaces opened up by the Constituent Assembly in order to influence the Constitution. The MNRU took part in gatherings and technical-legalistic debates (da Silva, 2003), where NGOs and professionals became the key interlocutors, gaining a prominence they had not enjoyed in the past. This led to decreased intensity in the mobilization of grassroots organizations, and a decline of their influence in comparison to NGOs (Maricato, 2000).

The MNRU managed to introduce the notions of ‘democratic management of cities’ and the ‘social function of property’ to the final text of the Constitution (Brasil, 1988). Nevertheless, it left the development of these concepts to those responsible for drawing up future national laws and municipal master plans—thus producing a new key change in the POS, as the local became a key autonomous centre of power in urban management. This opened new fields of action for urban movements.

At the national level, the City Statute was the key national law developed to regulate such issues. The first proposals were well received by the National Forum for Urban Reform (FNRU)—the new name given to the MNRU—but rejected by the real estate industry, which considered them confiscatory (Avritzer, 2010; Bassul, 2010). The initiative was blocked until 1994, when a new bill was introduced, in which the concepts and instruments for democratic management and the social function of claimed property (Avritzer, 2010) remained to a large degree underdeveloped. Although there was internal disagreement, the FNRU decided to accept the new draft bill (da Silva, 2003) and later was able to reintroduce some of the instruments, which were then accepted by the real estate industry (Bassul, 2010). In 2001, Congress unanimously approved the final text of the City Statute.

The FNRU’s partial success contributed to the creation of a master frame that highlighted the need for realism, dialogue and alliances with NGOs, and that considered management skills and instrumental knowledge as the most important capacities (Avritzer, 2010). This replicated what was happening at the international level, where professionalized NGOs gained prominence over grassroots organizations in elaborating ‘global charters’ on the right to the city (Mayer, 2009; Purcell, 2014) ‘aimed to construct instruments that could be adopted by the UN system, regional Human Rights systems and governments’ (Ortiz, 2008: 20).

However, some authors believe that the FNRU’s ‘success’ lay in the real estate sector’s changed perceptions. Soon after their initial rejection, they acknowledged that the proposed management models and tools would offer a way of legitimizing and broadening the market, without jeopardizing the property rights of those who were already property owners or the real estate sector’s role in the city’s processes of production (Bassul, 2010).

Following the approval of the City Statute, city officials began to produce local Urban Development Master Plans. This process was accompanied by local inhabitants mobilizing for and demanding real participation in the development of these plans (Rodrigues and Barbosa, 2010). However, local governments tended to use technocratic arguments against mass participation.

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

The analysis above identifies key properties of the political-institutional dimension of the POS that are relevant to the MSTB's actions: the renewed importance of local-level urban management, the creation of spaces of participation by invitation, and the relevance of new actors such as NGOs and professional organizations, even though traditionally powerful actors such as the real estate sector and construction companies remained influential. The dominant frame dictated that SMOs should be realistic, willing to engage in dialogue, and prepared to participate in policymaking and forming alliances with NGOs.

– Discursive context

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

The social function of property is considered in the City Statute as the use of property to cover the 'needs of citizens in terms of quality of life, social justice, and economic activity' (Brasil, 2001). This is developed in Salvador's master plan as 'the right to urban land, housing, basic sanitation systems, physical and psycho-social safety, infrastructure and public services, urban mobility, ... education, work, culture and leisure, the right to worship freely and the right to economic production' (Salvador, 2008).

The master plan states the criteria for determining whether a property fulfils its social function and includes a series of distributive and redistributive instruments (Ribeiro, 2003), such as regulation of possession, delimitation of priority urbanization areas, physical improvement of degraded areas, and reduction of residential segregation and speculation (Fernandes, 2007; 2010). Even though we consider these instruments to have some transformative potential (Lopes de Souza, 2006), the social function of property is framed in a technocratic manner that puts the state and bureaucracies at the centre. It does not challenge capitalist logic, pointing instead toward market regulation to balance the use value and exchange value of land. It recognizes a number of already existing rights and thus does not challenge individual private-property or compartmentalization logic. The master plan essentially supports the provision of individual property and housing via state intervention in the market (Bassul, 2010). This perspective is reinforced by an underpinning 'vision' of the city, the primary objective of which is to 'consolidate Salvador as one of Brazil's national metropolises ... in the vanguard of research and technical-cultural experimentation, business opportunities, enterprise and employment' (Salvador, 2008).

Furthermore, the City Statute states that 'democratic management' can be achieved 'through participation of the public and associations representing the various sectors of the community, which formulate, execute, monitor urban development plans, programmes, and projects' (Brasil, 2001). It also mentions the importance of social control over instruments that involve an 'outlay of resources of the municipal government' (Brasil, 2001) in terms of access to information, transparency and accountability. The master plan deals with this concept in similar terms, developing a series of specific instruments for participation, such as the creation of forums, committees, consultations and popular initiatives for bills, plans, programmes and projects.

However, the state is once again at the centre of the notion of management. Emphasis is placed on collaboration and spaces for participation by invitation, and not on spaces that are claimed or created by civil society itself. The focus is on consultation, deliberation, or—at most—proposals from civil society, all of which are far removed from the radical ideas of self-governing posited by Lefebvre.

Clearly, the institutionalized discourse on the right to the city is far removed from the Lefebvrian perspective, remaining within a liberal reformist and technocratic ambit. It is also far removed from the MSTB discourse, as we will explore next.

The MSTB's discourse and action

– Salvador and the MSTB

Salvador, the capital of the state of Bahia, is the third largest city of Brazil, with 2.7 million inhabitants. It is one of the most racially and culturally diverse cities on the South American continent. Squatter settlements have continued to proliferate since the 1940s, representing the principal housing solution available to a number of classes and leaving an indelible mark on urban development. According to the latest census, 880,000 people are living in 242 informal housing settlements in the city (IBGS, 2010), which lack access even to basic services.

The MSTB, established in 2003 (according to its now defunct website) defines itself as a 'popular organization whose fields of action are urban spaces, mobilizing homeless workers to fight for their right to housing ... To achieve this goal, it pressures the government through mobilization and the occupation of buildings and land that are abandoned and accomplish no social function' (MSTB, 2010, author's translation).³ Under the slogan 'Organize, Occupy, Resist', the organization affirms that it is acting in terms of the principles of 'autonomy, spirit of struggle, horizontality and solidarity' (MSTB, 2010).

The majority of people who joined the MSTB initially did so with the expectation of having their basic needs met (for shelter, security and basic services). The movement promotes occupation, thus offering a way of meeting these demands while simultaneously producing deeper transformation. Once land has been occupied, MSTB coordinators support occupiers to promote democratic organization, elect leaders and establish self-managed initiatives—community centres, libraries, kitchens, nurseries, school-support workshops, cultural and production projects (for example, urban agriculture cooperatives or small weaving workshops). In parallel, the MSTB pressures the public administration through negotiations, advocacy, demonstrations and mobilization. The movement demands the implementation of urban management tools recognized in the statute, the master plan and local regulations to improve occupied areas by regularizing occupied land, building housing and infrastructure, or improving degraded and environmentally risky areas.

The MSTB is organized into three kinds of spaces. First, the *nuclei*, which are the entry points to the movement for homeless families. These are spaces for participation and preparation where people begin to organize before occupying a place or joining an occupation. They seek out empty buildings to occupy, debate joint issues and organize protest actions and marches—approximately 36,000 homeless persons participated in six *nuclei* in 2010. Secondly, *occupation sites* refer to abandoned private or public buildings or empty lots where families erect self-built houses that are not legally recognized. Around 5,000 families lived on 24 occupied MSTB sites in 2010 (Zibechi, 2010). Thirdly, *communities* are established squatter sites that have received some kind of intervention from public authorities to improve physical conditions through regularization of property or the provision of public services and housing.

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

The profiles of people who join the movement vary greatly. Mostly, they are: rural migrants arriving in Salvador; new families who want to move from the over-occupied houses of their parents but have no access to formal housing; families who have lost or had to sell their houses in other neighbourhoods or occupations; homeless people who were previously living on the streets; and, to a lesser extent, migrants from other cities or countries. They are mostly black, have a very low income and frequently

3 Unfortunately, the MSTB's blog, which also described the history of the MSTB, is no longer available online. The MSTB now has a Facebook page, <https://pt-br.facebook.com/movimentosemetodabahia> (accessed 27 May 2016), but some of the information quoted cannot be found there.

work in the informal sector. The proportion of people from each type of profile differs in the various occupation sites.

– The MSTB's discourse on the right to the city

In order to explore the MSTB's discourse on the right to the city in relation to that of Lefebvre, we address the key issues listed earlier in this article: the meaning of the transformation of the city, the model of social relations pursued and the notion of right-holders and citizenship.

In terms of transformation the MSTB asserts that it is seeking a profound change in urban reality: 'we do not want to become a part of their city; we want to create our own' (MSTB, 2010). The organization echoes Lefebvre in stating that transformation means overcoming capitalism and a commodified society:

We use occupation as a means to ensure the resolution of pragmatic problems, such as the need for housing. But occupation is also the result of a wish to create the conditions that will help people overcome this society ... In reality, we are fighting for another society, a society characterized by new relations, where people can overcome the logic of market forces (interview with MSTB leader, 2010).⁴

The model proposed by the state, which is closely aligned with a capitalist logic, is also to be overcome:

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

The MSTB considers the model and the logic of social relationships proposed, highlighting the need to build 'the logic of the needs of people' (*ibid.*) in the city, which aligns with the radical ideas on the right to the city described in this article. The transformation of social relationships by promoting collective life is the path through which a model of urban life may substitute the current logic for a new one:

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

All this shows a radical democratic perspective on social relationships and participation, which echoes the idea of self-governance. Illustrative of this is the fact that the MSTB considers the self-managed initiatives it promotes as ways of experimenting with and creating relationships and initiatives that anticipate the future, and building what can be considered the self-governing of society: for the movement, community kitchens 'are not just alternative forms of service supply or income production' (*ibid.*); community assemblies are not just ways of making decisions; demonstrations are not just ways of lobbying; they are also spaces that enable people to 'take their decisions collectively to decide everything that has to do with their lives, outside of the State or market ... removed from individualist perspectives, which have to be overcome' (*ibid.*).

4 Statements from the various interviews and workshops conducted with members of the MSTB are identified here under the acronym MSTB. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese and translated by the authors.

They are ‘spaces for the emergence of a new sociability ... to make a new conscience emerge, as people enter into and build a logic of collectivization’ (*ibid.*).

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

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

– MSTB action: political-institutional and discursive context

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

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

BUILDING THE RIGHT TO THE CITY THROUGH SOCIAL STRUGGLE IN A
TECHNOCRATIC, INSTITUTIONAL AND DISCURSIVE CONTEXT

We start by examining the tensions that derive from the fact that the MSTB focuses on conflict and social struggle against capitalism and the state, while tactically trying to take advantage of existing participatory spaces and instruments based on a technocratic perspective.

As mentioned earlier, several spaces for participation by invitation were created during and after approval of the Statute and the Master Plan for Salvador, when the regime opened up activities to new actors. Based on this master frame, civil servants see these as spaces to ‘listen to the demands [of grassroots organizations] and jointly construct a new reality’ (interview with a civil servant, 2010). The MSTB, by contrast, which sees the city as ‘a political space under dispute’ (MSTB, 2010), considers these participatory spaces as spaces of ‘political dispute’: ‘you can’t hold a dialogue with the State, ... you can only negotiate with them’ (*ibid.*).

For the movement, participation in such spaces by invitation may represent a dangerous way of legitimizing government actions and a form of co-optation. However, the movement also believes that it may be useful and necessary to take part in these

spaces for tactical reasons, ‘to retain our legitimacy and to ensure that they will never be able to say that we are unwilling to negotiate’ (*ibid.*). Participation may also help the MSTB in two other ways: it provides the movement with access to information on local plans and policies, and it helps it obtain commitments from authorities—‘concrete commitments, whose non-compliance ... can be denounced’ (*ibid.*). All this seems to facilitate tactical decision making, to foster informed debates and arguments to maintain social mobilization in the occupations, and subsequently to promote learning in their social base.

To navigate these tensions, the MSTB participates in these spaces of negotiation but, simultaneously, makes it abundantly clear to its support base (in assemblies and meetings) and to the public (through public statements) that its collaboration with state institutions is purely tactical in nature. It is unclear whether the MSTB’s communication strategy has a significant influence on its social base, as the impact of negotiations in the occupations seems to depend mainly on the results: when an occupation achieves positive and visible results from participation in negotiation spaces (for example, in the form of an agreement to regularize the area), the social base usually moves towards a more collaborative and less confrontational attitude, sometimes losing its more combative spirit. The opposite happens in occupations that receive less attention from the state. In addition, successful negotiations that are not as visible to the social base—for example, obtaining some important information on local plans—do not seem to have an impact on the motivation of squatters.

Another key obstacle the MSTB faces when interacting with public institutions is the technical language and the knowledge required to navigate bureaucratic procedures. This can be partially attributed to the MSTB prioritizing political-ideological education over the technical training of its members. Squatters experience intense processes of political learning in their day-to-day practice of participation—through discussions, meetings and mobilizations. However, they do not learn much about the technical issues involved in these practices (such as the technical language of regulations or the development of projects). The opposite occurs in other SMOs, whose leaders spend time learning about technical issues, or who are selected on the basis of the technical capacity they already possess. In addition, the MSTB intentionally frames its demands and discussions with civil servants in political and confrontational terms. Finally, the fact that the MSTB uses horizontal decision-making procedures creates another situation of disadvantage vis-à-vis other SMOs that apply vertical, faster and more flexible decision-making procedures, which the public institutions prefer.

Politicians and civil servants often seem to employ technocratic arguments, which are legitimized in terms of the dominant frame and discourse, in order to prioritize the support to other organizations that are more efficient, have greater technical knowledge, frame discussions in technical terms, have more allies and are less confrontational. For example, a civil servant states:

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

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

The MSTB's limited access to public intervention may discourage occupiers. While the organization tries to mitigate this situation by creating political awareness and appealing to the occupiers' spirit of struggle and solidarity, awareness raising takes a long time. So, while relying on these strategies may work in the medium to long term, and in older occupations, this does not apply to newer occupations, where occupiers' motivation may dwindle rapidly.

TRANSFORMING EVERYDAY LIFE ON THE BASIS OF THE LOGIC OF PROJECTS AND URBAN PLANNING INSTRUMENTS

Usually, after long processes of pressuring, mobilization, negotiation, compromise and delays, the state finally intervenes in the occupations, improving the area, regularizing land or providing housing and infrastructure. The process may take from two to five years or longer, in the process exhausting MSTB's bases, creating frustration and causing some people to withdraw. In order to manage this frustration, the MSTB tries to achieve small, partial 'victories' to create a sense of progress. These may include meeting up with public officials and prompting them to make specific commitments.

Apart from this approach, a key MSTB strategy is making the most of these long periods of mobilization and expectation by calmly making changes to the everyday life of squatters, and by supporting self-learning through daily action to further develop occupiers' skills and habits of organization and self-management. This key process helps build the concept of the right to the city. Squatters develop critical awareness and political consciousness, alternative desires, democratic participation habits, mutual support and strategic planning; common views and community plans for the occupations. They begin to collectively produce and manage the built space (public spaces, community equipment and self-managed initiatives) based on the logic of mutual care and collective ways of daily living (collective childcare or urban farming, for example). In sum, the MSTB tries to change people's culture, mentality and everyday life, as well as advance collective control of space during waiting periods; in Lefebvre's terms, it tries to advance self-governing. It could be argued that, in this sense, the MSTB seems quite successful, as a number of people in the occupations take part in self-managed initiatives, assemblies, working groups and other collective processes. Collaboration and solidarity in the MSTB's occupations is perceived to be much stronger than in other sites in the city.

All this is possibly due in part to the long waiting periods. If waiting times were shorter, people would have gained the individual benefits they were looking for when they joined the MSTB without a change in their mentality or everyday way of life, and they would subsequently have abandoned the collectivization processes. However, the long waiting times are usually followed by rapid intervention, such as the distribution and registering of lots, or the building of houses. Usually, once interventions begin, the community has no time or space to discuss details such as housing typology, urban configuration and distribution of land among families, so conflicts, individualist attitudes and frustrations with the results may arise. This is another reason why, for the MSTB, occupations have to be organized, have community plans in place and achieve political maturity before interventions begin.

A frequently successful strategy of the MSTB is influencing, wherever possible, the time and the duration of interventions. It is usually easy to postpone the start of a project, or to ask the government for extra time to organize a community and its demands and proposals. However, it is much more difficult to request a delay once an intervention has begun, as the private companies charged with building the houses and providing public facilities and amenities (such as schools, social centres, health centres, leisure centres, and so on) and basic urban services (water, sewerage, electricity, street lighting and paved roads) in the areas work according to time frames that are most

convenient to them. At that point, the MSTB would then have to ask the government to manage urban interventions directly—and so far this has been unsuccessful.

PROMOTING COLLECTIVIZATION AND USE VALUE IN A LOGIC OF
COMPARTMENTALIZATION AND EXCHANGE VALUE

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

Housing typologies and urban configuration of public and private spaces set out in regulations are inspired by the logic of compartmentalization described by Lefebvre: functionally, social houses conserve the classic individualistic typology of the housing unit (Fiori and Fix, 2009) designed for a single family, which integrates all ‘private’ functions—sleeping, dining, caring for children, enjoyment, and so on. At the urban level, this logic prioritizes the maximization of private space over public space. For the MSTB, this ‘promotes individualism and destroys community-building’ (MSTB, 2010). Based on the logic of collectivization, interaction and transformation of everyday life, it tries to propose housing typologies consisting of reduced private space and more common space, where neighbours may collectively develop activities that are usually considered ‘private’, such as childcare, laundry, cooking and cultural activities. Consequently, at the level of urban planning, the MSTB proposes more public space and infrastructure at the expense of private space.

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

However, the MSTB is sometimes successful when negotiating the configuration of public spaces. The movement has been able to negotiate small changes to projects if these are in keeping with the regulations and do not involve extra cost. For example, people in an occupation might forfeit some green space in the project to make space for a community childcare facility or for urban agriculture. These changes, however small, may be of key importance in preventing the dismantling of existing collectivization processes and self-managed initiatives, serving to reinforce these instead.

PROMOTING EXCHANGE VALUE IN A LOGIC OF PRIVATE PROPERTY AND USE VALUE

As posited, property rights regimes and regulations are based on the notion of private and individual property. Although the MSTB—in alignment with Lefebvre’s perspective—has been voicing demands regarding community-owned land and housing, the state has not taken these into account. The state system seems to promote individualism in squatters, and the demobilization of previously active individuals once they receive their property titles, improved plots or houses. Moreover, the plots and houses are subject to market logic, as individuals are able to sell their property (although only in the informal market, as they cannot officially be sold until 20 years after the intervention); in fact, families who have severe financial problems often sell their new houses or regularized plots and move to a new occupation. It is therefore not easy to eliminate the exchange value of land and housing.

It seems that, after public interventions in the occupations, the MSTB is only able to maintain processes of self-management and collective decision taking in those occupations where these spaces and processes are well consolidated, and where political awareness has been developed. Moreover, it is always very difficult for the MSTB to prevent people from selling their houses and moving if they decide to do so. The

only thing the MSTB does is to promote self-help groups to assist families in dire financial situations to prevent them from selling their houses, but this is not often successful.

BUILDING POLITICAL ALLIANCES IN A CONTEXT OF DEPOLITICIZED RELATIONS AND CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES

As stated earlier, for Lefebvre, alliances between classes and factions of classes are key to the construction of the right to the city. For the MSTB, this is difficult, given that its perceptions of the new institutions and instruments differ from those of most of the city's organizations, which are more aligned with the master frame. Most local SMOs consider the state as central to the construction of the right to the city and have focused on building instrumental alliances with other social organizations, NGOs and professionals to gain more influence and capacity for dialogue with public institutions.

The MSTB, by contrast, rejects any collaboration with what they consider co-opted organizations, restricting its alliances to 'organizations which may bring real transformation, and which have a tradition of autonomy and horizontality' (MSTB, 2010), that is, to organizations with similar political perspectives that do not collaborate with the state, that are deeply democratic, and that are oriented towards building self-governance. Most of the few SMO allies the MSTB has are part of the Frente de Resistencia Urbana, an organization formed by homeless, black, cultural (such as hip-hop) and women's organizations. For the MSTB, these groups 'are different in some aspects, but share a situation of oppression' (*ibid.*)—in Lefebvre's words, they are groups who share 'the misery of habitat'.

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

CONSERVING A TRANSFORMATIVE PERSPECTIVE WITHOUT A VANGUARD IN A CONTEXT OF IMMEDIATE NEEDS

The MSTB constantly faces the tension of not losing its radical orientation, while democratically responding to its social base. Even though differences within the movement were not the focus of our study, it is clear that we cannot consider the MSTB a monolithic organization. Tensions are frequent between leaders or between older and newer members. The first group is usually far more politicized and subscribes to a markedly more radical perspective on the right to the city than the other two. The second group is mainly driven by immediate needs and would prefer the movement to adopt a more 'realistic', 'pragmatic' and 'friendly' attitude towards institutions.

Older and more politicized leaders of the MSTB do not seem to believe in the need for a vanguard to guide the movement and try to respect the decisions and priorities of each occupation or community. However, they do not renounce wider perspectives for transformation in the various occupations. To manage tensions arising from neither accepting a vanguard nor renouncing a more radical project of the right to the city, they employ several strategies. For example, they facilitate meetings between people in more recent occupations and people in older and more politically mature occupations or with other groups, such as organizations of the Frente, with extensive experience of social struggle. Another strategy they employ is to continually encourage new leaders in the occupations and in the MSTB's social base and to provide them

with intensive political training. In order to politicize their new leaders, these groups participate in various formal and informal spaces of learning: workshops, meetings with other organizations, and more. Leaders generally have more authority, so their strategy usually succeeds in keeping discussions highly politicized to ensure radical perspectives in the occupations. However, this strategy can create problems and may be in conflict with the MSTB's principles, as it creates power imbalances between some of the selected members of the occupations and the remainder of the social base.

Conclusions

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

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

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

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

As far as the key actors in the transformation of urban life are concerned, the MSTB case shows the relevance of the concept of *inhabitants*. This concept calls to attention the importance of connecting the very diverse groups who suffer the 'misery of habitat'. These notions help provide an understanding of the diversity of the collective struggle in Salvador for the right to the city. Beyond this, the MSTB case brings to light that in twenty-first-century Salvador, those who suffer the 'misery of habitat' are not only from diverse classes and fractions of classes, as Lefebvre posits, but also from diverse groups in terms of gender, race, religion and origin.

Finally, we know that Lefebvre challenged the notion of needing a vanguard, believing that self-organization will provide a substitute for the state through processes that will arise spontaneously, from below. The MSTB case shows that this

notion should be more nuanced. For example, the leadership's need for more 'awakened' inhabitants may be key in some contexts, such as that of the MSTB, to avoid the depoliticization of social struggles, but without controlling processes or limiting genuine participation.

To summarize, this study reveals that the work of Lefebvre still holds for understanding and inspiring contemporary radical processes of transformation in the city, that Lefebvre's ideas can be discussed by drawing on reality, and that further research is needed in this direction.

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