

São Paulo: Recent Social Movements and Insurgent Urban Culture

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This article aims to reconstruct landmarks of recent urban culture (2011–2019) in the city of São Paulo, which is characterized by intense social movements in which people take to the streets and public spaces. The paper is divided into four parts: the first presents a brief overview of these insurgencies, emphasizing their relations to a global wave of protests and to the adversities of an everyday life in the city. The second moment shows how these political organizations not only have the city as an agenda but also absorb it in a repertoire of collective action. In this sense, this generation of movements finds new ways of “constituting class” that are characteristic of a post-Fordist, deindustrialized, highly urbanized, and unequal social reality. The third topic looks into that repertoire to highlight its aesthetic–political actions, which have great power of contagion and popular appeal. The fourth and final topic highlights another element of this young urban culture, namely the popular college preparatory courses (*cursinhos populares*), which have grown in recent decades and have become even more fundamental in the post-2016 adverse environment. As regards to method, it is necessary to combine a historical and bibliographic reconstruction with an ethnographic exploration of the routine of these movements and organizations.

Panorama of Recent Urban Struggles in São Paulo

The São Paulo of the 2010s is marked by enthusiasm and frequent demonstrations in the streets; we witnessed a plethora of social unrest with different directions, with more than one causality, all pointing to very different horizons of society. Demonstrators were protesting fiscal austerity policies and presenting demands for transport and public education, as well as for

democratic disruption and military intervention. According to a survey by political scientists Tatagiba and Galvão (2019), between 2011 and 2016, there were 226 demonstrations per year in the city, on average. With the hegemony of what can be considered a “new right” at the end of the decade, protests and public opinion became even more divisive.

As one paper cannot fully cover this complex scenario, we will focus on democratic mobilizations. While these mobilizations were heterogeneous, there was nexus among them in their respective readings of reality—their symbolic framework—and socioeconomic profile. They also have “generational connections,” which will be more evident later.¹

In Brazil, the turning point to the troubled scenario of the 2010s was strongly linked to the conjuncture of the global economic crisis of 2007–2008, although there were particularities. All over the world, the neoliberal development model was questioned as nation-states worked for the stability of financial institutions, while placing austerity policies on the shoulders of ordinary citizens.² From the Spanish 15M to Occupy movements around the world, the message was clear: with the crisis rhetoric, governments and authorities acted on behalf of the one percent at the expense of the other 99 percent.

In our context, the solutions of the Workers’ Party (PT) federal administration to the crisis were more ambivalent. Evaluations that there was a “developmentalist experiment” (Singer) or a “neo-developmentalism” (Boito) are accurate, because the State was an important presence, inducing economic recovery in strategic sectors. The infrastructure policy of the Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento (Growth Acceleration Program, or PAC) and Programa Minha Casa, Minha Vida (PMCMV) housing program attest to this presence, despite limitations imposed by neoliberal boundaries and conciliations that are characteristic of the national correlation of forces.

In the state of São Paulo, where the Social Democracy Party of Brazil (PSDB) has hegemony, the cuts in social policies and the dismantling of public institutions were more substantial, which explains a significant increase in the number of strikes since 2011.³ Tensions marked this moment of crisis. If, on the one hand, the union bases demanded that working classes be safeguarded, then, on the other hand, the proprietary classes, especially after 2014, disembarked from the neo-developmental project and wanted more advantages in their conditions of accumulation, which also explains Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment process.⁴ We are unable to analyze this whole set of issues that have motivated the uprisings in Brazil and São Paulo since 2011, but it is important for us to understand some points that partly explain the protests of June 2013 and the struggles against the FIFA World Cup in 2014.

The period of inclusive economic growth (2003–2014), promoted by so-called lulismo (Lulism) was not felt in the same way by the middle classes

and the urban working class.⁵ The boost in spending power did not directly improve living conditions in the cities, due to at least two points eminently linked to the production of urban space. The first point is related to the reproduction of peripheralization and the car-centered mobility model, which inflicts everyday suffering on much of the working population, who waste part of their lives in traffic.⁶ In São Paulo in 2012, on public transport and under normal circumstances, a resident of the Grajaú neighborhood—in the extreme south—took two hours and thirty minutes to reach Praça da Sé, where the city’s kilometer-zero mark is located. On average, the time spent on a daily commute was two hours and forty-two minutes—for over 33 percent of the population, it was over three hours, while for 20 percent of the city’s inhabitants, it was over four hours. Not surprisingly, disorders such as anxiety, depression, and stress, which are largely attributed to poor traffic conditions, affect 29.6 percent of the city’s population (Saldiva).

In this sense, citizens who use public transport daily, rain or shine, often experience subalternity and even humiliation. This miserable routine is imposed on the same people who have precarious jobs, are poorly housed, and live far away. Most of them are black people, who suffer institutional violence and the stigmas of systemic racism. What sparks an uprising is not one cause alone but is the moment when everyday life becomes unacceptable.

This is what happened in 2013. The public-transport-fare increase caused protests to break out as media support and police repression managed to raise exponentially the power of the uprisings, which forever marked the country’s urban cultural history. That June, the diffuse indignations (for instance, dissatisfaction with “corruption” or with the “political system”) and diverse “ideologies that crossed paths in the streets” (Singer) were condensed. The ambiguities of this protest movement were poorly understood because they mobilized passions that were diametrically opposed.

For analysts closest to the decision-making centers, it was difficult to accept that these massive demonstrations could be legitimate, because the developmentalist solution achieved good economic growth and the country was close to full employment. According to them, June was the starting point of the 2016 coup. Meanwhile, in the symbolic framework of the younger progressive forces, which are still outside the institutions, June 2013 was as a disruptive landmark for an effervescent climate of militancy and activism linked to the right to the city. They protested everything from mobility, housing, participation, and access to public spaces to class, gender, and racial equality in cities.

These positions were both right and reductive to some extent. Perhaps the fairest thing is to understand June as a complex “societal opening” (Bringel and Pleyers) that widened the spectrum of forces. It was the quintessential

contradictory phenomenon, which encouraged a wave of demands, activism, and organization on the right and on the left. It did create a climate of insurgent ideas and feelings, which circulated in a diffuse and almost viral way, as well as a period of pulsating urban life. Urban issues were no longer specific or technical but vocalized by youth movements, cultural collectives, NGOs, student unions, and various university departments. The urban space has become an elucidative object for reading social conflicts and the “right to the city,” a key idea for the political imagination of other forms of life.

However, as 2020 progresses, the contention over the meaning of the June phenomenon becomes somewhat fruitless, given the accumulating adversities in the present.⁷ It is more productive to pay attention to the days following June, looking for what has been added to the forces that were renewed and to the desire for democratic radicalization.

On the left, there was neither a political line nor a hegemonic force that guided the mobilizations after June. Nevertheless, it spread with clear connections to 2013, criticisms of the World Cup in 2014, the emergence of the high school student movements (in São Paulo in 2015 and nationwide in 2016), a feminist spring, the resurgence of the student movement, and the multiplication of activism in defense of urban public spaces and, in particular, green spaces.

To show the urban conditions that made this diverse range of insurgences possible, it is worth highlighting the issue of housing for the popular strata and its relationship with the mega-events of the 2014 World Cup. There was an unprecedented real estate boom in this period. From 2008 to the end of 2014, the value of property sales increased around 220 percent in São Paulo and 260 percent in Rio de Janeiro. Rent also increased well above wage growth and inflation—accumulating around 50 percent in the same period. It is not by chance that, even after 5 million units were built, the housing deficit levels remained the same, but with a greater effect of “excessive rent burden.” That is, even with wage appreciation policies, the working population saw its resources drained and, in many cases, had to move to the periphery of the periphery. Moreover, there was also an aggravating factor. Such a rise in the cost of living puts big business in a frenzy and the popular strata in a bad predicament, but it does not fall solely upon people and families looking to buy or rent a house. Obviously, in a heated market climate, rent of commercial and office buildings is also readjusted. Tenants pass this cost on to their products. As a result, there is a general increase in the prices of goods and services.

The main conflict hotspots were construction areas for the World Cup, as in the case of the Itaquera neighborhood in São Paulo. In addition to the monumental costs of the stadiums, the surroundings were prepared for a foreign

audience, with hotels and other services developed with partners in the international circuit of financialized capitalism. As the cost of living jumps, the population with ties to the place has to move, either due to need or opportunity. It was not by chance that housing movements, such as the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto (Homeless Workers Movement, or MTST), intensified confrontation and occupied buildings in these surroundings precisely.

Yet, if in 2013 and 2014 the protests were directly related to the conditions of urban life, in 2016 the trigger for social dissatisfaction was again the way the rhetoric of the fight against corruption, the economic crisis, and the need for “fiscal responsibility” were used as pretexts for casting the burden of the crisis on ordinary citizens and urban working classes. In 2015, this rhetoric was used by the governor of São Paulo when he proposed closing some public schools, which triggered the uprising of high school students. Largely influenced by the Chilean movement in 2011–2012, these students not only occupied their schools but also showed publicly that they were rehabilitating those spaces, which had been neglected by the government. They generated a wave of awareness among parents and neighbors, teachers, artists, and intellectuals who presented public lectures and performed in the occupied schools. The mobilization spilled over into protests in the neighborhoods and blockades in the city center. Their textbook said: “today class is on the street: and the first lesson is how to block an avenue” (Campos et al. 15).⁸ In a few weeks, more than two hundred schools were occupied, the school closure plan was revoked, and the Secretary of Education fell. As Ortellado and the students involved remind us, the 2015 school movement was “the first full development of June 2013.”⁹ Again, as resistance to the rhetoric of crisis, students occupied more than one thousand schools and 150 universities and Federal Institutes throughout the country in 2016.

The school movement wave was spontaneous and, in many cases, denied the participation of student representation institutions, such as the União Nacional dos Estudantes (National Union of Students, or UNE). But the phenomenon of the school movement wave was shared by many of that generation who had accumulated forces in several organized movements such as Rua, Juntos, Levante Popular da Juventude, and others.

By 2016, the scenario had become much more regressive. The great national agreement that brought Vice President Michel Temer to power created the conditions for a public dismantling without restraint and ambivalence. The rhetoric of crisis was mobilized to impose a ceiling on social investments, to bring more flexibility to commitments in labor relations, and to propose pension reform.

But the institutional victories of the conservative forces did not dampen the spirits in the progressive field. These factors motivated the 2017 General

Strike, which, on 28 April, took more than a million people to the streets of all state capitals and over 150 other cities. In 2018, women were the protagonists of the #EleNão (NotHim) protests against the then-presidential-candidate Jair Bolsonaro. In 2019, the #15M demonstration, again in defense of public education, was also massive. These actors were instrumental in scaling up the manifestations.

Even though, by the end of the decade, the democratic environment was deteriorating and the correlation of forces was much more favorable to the conservative field with the rise of a new right, the diverse range of insurgent urban culture shows us that, even in this adverse situation, forces are gathered, dialogues are opened, and new leadership emerges.¹⁰ These are activists whose roles are not yet precisely known, but many of their practices and political sensibilities can already be mapped. The next section is dedicated to identifying these points.

The Urban Repertoire of Struggle

The recent urban movements mentioned earlier not only have the city as an agenda but also use it in their repertoire of actions. For these activists, who were born and raised in cities, the class conflict, which also has gender and ethno-racial dimensions, is experienced and understood through urban space.

In *A rebeldia do precariado* (The Rebelliousness of the Precariat), sociologist Ruy Braga recalls that there was a “transformação em termos de protagonismo político que, apesar de perder o foco na produção, alcançou certa relevância ao conectar-se à esfera da vida cotidiana das classes subalternas em diferentes contextos nacionais” (34) (transformation in terms of political protagonism that, despite losing focus on production, reached a certain relevance when connecting to the sphere of the daily life of the subaltern classes in different national contexts). If it is no longer only in the factory, but rather in everyday life, that inequalities and contradictions of capitalism are perceived, then it is expected that forms of organization also occur through identifications mediated by these everyday experiences, which can include the association at work but which go beyond it. However, Braga’s valuable work does not develop the fact that this daily life is eminently urban. It is an urban everyday.

This also translates into a protest repertoire of urban character, which becomes urban culture (Colosso). It is no longer a question of halting the factory and production but rather the circulation of capital and people that is concentrated in large centers.

Se a retomada do espaço urbano aparece como objetivo dos protestos contra a tarifa, também se realiza como método, na prática dos manifestantes, que ocupam as ruas determinando diretamente seus fluxos e usos . . . *Nesse processo, as pessoas assumem coletivamente as rédeas da organização de seu próprio cotidiano.* (Movimento Passe Livre 16)

(If reclaiming urban space appears as the objective of fares protests, it also takes place as a method in the practice of the protesters who occupy the streets directly determining their flows and uses . . . *In this process, people collectively take the reins of the organization of their own daily lives.*)

This passage from Movimento Passe Livre (Free Pass Movement) could also be from an MTST booklet or the “Manual para travar uma avenida” (“Manual for blocking an avenue”), which was produced in 2015 by Mal Educado, a high school students’ collective from São Paulo. In all these movements, there is an understanding that cities are intersections of networks; some of them must be blocked for others to gain dimension and consistency.

There is yet another point linked to urban conditions. Since the press, professional and technical entities, NGOs, laboratories, and institutes producing data on reality are concentrated in large urban centers, it is impossible for decision centers to control information flows. In these centers, the powers that be fail to hide their errors and shortcomings no matter how hard they try—just as the authoritarian regimes of the last century did. Transparency and social circulation of data and information are inevitable. Narratives and communication channels multiply and, not by chance, media activists become a considerable political force. Two significant examples are Mídia Ninja and Jornalistas Livres.

These historical conditions are connected to another point. As the seats of the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches are in urban centers, the movements do not always need large masses but only clarity on which decision centers are involved in the agenda. They then put a *precise pressure* on the responsible bodies. Having “swarm intelligence” and a minimally stable organization is enough for the force to become sufficient to displace the competent authorities.¹¹

This is an old practice of housing, homeless, and landless movements. Perhaps in the times of the great factory strikes, it was a residual element, but now it becomes relevant. It is not by chance that similar actions were absorbed by other movements: in 2016, when high school students occupied

the Legislative Assembly of the State of São Paulo; in 2017, when several youths occupied the City Council to protest the cuts in the student free transit pass; and, particularly, when the Levante Popular da Juventude promoted *escracho* (bashing), an event in front of the house of then-mayor João Doria Junior to criticize him.

The Ecstasy of Living Together in the Open City

The urban repertoire of these recent movements carries along a universe of codes and practices. It approximates dispositions and affections that seem distant at first, such as pleasure and confrontation, resistance and inventiveness, subjective liberation, and collective care. Thus, critical knowledge and playfulness constellate in contagious aesthetic–political actions with great popular appeal. And these combinations have an intimate bond with the street, the quintessential public space. What we briefly describe here applies to youth movements such as Rua, Juntos, and Levante Popular da Juventude, but it also applies to the World March of Women (Marcha Mundial das Mulheres) and, to some extent, is absorbed by homeless movements.¹²

Filling resistance with festivity is not, in any way, removing the potency of the struggle, as it is interpreted by some austere critics. On the contrary, it means putting expansive affections into circulation, reconnecting bodily powers, and strengthening ties with each other and with the surroundings. These are the elements that make up the fusion of collective self-determination with which the youth movements move between the streets and organizations' meetings.

The struggle combined with festivity coheres militancy and overflows into urban life as both an expression of collective energy and an inscription of popular power in places of high visibility—streets, squares, but also city halls plenaries—which are unusual in their daily lives. Those subaltern subjects who used to experience the city in an estranged way, as “if it were not for us,” now feel that the city will need to make space for them or, what's more, open up to them entirely. The dancing struggle institutes practices and values that refer to another sociability that is more integrated, open, and inclusive, in which the subjects see themselves constantly permeated and touched by each other. In these collective actions, the approximation of bodies and the exchange of affection provide the institution with common narratives, which produces knowledge that does not separate from the action and movement of agglomerative insurgence, a binding insubjection.

Affections and emotions circulate quickly and bring everyone together in harmony, with fewer reservations than in an organization's membership

meeting and with less disagreement than in a debate. There is an expansive, non-logocentric power that surrounds bodies, interweaving them for a time after the end of the act. And because there is a yearning for that moment and that fabric to be maintained indefinitely, the acts are engendered full of exemplarity.

But what is the relationship between the dyad festivity–struggle and the streets? Both by principle and as a mark of the social imaginary, the street is the space for spontaneous interactions and popular encounter because it does not stratify people by income or by spending power. There are no walls on the street nor turnstiles. In addition, the street is the place that suits this explosion of libido triggered by such demonstrations. That is why being on the street in struggle puts the subjects in a different position in relation to the city.

Putting these affections into circulation brings politics closer to an experience of collective freedom, in which everyone is equal, without fear and without the need for distinction or demarcation of an individual space or property. In this way, it brings back a dimension of belonging to a community and a people, as well as a dimension of enchantment. Such emotions are fundamental for those who bet on grassroots solutions and create political poetics.

The moment of rising coincides with the moment when daily life becomes unacceptable and unreasonable. On the street, a drive takes shape, the drive for something that seemed unforeseen until then. What is yearned for is not right there, but it is closer, because there is a young, powerful, and collective body that has been set in motion for such an endeavor. In the act of rising, therefore, the subjects call, in a clamoring tone, for another world.

The festive spirit in the streets is not recent but holds a trace of earlier protests, such as May 1968 or the Paris Commune (1871), which were important events for Lefebvre (1968) and the Situationists. But in our context, it is important to underline noticeable transformations between the mobilizations of the post-redemocratization years and those that formed in the 2010s, especially post-June 2013, in Brazil. In acts called by union entities, large sound trucks are predominant and function as platforms. On the ground level, there are banners produced in print shops and balloons, and the militant public listens and applauds the leaders. In the acts summoned by the youth, manufacturing banners and T-shirts is already part of the process of mobilization and assemblage. The sound speakers are portable and come at ground level, or, at times, they are not even used. The street is not only a place of protest, but also a place of collective performance, which features the desire to remove authorities and to establish another city.

The musical presence remains fundamental in the form of percussion playing, the *batucada*. Drumming functions as an aggregating element, from

the rehearsals to that moment on the street, when it intensifies the agitation of the present collectivity and, not rarely, infects passersby who share these codes rooted in Brazilian popular culture. As in carnival parties, the militants follow the batucada but with marches that parody pop songs and express themes from the agenda in question. It is difficult to deny that there is skill and inventiveness that are superior to the scene of the sound truck with ready-made banners and slogans. In this generation, there is also a renewed degree of spontaneity and improvisation.

In some of these acts, the use of a microphone is not required for the chants, following the outraged Spanish and Occupy movements. From these references also came the hand signals, which show approval during leadership speeches. These gestures usually replace the applause because they do not make noise. In a school students' act, for example, these codes are prevalent.

In the General Strike act in April 2017, which was attended by more than one-hundred thousand people in the city of São Paulo alone, the difference in language codes became clearer. Trade union forces in sound trucks, balloons, and ready-made banners were spatially mixed in Largo da Batata with these other, more recent characters in defense of lost rights. In this case, a generational difference did not prevent convergence in action.¹³

Knowledge and Collective Action: Popular College Preparatory Courses for Peripheral Youth

With the 2016 parliamentary coup, the correlation of forces shifts much more favorably to the conservative field. The rise of Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency in 2018 drew on his belligerent stance, which was characterized by trivializing democratic debates and pulverizing toxic affections, fragmenting the social body, and promoting misunderstandings and paramilitary violence. For the movements, that means real and higher risks to their militants. It becomes urgent to emphasize less conflicting methodologies of political organization, which do not prevent them from being in large demonstrations but guarantee more continuous work in the territories and in contact with the young public. Therefore, this last topic is attentive to popular college preparatory courses, which are spaces capable of shuffling moments of instruction, organization, and struggle and which can be understood as "instruction in action."¹⁴

It is a fact that, from 2003 to 2015, Brazil experienced a wide and contradictory growth in higher education offerings, with a significant increase in the number of universities and federal institutes at the same time as the

formation of private conglomerates at the forefront of precarious education.¹⁵ In addition, the black movement's struggle for affirmative action policies has made substantial progress. With racial quotas becoming federal law in 2012, the possibility of higher education enters the horizon of expectation for many younger people, both as a promise of better life and the possibility of transformation ("Seleção de alunos"). Among the many changes resulting from this progress, a significant one was the growth of the so-called "cursinhos populares" (popular preparatory courses) for low-income young students from public schools aiming for admission to university. In São Paulo, there have been courses of similar profile since the 1950s, but they multiplied in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

There are popular courses in the occupations of MTST and the Housing Struggle Front (Frente de Luta pela Moradia). Several forces of the student movement participate in the creation of courses through their organizations or through students' unions. There are also courses in churches that stem from Liberation theology, such as the Igreja do Carmo in Itaquera. The Federal University of ABC (UFABC), for example, mobilizes teaching staff for a preparatory school that offered 627 seats in 2018.¹⁶ With the popularization of higher education, there are not only more young people interested but also a greater number of teachers involved.

These courses have a preparatory character, but through education on reality, young people review their own history, reorient their approach to daily adversities, forge forms of belonging that are different from those of their family and their previous schools, revise traditional values, and constitute new bonds and collective action repertoire.¹⁷ With the explosion of urban movements after June 2013, the relationship between knowledge and action that permeates these residual spaces in the metropolis of São Paulo is intensified. The overflowing of spirits around the right to the city also reached these subjects.

Emancipa is an important case. The organization defines itself as a network of courses, as well as a "social movement for popular education" (*Rede Emancipa*). It started in 2007, and, ten years later, it is estimated to have served more than twenty thousand young people. The opening in 2018, in an inaugural lecture held in Vale do Anhangabaú, was attended by five thousand people.

Uneafro has a similar profile and also successfully combines knowledge production and collective action, based on the interchange among race, class, and gender in the urban space (*Uneafro*). Founded in 2009, it is characterized as a movement for popular education. It is not only organized in units but in "community nuclei," with different profiles: some are focused on university entrance exams, others are thematic in focus, and yet others

are linked to the production of culture and sports. To optimize operation, they are also divided into work groups (GTs) and form a council.

For different reasons, educators empathize with their adolescent students who venture out on these uncertain paths. This can be seen, for example, in the recurring fact that, after going through university, many students return to the preparatory course as educators and sometimes coordinators. It is a clear desire to share the opportunity they were given and the right they were guaranteed. But, it is also a desire to be *an example* for these young people—that is, to show it is possible to overcome difficulties and to jump over the walls that were historically placed before them. This exemplary action has the potential to reinforce the students' odds, as well as those of the educators themselves.

It refortifies students because knowledge gains a strongly mimetic character to the extent that youths draw on not only the content of lessons but also behavioral and even visual references. For instance, the young black woman who, because of a dominant culture, straightens her own hair, sees in the eloquent teacher's afro hair the beauty of black people's natural hair. The decision to embrace natural hair is an act of self-acceptance and non-submission to norms that are historically imposed by the white ruling class. Moving forward, we will see more of this affinity between exemplarity and militancy as an internal weaving of movements and organizations.

While providing this benefit to the students, the educators are also benefiting themselves because that is the space where they deposit and perceive the feeling of hope that is necessary to continue practicing in education. Analyses of this type of interaction tend to be impoverished if they are focused on individuals because it is a type of relationship in which the subject passes into another subject, such that common goods are produced. These goods do not become the property of an individual, excluding another, when they are shared; they are actually multiplied by the act of sharing.¹⁸ The common good generates collective abundance.

The experience of dedicating oneself to one's studies, because it requires a desire that persists in time, provides important elements for a militant spirit. In these spaces, studying by choice means cultivating an internal discipline capable of putting immediate desires and inevitable fluctuations on hold in the name of a greater good in the future. It is worth remembering that a good such as knowledge is never just for the self, but it is a good that multiplies when it is shared. Such traces of a persistent desire are, in and of themselves, countercultural virtues in a consumer society, and they are essential to the construction of a movement that intends to survive in time by not only being disruptive, but also by combining insurgency and social construction.

However, such experiences are constantly challenged. Young people need discipline to access the university and confidence to overcome previous deficiencies, but that is not everything when it comes to dedication. Quite often, the underemployment that might give them more autonomy at home results in fatigue, which is added to the time and cost of commuting between home, work, and the preparatory school.¹⁹

These subjects constitute urban communities that are spaces of hope, which reintegrate knowledge and action. This translates into their participation in campaigns, acts, and collective manifestations, often seen carrying objects with the identity of their preparatory courses, such as T-shirts and banners. For example, Uneafro is a sure presence and a prominent group in the acts that occur every year on November 20, Black Awareness Day (Dia da Consciência Negra).

These subjects make up the urban youth who become close through generational connections and who come together without an organizational unit, eventually forming joint actions. From these networks, new community leaders emerge. These leaders later migrate to other movements and envision how to occupy other spaces of public life that were, until recently, confined to white men from the wealthier classes. The rise of these subjects means turning over turnstiles and piercing through the private enclaves of the city.

Discussion

By analyzing landmarks of the urban culture in São Paulo between 2011 and 2019, we have highlighted the importance of major mobilizations that were generated by a plethora of forces without unity but with a heterogeneity that allowed for confluences through generational connections and a shared perception about the negative impacts of austerity policies, cultural conservatism, and urban inequalities. While we were not able to properly include many of these phenomena in this article, they share a climate of ideas and feelings of this urban culture.

A true feminist spring has taken place. The #EleNão movement in 2018 was very expressive and central to the maturation of this process, whose values and practices percolated through social life and behavior. The racial agenda is present in all youth organizations, and the black movement is a protagonist on several fronts.

The central argument of the article is that recent social movements, organized by the young women and men who grew up and live in a highly urbanized world, have the city not only as an agenda but also an instrument in their action repertoires. We've highlighted some elements, such as the

tactics of blocking circulation and requiring mobility, the precise pressure with swarm intelligence, the aesthetic–political actions of great popular appeal, and the popular college preparatory courses that shuffle formation, organization, and struggle. These subjects experience and understand class conflict, which has gender and ethno-racial dimensions, through urban daily life. This translates into urban forms of “constituting a class” and imagining a free and radically democratic society.

It is a fact that, after 2016, few of these massive demonstrations achieved institutional victories. However, they certainly marked many subjects and politicized many others. Organizational accumulations have been created, new leaders have emerged, and, precisely because of adversity, more generous dialogues have been opened. These recent forces have replaced horizons of hope, which are necessary but not sufficient in the face of such an adverse historical moment. There is a path to be built toward a new project of society that is attentive to the possibilities and conflicts of cities.

Notes

1. We resort to Mannheim’s 1952 concept of generation and, more specifically, “generational connection.” The latter helps us understand the extent to which a social group can be marked by a collective experience so that it builds common meanings but does not become a unitary block, allowing it to remain in close, yet diverse positions.
2. What we mention in short here is abundantly analyzed in the works of Laval and Dardot, as well as in the works of Brown, whose concept of “de-democratization” is quite elucidative.
3. In a more recent article, Tatagiba and Galvão reinforce this idea with new data. The number of mobilizations, which was already considerable in 2011, was 140 percent higher in 2012 (70). In this survey, Tatagiba and Galvão highlight that the three largest categories were: “workers,” linked to the trade union movements, especially those in education, manufacturing, commerce, and services (31 percent); “grass-roots and residents,” which includes groups linked to associations of residents, landless and homeless organizations, and community movements for improvements (19 percent); and students (11.9 percent). This also meant that the three main topics of demands were “government and political system” (25.2 percent), which, as we know, was the same agenda that later divided the country; “wages and working conditions” (17.6 percent); and “living conditions in cities” (16.5 percent).
4. See Singer.
5. The term “Lulism” was created by political scientist Singer to describe the set of policies marked by class conciliation and gradual reforms.

6. Report by the National Public Transport Association shows that the car is responsible for only one third of the trips, but investment in this mode of transport is eight times higher than in public transport (*Relatório Geral 2016*).
7. Perhaps the most misguided assessment is that June was the beginning of the impeachment process. A vast literature shows that this association is reasonable but ignores fundamental points. To cite a few examples: it is worth reading the article written in the moment by Maricato, which warns about urban conditions. Colosso discusses many of these topics and examines other urban issues related to the political scene. Singer thoroughly analyzes the changes in the correlation of forces and the displacements of the actors in institutional politics at the national level.
8. In an interview, a student points out that, after 2013, “as pessoas se apropriaram de como fazer um ato, do porquê de fazer um ato, da facilidade de fazer um ato, travar uma rua” (Campos and Medeiros 71) (people took advantage of how to protest, why protest, the ease of protesting, blocking a street).
9. See Campos et al.
10. For a few examples, see Abranches and Solano.
11. We can understand “swarm intelligence” as the collective behavior of a decentralized and self-organized system. The term is used in biological studies, computer theories, and in political science.
12. We speak here of youth movements, in respect to the self-definition they share. “Youth” for these groups is not just the age or the time spent at university as a student. “Youth” and student life are a moment in life away from direct control of the family when they are able to experience new interpersonal situations and other existential horizons. Therefore, such a moment brings the condition of open possibilities for the transformation of forms of life. In this sense, these subjects share the notion that “youth” is a renewing force. It is a force that dynamizes social life, which can break—not without conflicts—with what has been given to them and which has the potential to build, if not a new world, appropriate spaces to build it. Their distance to their previous circles of sociability is also important for the impulse to socialize within the new circles. One author who contributes to this interpretative key is Foracchi.
13. Largo da Batata is a big square in the expanded center of São Paulo, which was transformed in the gentrification process, but which remains central for the peripheral population and political movements.
14. In Brazil only a fraction of the young population is admitted to universities, which gives them an elitist character. Cursinhos (college preparatory courses) are a very common resource for students preparing for the entrance exam, but most charge high tuitions. On the other hand, cursinhos populares try to guarantee that students from popular classes, low-income families, and the periphery have access to university. These courses are based on the principles of popular education, usually organized by grassroots and community movements, and mostly offered by volunteers.
15. See Mercadante et al.

16. Racial quotas were established by federal law 12.711/2012. This and other inclusion policies are analyzed in Feres et al. and Mesquita.
17. The understanding of popular courses as spaces for the formation of knowledge and action is already in Santos. It is also worth reading Saffiotti.
18. Although there are divergences, on this point they agree with theorists, such as Negri, as well as Laval and Dardot.
19. An interesting case analysis of the current profile of these “student-workers,” their families, and their conflicts, both internally and with higher education institutions, is found in Bonaldi.

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