

DRAFT.

**THE BRAZILIAN “JUNE” REVOLUTION:  
URBAN STRUGGLES, COMPOSITE ARTICULATIONS AND NEW CLASS  
ANALYSIS<sup>1</sup>**

In Kalb, Don and Massimiliano, Mollona (eds.)  
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The June Revolution that shook Brazil in 2013 took everybody by surprise. It started in Sao Paulo as a small gathering protesting a looming rise in the cost of public transport, and in two weeks it spread across 400 cities and towns, bringing millions of people (6 percent of the national population) into the streets and forcing President Dilma Rousseff to start a process of constitutional reform. For many political observers this “movement of movements” was essentially a new form of working-class articulation of diverse social forces including the urban poor, traditional workers and the middle classes. Sociologist Göran Therborn (2012) reads the June revolution as an example of a new kind of socialism spreading in Latin America based on “ideological bricolage” rather than on clear-cut class distinctions and the assumption of the vanguard<sup>2</sup> of the industrial working class as per the Eurocentric model of socialism. But, are these bricolaged working-class formations truly “atypical” in relationship to the Western model? The very idea of a typical Western industrial working class is problematic since, historically, this has been consistently fragmented in uneven patterns of labor relations, ranging from wages, slavery and informal labor, kinship and cooperativism.<sup>3</sup> Besides, the re-emergent communism in Spain and Greece is based on similar cross-sectional alliances and ideological meshes – although in their marginal socioeconomic position within Europe, these countries are hardly typical of how capitalism articulates itself in the center.

Ethnographic comparisons of working-class struggles are difficult to draw. Elsewhere<sup>4</sup> I have stressed some differences in the way the industrial proletariat articulates its struggles in Brazil and the United Kingdom, based on the industrial fieldwork I conducted in steel towns in these two countries. In particular, the Brazilian experience of labor struggle was influenced by three factors: (1) a reduced public sphere, (2) a populist consensus that produced class emancipation with little class struggle and (3) the articulation of class struggle as anticolonialist struggle. Particularly, the historical convergence of anticolonialism and anticapitalism led to cross-sectional collaborations between civic, rural and labor movements that toppled the military rule in the 1980s and later propelled the Workers Party (PT) to power. As Aricò notes in *Marx and Latin America* (2013), these anticolonialist cross-sectional

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<sup>1</sup> This article greatly benefitted from a conversation that I had with my colleagues Marco Santana of Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Don Kalb (CEU University) and those who joined the panel on urban mobilization at the EASA conference in Tallinn.

<sup>2</sup> Therborn describes them as “drawing support from many layers of society – the urban poor, people of indigenous or African descent, progressive element of the middle strata – and in which industrial workers are rarely in the vanguard” (2012: 16).

<sup>3</sup> Van der Linden (2008)

<sup>4</sup> Mollona (2014)

alliances negated the classical Marxist<sup>5</sup> hypothesis of the vanguard of the industrial proletariat leading to the “new social unionism” that has been broadly documented in subaltern labor studies.

In Brazil, it was the legacy of slavery that brought together anticapitalist and anticolonial struggles. Fighting for a freedom that encompassed both social demands and labor demands, slaves infused the labor movement of the early nineteenth century with powerful support structures, forms of struggles and civic consciousness. But boundaries between freedom and slavery continue to be fluid in Brazil. Outside the small and privileged enclave of formal workers, a vast universe of bonded and slave labor still exists. Besides, as in past forms of slavery, the civil liberties of the Brazilian poor are heavily restricted. As a result, economic and civic struggles – or, to paraphrase Nancy Frazer, struggles for “recognition” and struggles for “redistribution” – go hand in hand. For instance, women, indigenous and black consciousness in Brazil are central elements of class struggle and, according to sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, of a radically different southern epistemology of socialism that combines (cultural) difference and (economic) equality. But as Eurocentric as the theory of convergence appears to be, there is widespread skepticism in the idea that the socialist regimes of Latin America are immune to the forces of neoliberalism. After all, did not the ex-metalworker-turned-president Lula da Silva subscribe to the neoliberal dogma of deindustrialization, financialization and tertiarization, in cahoots with the industrial working class and at the expenses of precarious and informal workers and the rural poor?

In this chapter I attempt to root these theoretical debates in the context of the struggles taking place in Rio de Janeiro in the summer of 2013, arguing for a new kind of class analysis located at the intersection of anthropology, urban geography and political economy. The deindustrialization, deregulation and financialization of the world economy have turned “global cities” into invisible factories where the dynamics of class is more complicated than in traditional, factory-based scenarios. Besides, capitalist relations attach themselves to places unevenly and invisibly, through the hidden folds of urban infrastructures and the complex politics of city planning. Take, for instance, the recent struggle of the dockworker unions, low-income communities and social movements against the development of the Olympic Village and the megatourist “marvelous port” (*porto maravilha*) in Rio de Janeiro. Up until the end of the nineteenth century, the port of Rio was one of the epicenters of the Atlantic slave trade and a hotbed of radicalism and rebellion. Living in the same squats, *cortiços* and collective houses surrounding the port, slaves and dockworkers struck together against the same masters. In 2012 the municipality bought from the federal government five million square meters of public land surrounding the port and sold it to private developers. A few months later, it evicted local residents and closed down primary schools, samba schools and community organizations to make space for the Olympic Village and the tourist port. Civic movements, dockworkers and low-income residents joined forces to stop the development of the “wonderful port,” although the gentrification of the area continues. This struggle may resemble similar anti-gentrification movements that are spreading throughout Europe (see, for instance, Manuela in this volume). In fact, Saskia Sassen argues that the old North–South and

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<sup>5</sup> In spite of these Marxists claims, Aricò argues, in his discussion of the Irish question, Marx did acknowledge the centrality of anticolonial struggles in the peripheries for working-class struggles in the centers.

East–West divide has been replaced by a generalized logic of dispossession and urban segregation coalescing around global cities such as Rio.

But as Mike Davis shows so well, the slummification of the South, of which Rio is such an iconic example, followed a different trajectory of urban development than those of Euro-American neoliberalism, based on an explosive mixture of industrialization and extreme urban segregation. The geography of the slum has produced a political landscape marked by three strong features. First, in urban peripheries the de-territorialization of capital has been so deep that the urban poor are going through the same experience already lived by the rural poor in the 1970s – occupying land, organizing close to the territory, in small units and on a day-to-day basis. The convergence between urban and rural poor – for instance, the convergence between homeless and landless movements in Brazil – has created a new peasantry whose political force has to be reckoned with. Besides, political actions in urban peripheries take micro, dispersed and invisible forms. For instance, Bayat describes urban struggles in Cairo as an “everyday encroachment of the ordinary,” Holston argues that the self-construction of houses in poor neighborhoods is a form of civic struggle and Zibechi emphasizes the subterranean and dispersed forms of resistance in the mobilizations in El Alto and Buenos Aires.

Second, urban peripheries have informal economies and family-based micro-entrepreneurship, which may empower marginal social constituencies. Urban-based forms of Petty Commodity Production (PCP) differ from those traditionally analyzed in anthropology and development studies.<sup>6</sup> If the fusion of management and ownership in rural context often leads to self-exploitation, in small-scale urban contexts it may empower ethnic communities as in the cases of El Alto (Zibechi), the worker-owned factories in Buenos Aires (Sitrin) and the urban cooperatives in Sao Paulo (Singer). On the other hand, it is disingenuous to cast the informal economy and PCP as forms of “people’s capitalism”<sup>7</sup> or to romanticize the economic mongrelization<sup>8</sup> of cities in the South – the other side of Bauman’s dark vision of the Brazilianization of Europe. The emphasis here is on the new forms of cooperativism that are emerging from the urban peripheries of the South.

Third, in the South and especially in Latin America, the urban poor, peasants and precarious workers led powerful “Right to the City Movements” fighting urban segregation and land grabs through commoning and grassroots participation such as the urban land committees in Caracas and Cochabamba or self-managed neighborhoods in Argentina and Brazil. These movements, fighting for urban democracy, were originally independent from party politics<sup>9</sup> and were only later incorporated in the socialist governments of Morales, Chavez and Lula. Yet, again, are not these urban struggles for the commons the same kind of working-class “commoning” described by Susser (2013) and Kalb (2014) for the United States and Europe? There has always been a great deal of overlap between the struggles of the urban poor, those of civic movements and those of the industrial or postindustrial

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<sup>6</sup> These tend to be integrated in global commodity chains, located in rural context and open to simple patterns of proletarianization led by male elderly (Smart and Smart 2005; Kalb 2014).

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, the proposal of formalizing the informal economy of the South made by Robert Neuwirth (2013).

<sup>8</sup> I am using the term of Merrifield (2013).

<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of these contemporary urban movements in Brazil, see Santana and Mollona (2013).

proletariat. In order to understand these entanglements, I will now look at how capitalist relations of production encroached on the urban texture of Rio de Janeiro, generating uneven moments of docility, resilience, rupture and contestation.

### THE “EVENT”

The June revolution started when the Free Fare Movement (*Movimento Passe Livre – MPL*) led a demonstration against the impending rise in public transport fares. The MPL emerged from the student movement in 2000 and brought together the Workers’ Party (PT), students, anarchists and antiglobalization organizations. The MPL has been at the forefront of the struggle for free transport in Brazil ever since. This small protest by a few thousand demonstrators quickly escalated due to violent repression by the military police. This led to a second phase of the struggle, which reached its apex between June 17 and 20 when the movement counted hundreds of thousands people. By now the demands had widened and included health and education and opposition to Constitutional Amendment Proposal (PEC) 37, which would restrict the attorney general’s power to carry out independent investigations, de facto eliminating an important anticorruption tool. The slogans focused on the corrupted practices of the PT in government, once an icon of utopianism and of people’s power. The recent conviction of several PT members, including from the top echelons of the party from the previous administration (known as the *mensalão* scandal) cast a heavy shadow over the Rousseff administration too. It was especially the government’s unethical pro-business stance in dealing with the planned sports mega-events – the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016 – that generated the most outrage. As for Argentina and Spain a few months earlier, the slogans did not touch specific issues or parties but rather the whole political system – “all that exists” (*contra tudo que aí está*).

Symbolically, the movement unfolded in the same streets of the city center – Candelaria, Avenida Rio Branco and Cinelândia – where the anti-dictatorship movement, led by the PT, marched in the 1980s. On June 20, one million people marched in Avenida Vargas, the modernist avenue that was bulldozed through Rio’s imperial cityscape to celebrate Vargas’s revolutionary dictatorship in the 1940s. As in other contemporary mobilizations, the Brazilian movement relied heavily on social media (Facebook and Twitter) to organize, in parallel with the mainstream demonstration, horizontal gatherings, flash mobs and direct actions targeting corporate and state buildings across the city. In this initial phase, traditional labor movements such as the PT and the trade union confederation CUT were absent, whereas more radical fringes such as the trade union confederation CONLUTAS and especially bus drivers, mass transit employees and auto- and metalworkers supported them. In spite (or because) of their traditionally conservative stance, mainstream media and TV heavily covered and even explicitly supported the antigovernment demonstrations. But, at the apex of its strength, when President Rousseff reversed the transport fare increase and proposed a constituent assembly devoted to political reform, more stringent punishments for corruption and investments in transport, health and education, the movement was furiously repressed. In the favela da Maré, ten people lost their lives in a confrontation between the police and local residents. More than one hundred activists were jailed. As if a result of the violence unleashed by the police and the army on that night, the protest entered into a third phase. Demands became more dispersed and contradictory across a wide range of issues including gay rights, the legalization of drugs, abortion and religious issues, inflation,

public spending and privatization, traffic tolls and the national contract of public sector lecturers and bankers. For Saad-Filho, the movement was now “out of control,” fragmented and radicalized and captured by a strong anti-left middle class.<sup>10</sup> In this phase, the traditional labor movement entered the political struggle. On July 11 – the National Day of Struggle, organized by the PT – CUT and eight trade union confederations made traditional labor demands, such as the reduction of the working week from 44 to 40 hours, increase in pensions and opposition to Lei 4330, a radical program of labor deregulation<sup>11</sup> proposed by the government. This radical about-turn of the CUT, which had so far supported Lei 4330 in Parliament, generated speculations that the federation was trying to co-opt the movement at a moment of internal fragmentation. A more optimistic view holds that this was a moment of convergence between the “old” and “new” left.

Ruy Braga (2014) argues that the June events were the culmination of a series of workers’ actions, especially of public workers (lecturers, bankers) and service workers (teleworkers), against the neoliberal turn the government had taken since 2008. For Saad-Filho, it was a sign of the rise of the middle classes that had been systematically penalized by the PT in power. Besides, strong regional and municipal forces against the federal government were at play, especially after the municipal elections in 2012, when almost all state capitals elected opposition mayors. More generally, the popular discontent seemed to stem from the contradictions of neo-developmentalism (in the age of late capitalism) in its combination of income redistribution, labor deregulation, especially in the service sector, and cuts in public spending. These contradictions emerged with force after the Brazilian economy started to slow down in 2012. The Rousseff government responded swiftly to the mounting criticism against the government. Already at the end of June, the president had proposed a national “pact” to reduce corruption and to expand public services, to be funded in part by the sovereign oil fund. Later, Rousseff proposed to call a plebiscite to reform the electoral and party legislations and radically boost basic health services. At least on paper, the democratic revolution had succeeded.

## **SCALES OF CAPITALIST DISPOSSESSION IN THE CITY**

But how did a brooding political discontent become a full-fledged urban revolution? Some structural urban factors, including the political economy of the city, need to be considered. Reflecting the dynamics of foreign capital accumulation and developmentalism, Brazil’s shift from the coffee economy to industry was marked by a spatial reorganization from Rio de Janeiro to Sao Paulo (Mello 1982). As a result, Rio de Janeiro is now overdependent on real estate and tourism, sectors that are vulnerable to foreign speculative capital and inherently associated with high levels of informal and exploitative labor. Tourism, real estate and finance rely on armies of cleaners, gardeners, nannies, porters, receptionists, butlers, drivers, sex workers, waiters, shopkeepers, street vendors, builders and rubbish recyclers commuting daily to the wealthy suburbs in the south part of the city from favelas and poor

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<sup>10</sup> Writing about Sao Paulo, he reports that “in Paulista Avenue on Friday evening, three demonstrations took place with different demands and in absence of any point of contact, they did not engage with each other” (Saad-Filho 2013: 666).

<sup>11</sup> The proposal would allow companies to outsource core workers and hence to operate with a workforce of zero full-time or permanent workers, relying instead on a reserve pool of workers provided by “contact centers” – labor brokers and temporary hiring agencies.

neighborhoods in the north. But most people are excluded from these sectors and survive on even more informal and illegal work. Perhaps more than any other Brazilian cities, the “wonderful city” is an explosive mix of extreme wealth and deprivation – of drug gangs and finance barons, favelas and luxurious real estate; of ancient aristocracies and brutal police; of pollution, infrastructural decay and stunning natural beauty. In the past few years, thanks to the dealings of the powerful governor of Rio de Janeiro, Sergio Cabral, investments in urban infrastructures and real estate boomed in Rio, accompanied by processes of gentrification and forced relocations of poor neighborhoods – often dressed up as measures of police pacification. In this already cacophonous socioeconomic context, the following powerful global, national and regional processes converged in the city at the time of the protest, magnifying it and taking it well beyond the demonstrators’ original intentions.

### ***(1) The organization of three sport mega-events***

The protest was ignited by what was perceived as an unjust and racist planning of three major sport events – the Confederation Cup, the World Cup and the Olympic Games – to be held in Rio between 2012 and 2016. Discontent started to arise in 2012 when the newly formed Olympic Committee announced its plans of infrastructural investments in the city. Transport and housing improvements focused mainly on Barra da Tijuca, a high-income area with a mix of multinational businesses and middle-class housing representing only 4.76 percent of Rio de Janeiro resident, while bus and low-cost train networks for low-income families were to be radically scaled down. In 2012, there were several small protests against the bourgeoisification and “whitening” of Brazilian football, reflected in the steep decline of live spectatorship and increase in tickets prices. When the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) set the price of football tickets above the financial possibility of even middle-class fans, discontent turned into anger, fueled further by revelations of FIFA’s corrupted deals. As the FIFA scandal spiraled out of control, uncovering global networks of bribery and corruption, the institution was revealed to have been granted extra-judicial power to preventively arrest people suspected of violence. For the *carioca* football fans, vastly black and poor, FIFA came to signify the arrogant and unaccountable power of international institutions controlled by rich nations.

### ***(2) Increased military repression***

In order to enforce the plans of FIFA and the Olympic committee, the municipality stepped up evictions and police occupations of favelas,<sup>12</sup> also known as Police Pacification Units (UPP). UPPs are officially aimed at reducing the drug factions’ armed violence and community control. In practice, they empower corrupt state militias and clear the ground for private developments and gentrification of favelas in the rich, southern part of the city. Poor favelas are not targeted for UPP, or they are targeted only when they offer some potential for market expansion.<sup>13</sup> In 2012, a leaked report showed that the Olympic Committee had already completed hundreds of forced relocations in the area of the old port, for developing transport and touristic infrastructures for the forthcoming events. Moreover, the municipality gained additional power of forced relocation after UNESCO nominated it a World Heritage

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<sup>12</sup> See also Charlotte Livingstone, “Armed Peace: Militarization of Rio de Janeiro’s Favelas for the World Cup,” *Anthropology Today* 30: 4, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank, *Bringing the State Back into the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro*, 2014.

City. Thousands of families, samba schools, *quilombos* communities, indigenous centers and squats located nearby Maracanã Stadium were forcibly relocated by the police, following the example set by Olympic committees in other cities.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the special bodies Security Force for Mega Events, Security for Tourism and Special Force for Order were created especially for the occasion. These paramilitary bodies were given special powers, including that of holding guns, preventive detention and destruction of identification documents to curb fans' violence. But in fact, they were mainly deployed to disperse homeless from the city center or to join the UPP. The pacification of favelas and of the city slowly blurred into each other. On June 20, the "lawless Friday," the armored tank used by the special police unit to invade favelas was used to disperse the demonstration. Public teachers gathering outside the Parliament in protest against the proposed reduction of the national wage were cordoned off and violently dispersed. The municipal police, with the help of military personnel trained in urban warfare, attacked street vendors in the center and around Maracanã Stadium, as Law 11 had made street selling and advertising around stadiums illegal.<sup>15</sup> After an officer was shot dead during a protest in March, special forces stormed the Complexo da Maré, killing ten people, at least two of them bystanders. It also transpired that the Navy had installed ballistic missiles on the rooftops by Maracanã Stadium.

### ***(3) The National Commission of Truth (CNV)***

Perhaps in normal circumstances, the violence of the police may have passed unnoticed. But these heavy repressive measures coincided with public debates about the military regime and about Brazil's unfinished transition to democracy generated by the work of the National Commission of Truth (CNV). The CNV was established in 2011 to explore various aspects of repression and corruption during dictatorship, whose epicenters were Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Especially during the "leaden years" of the 1970s, the military's Department of Information (DOI) assaulted, tortured, killed and kidnapped thousands of militants in these cities. In June, when the military police moved its armored tank from the favelas to the center and beat up and jailed hundreds of demonstrators, anti-dictatorship slogans and photos emerged from everywhere. Connections between past and present forms of state repression were made. A graffiti "no to dictatorship" emerged on the state security department's new image center building. The Legislative Assembly was stormed. MPs inside the building were inundated by text messages reading "Cabral dictator" or "happy 1968." Thousands of photos superimposing street fights in 1968 and the present demonstration were distributed outside the building. But as well as mobilizing progressive forces, the ghost of dictatorship created a state of generalized fear and mounting speculation of an imminent military coup, especially after the police and the far right were revealed to have infiltrated the demonstration and were involved in violent actions. Is it possible, as Saad-Filho argues, that magnified by the media, the fear of an imminent collapse of democracy brought to the fore the moderate anticorruption and antigovernment agenda of the middle class?

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<sup>14</sup> In 2007, the UN-funded Centre for Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) concluded that over the past twenty years, the Olympic Games have forced two million evictions. The Olympics were listed as one of the top causes of displacement and real estate inflation in the world.

<sup>15</sup> Law 11 gave to FIFA exclusive selling, advertising and distribution rights over the World Cup.

#### ***(4) Regional politics and the infamous story of Governor Cabral***

The governor of Rio de Janeiro, Sergio Cabral, was a skilled politician who succeeded in creating a powerful regional block against the federal government. Cabral reached an apex of popularity in 2011 when, with a coalition of businesses, parties, municipalities, unions and NGOs, he organized “the oil rebellion” against the federal government, forcing Dilma Rousseff to increase Rio’s stakes in oil royalties. When he announced he would run for the presidency in 2014, Cabral stood a very good chance of winning. But, at the time of the demonstration, Cabral’s good friend, developer Norberto Odebrecht (who had donated R\$200 million to Cabral’s electoral campaign two years earlier), won several major bids for developing the Olympic Village. In addition, Cabral had taken big cuts on deals he brokered with global hoteliers and constructions groups – Hyatt, Hilton and DELTA – and with national crony capitalists. He was also revealed to have owned seven helicopters, which he used to transport nannies and his children’s friends and even to walk the dog. Suddenly, Cabral, Edoardo Paes (the mayor of Rio) and by extension their PMDB party, became symbols of national corruption. During “Occupy Cabral,” hundreds of people camped outside the governor’s mansion in the affluent Leblon area for several weeks, demanding Cabral’s resignation and persecution for corruption and misuse of public funds. In a dramatic announcement on public television, looking weak and defeated, Cabral resigned, pleading the occupants to leave him alone. But this moral campaign against the PMDB served the purposes of the right-wing coalition, which used it to bring down the PT/PMDB governmental coalition.

### **FORCES OF LABOR**

In a recent *Financial Times* interview, President Rousseff declared her intention to “transform Brazil into a middle-class population.”<sup>16</sup> If sociologist Saad-Filho<sup>17</sup> is right to claim that the June revolution was essentially a middle-class phenomenon, then the president failed in her goal. Saad-Filho links the fierce opposition by the middle classes against the government to its policies of income redistribution, poverty reduction and expansion of citizenship, which radically reduced their privileges and economic power. Besides, Lula’s appointment of trade unionists, activists and NGO cadres to the federal government effectively changed the social composition of the state and aligned it more with the interests of the masses.<sup>18</sup> In this optic, the revolutionary events of June reflect both the political isolation of the PT and the democratic accountability of the government vis-à-vis the masses. Sociologist Ruy Braga gives a different reading of the June events. For Braga, they were not a middle-class phenomenon but rather a movement of the “precariat” – made up mainly of those young unskilled and semi-skilled workers who gained formal employment when the PT was in power but who now suffered from low wage, high turnover and exploitative working conditions. In its first mandate, the PT government increased minimum wage and workers’ welfare and formalized the labor market, also thanks to the favorable economic context. During the second mandate, starting in 2008, Lula introduced labor market flexibility and cut welfare expenses. Of the employment

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<sup>16</sup> Joe Leahy, “FT Interview: Dilma Rousseff,” *Financial Times*, 3 October 2012.

<sup>17</sup> He sees in the demonstrations “evidence of the unremitting rejections of former President Lula, President Dilma Rousseff and the PT by large segment of the upper and middle classes and the mainstream media” (2014: 661).

<sup>18</sup> 2014: 229



created during the Lula and Rousseff administrations, 60 percent was taken by workers between 18 and 24 years old, and 94 percent of them are on an income of 1.5 times the minimum wage,<sup>19</sup> just above the poverty level.<sup>20</sup> The precariat's discontent was directed against the PT, a workers' party that was ignoring the needs of the very working class from which it originated. But there is also another explanation for such a high proportion of extremely low-paid jobs in Brazil. Since 2000, 90 percent of the jobs created during the Lula administration pay less than 1.5 times the minimum wage but nonetheless have led to a sharp decline of poverty rates in the country.<sup>21</sup>

So the term “precariat” captures well the current conditions of a working class pulled into different directions, which consists both of formal workers whose jobs have been precarized and of the poor and previously unemployed who just got onto the job ladder. Yet the term does not reflect the complex class composition of the movement, which included the following social forces:

(1) The **MPL**. Originated from within the student movement, the group has a strong collectivist and anticapitalist agenda. Its decentralized, horizontal and pluralistic ethos, forms of direct action<sup>22</sup> and anti-institutional politics are rooted in the tradition of the anti-dictatorship movement of the 1980s, which included the PT now in power. The MPL is leaderless, and decisions are taken by a general assembly based on consensus. Besides the free fare campaign, the MPL opposed the high level of infrastructural investments in rich areas and the building of expensive stadiums. It asked for better sanitation, medical care, public safety and transport in poor areas.

(2) **Precarious public university lecturers** who had already led a series of successful strikes in 2012 asking for wage increases and improved working conditions in line with those of private universities

(3) An umbrella of **left-to-the-center parties and unions**, such as the Socialist Party (PSOL), the Unified Socialist Workers Party (PSTU) and the industrial confederation CONLUTAS, recently split from the mainstream industrial confederation CUT. CONLUTAS had the important role of bringing together the traditional working class (auto- and metalworkers) and civic organizations advocating both on labor issues – mainly against the precarization of service work – and on identity and equality struggles. For instance, it supported the protests by LGTB organizations against the grotesque parliamentary proposal to give psychiatric assistance to gay people.

(4) **Anarchist groups** such as the Black Blocs, the Independent Popular Front of Rio de Janeiro (FIP) and the Popular Revolutionary Student Movement (MEPR) consisting mainly of “precarious” university students working during the day and studying at night. These anarchist and anti-parliamentary groups and the radical left parliamentary coalition clashed continuously and often violently.<sup>23</sup> Mainstream TV

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<sup>19</sup> The minimum wage is R\$700 per month.

<sup>20</sup> Calculated at R\$1,000.

<sup>21</sup> The population below the poverty line went from 36 percent in 2003 to 23 percent in 2008.

<sup>22</sup> These often took the form of situationist interventions. One of the most successful of these involved a man dressed up in a Batman costume climbing on the roof of a building in central Rio with a placard reading, “We want quality schools and hospitals – fuck the World Cup.”

<sup>23</sup> In one instance, after the FIP and MEPR accused the PSTU of “bourgeois pacifism” and reformism, some of its members physically assaulted an FIP group during a demonstration.

captured young anarchists and Black Bloc activists looting and destroying shops and violently attacking the police. Many of them ended up in jail. But their politics were not “spontaneous,” as they, for instance, supported the strikes of primary teachers and university lecturers.

(5) **Subaltern formation** of street vendors and the Landless Movement (*Movimento de Sem Terra* – MST) militants. Street vendors had been resisting relocation from the center by the municipal police for some time. As in Egypt, Mexico and Bolivia, the street vendors in Rio mobilized a huge social network that blocked the action of the police and paramilitary in the center. The MST’s historical formation brought to the fore the voices of indigenous and black communities against the gentrification and social exclusion generated by the sport events preparation. Together with the homeless movement, the MST is consolidating its presence in rural favelas and urban farms in the north of the city.

(6) **Service workers**, especially teleworkers<sup>24</sup> who, since 2000, had strongly opposed the government’s proposal of labor deregulation contained in Lei 4330. It is worth describing in some depth the telemarketing industry, as it incarnates the current dynamics of tertiarization, privatization and financialization of Brazil’s economy . The sector is characterized by a feminized, non-white and low-income labor force from a very poor background.<sup>25</sup> Telework offers them some labor rights and the chance to study at night. But even so, the telework is so alienating that an average job lasts only one year. Braga argues that Brazilian teleworkers and other service workers are traditionally described as “the neoliberal generation” – individualistic, apolitical and “economically minded.” In fact, since 2000, they have been very politically active and have developed a powerful social movement unionism, combining demands for higher wages and other social and civic struggles. In particular, they have campaigned against unequal treatment of women, racial discrimination against black people and homophobia regarding gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transsexual and transgender communities. Moreover, service workers, especially teleworkers, are at the forefront of the recent struggles against labor deregulation. The current labor system forbids outsourcing “core” productive activities. Under the terms of Lei 4330, proposed by the government, outsourced workers will no longer work at the margins of the productive process but will rather be at its very core. This will allow call centers to operate with full zero-hour workforces provided by contact centers, labor brokers and temporary hiring agencies. Lei 4330 is widely perceived as a deliberate response from the Rouseff administration to international call centers’ ongoing demands for lower labor costs and increased outsourcing opportunities. Effectively, the new legislation will enable call centers to move from higher skilled, trilingual and technical contract workers to low-skilled, low-wage employees. The campaign against precarization has brought together the traditional labor movement and various grassroots and civic organizations, especially young women, black and LGTB communities who share the precarious condition of service workers.

(7) The **Popular Committee on the World Cup and Olympics** – an umbrella of NGOs, academics, neighborhood associations, human rights organizations and legal activists formed in 2012. The Committee drew on the already-existing Right to the

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<sup>24</sup> Ruy Braga has analyzed these workers’ conditions in depth.

<sup>25</sup> They are mainly children of casual laborers, maids and cleaners – all jobs with earnings below the poverty line.

City coalition and the rules of participatory planning contained in the 1988 constitution and the City Statute (2000). It gathered confidential data and information on forced relocation, municipal budgets and extraordinary legislation; organized high-profile debates and campaigns; and, during the protest, led urban actions with the disenfranchised population of favelas and urban peripheries.

(8) **The traditional labor movement.** The PT and the CUT entered the stage as late as July when it organized, along with eight national trade union confederations and the MST, a “day of action.” Part of the reason for this delay into the demonstration is that the PT and CUT were marginalized and attacked by the main coalition early on because of their support for Lei 4330. CUT, its affiliated unions and the PT have been traditionally indifferent if not hostile toward nonindustrial and informal workers, even if this category represents 40 percent of the labor market. At the beginning of the struggle, these traditional labor forces failed to acknowledge that the demonstrations articulated central labor struggles and demands, even if not in the traditional form of mass protest. Only later, with the mediation of CONLUTAS and the MPL, was the left able to rearticulate itself across a broader political spectrum.

### **MIDDLE-CLASS, POOR OR PRECARIOUS?**

So, was “the movement of the movements” led by the middle classes or by the precariat? The answer is not straightforward because the political and economic threshold between the precariat and the middle classes is fuzzy. For instance, their main common enemies are inflation and corruption. Inflation is especially explosive because of the enormous impact it has on consumption. The PT in government had made consumption the base of the social contract with its working-class electorate and the motor of Brazilian growth achieved by raising minimum wages, credit and transfers to working-class families. But at the beginning of 2013, the 10 percent increase in retail prices hit the working class hard. Most working-class families struggled to pay back their mortgages and for food and basic services. The middle class was hit even more violently by the raise in services. By the time of the demonstrations, a vociferous anti-inflation movement, bringing together middle and working classes, had emerged. As well as the price of basic food, people lamented the astronomical price of durables and high-tech goods, due to protective duties and high corporation taxes. It is difficult to believe that inflation hit in the same way those who were struggling for survival and the conspicuous consumers. But at least in Brazil, popular mobilizations against inflation tend to happen in turbulent times when the populist social contract between state, middle classes and working class collapses. Anticorruption movements are also typically cross-sectional. In May, just before the demonstrations, the trials against the PT politicians involved in the *mensalão* vote-buying scandal had just ended. The president’s chief of staff, the president of the PT and several federal deputies were forced to resign. The PT went through a catastrophic loss of support. By trying to repel Constitutional Amendment Proposal (PEC) 37, the PT in power appeared to want to neutralize the power of the public ministry and refuse to be held accountable by its citizens. Left-wing organizations led anticorruption campaigns as struggles for democratization. Right-wing forces and the middle classes used the anticorruption argument to topple the government, as in the case of Cabral.

Moreover, the boundaries between the middle class and the precariat are economically fuzzy. The World Bank puts the middle class at an income between \$2 and \$13 per day – the first is the definition of absolute poverty and the second the poverty line in the United States.<sup>26</sup> Economists Duflo and Banerjee<sup>27</sup> also emphasize the economic precarity of middle classes, whose income they also calculate between \$2 and \$10 per day but differ from the precariat because of their occupational stability. In Brazil, references to the precariousness of the middle class are constant. Marcio Pochmann's<sup>28</sup> statistical analysis of Brazilian middle classes shows how in fact they are in fact blurring with the precariat. Or, to put it differently, he argues there has never been a real middle class in Brazil. Set up in 2003 by the first Lula administration, the program of poverty reduction *Bolsa Familia* today reaches 13 million families, one-quarter of the national population. But on the backdrop of its massive social spending, which reached 23 percent of the GDP in late 2000, the second Lula administration started a process of mass tertiarization across the economic board, which involved mainly older, female and black workers. Parallel to the precarization of formal sectors, there has been an increase in informal jobs (which today constitute 40 percent of the economy) and of low-income occupation such as domestic labor. The new middle classes, Pochmann argues, barely make it above the poverty threshold. Their occupations are as precarious as those of informal workers and of the poor who just entered the job market.

Singer's analysis<sup>29</sup> of the June demonstrators' socioeconomic profile confirms the porosity between the middle class and the precariat in Brazil. The majority of the demonstrators were very young, especially in Rio, where 41 percent were under the age of 25 and 39 percent under 34. That is to say, 80 percent were under the age of 39. Moreover, participants overall had high levels of education. In most cities, no less than 43 percent of demonstrators had a university degree (against a national average of 8 percent). In Rio, this percentage was slightly lower at 34 percent. But is high education enough to be middle class? In Rio, 34 percent of the protesters had only one family minimum wage per month.<sup>30</sup> If we add those who earn between two and five minimum wages for months (still considered among the lowest income strata in Brazil) together, these groups accounted for 88 percent of the demonstrators – against a national average of 50 percent. Yet, according to economist Waldir Quadros,<sup>31</sup> this is exactly the profile of the Brazilian middle class associated with such low-income jobs as shop assistant, receptionist, domestic servant, maid, clerk, waiter, driver, nurse, primary school teacher, manicurist, hairdresser or telemarketer who are entering the job market today. This is not the middle class of the liberal professions – of the lawyers, doctors and engineers who joined the anti-dictatorship movement in the 1980s or who toppled Mubarak in Egypt. Yet research suggests that 30 percent of the demonstrators defined themselves as being from the center, and adding those who

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<sup>26</sup> Martin Ravallion, "The Developing World's Bulging (but Vulnerable) Middle Class," *World Development* 38(4), 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, "What is Middle Class about the Middle Classes around the world?" MIT Department of Economics Working Paper, no 7-29, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Pochmann (2012)

<sup>29</sup> André Singer, "Rebellion in Brazil: Social and Political Complexion of the June Events," *NLR* 85, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> The dynamics of poverty and inequality in Rio is more extreme than in other cities, where on average only 15 percent of demonstrators came from the lowest income level.

<sup>31</sup> Waldir Quadros, "Brasil: Um País de Classe média," *Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil*, 1 November 2012. Cited in Singer (ibid.).

classified themselves as center-left and center-right, the center constituted 70 percent of the demonstrators. Instead of the demonstrations being co-opted by the middle classes, Singer suggests a “much more subtle repositioning by a post-materialist center.”<sup>32</sup> Inglehart’s notion of “post-materialism” – the idea that the relationship between income and well-being is relevant only at low levels of income and that for most people well-being is associated with such factors as self-expression and quality of life – has become a central reference in the debate about the middle classes in Brazil, especially within the liberal center.<sup>33</sup> The popularity of this empty term – “post-materialism” – shows how confusing the current situation is in Brazil due to its exposure to two contradictory and convergent political and economic processes: one of proletarianization of the center, through casualization, and another of bourgeoisification of the masses, through poverty relief and incentives to consumption. But what are the implications of this blurring of middle-class and working-class struggles in Brazil and, if Singer is right, of the working-class endorsing non-materialist values? An episode will help to illustrate these questions. During the black Friday, a journalist was killed by a group of youths identified as Black Blocs. At the trial, it emerged that some of the incriminated Black Blocs were from the very affluent neighborhood of Barra de Tijuca and some from the Baixada Fluminense, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Brazil. Even assuming they will have an equal trial (still pending), will the experience affect their lives in the same way?

### **CONCLUSION: NOTES FOR A CONTEMPORARY URBAN CLASS ANALYSIS**

- Cities nest within themselves different scales of political economy – regional, local, national and global – each of them with different temporal dynamics. The traditional spatial and temporal dynamics of capital and labor associated with factory work has been replaced by a radical temporal and spatial disjuncture between, paraphrasing Harvey,<sup>34</sup> “life-spaces” (the space of community and places) and the forces operating in the abstract economy (international investors, sport institutions, global developers, hoteliers and oil companies). Such cognitive and experiential disconnect between economy and life in the urban context makes it difficult to develop class solidarity and sustained political action. But the convergence of different scales and forces of political economy within the city, as in June 2013, has a multiplier effect on solidarities, cross-sectional alliances and revolutionary action (see for instance the Greek example).
- As much as economics is an ideological construction, politics does not exist in a vacuum. The political economy approach I propose roots the analysis of urban struggle in the understanding of the economy and the relations of production of the city “as factory.” The focus on rents and incomes associated with the abstract logics of finance and services is only one aspect of it. Invisible labor infrastructures and grassroots economies – informal trade, small and illegal production, street markets – need to be unveiled too.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid: 34

<sup>33</sup> It was used for instance by Green MP Marina Silva in her electoral campaign in 2014

<sup>34</sup> Harvey and Hayter (1994)

- In cities like Rio, where rural favelas and the hyper-developed center blend into each other, it becomes clear that the dynamics of inequality from urban rents (highlighted by Harvey<sup>35</sup> and Piketty<sup>36</sup>) and land grabbing (highlighted by Sassen<sup>37</sup>) are part of the same global logic of dispossession. The important role of the MST in the June demonstrations highlight a new convergence in Brazil as in other parts of the South, between “new-peasant” and working-class struggles. More generally, do the casual laborers, landless peasants, street vendors and dispossessed ethnic minorities living in the slums in Asia, Africa and Latin America form a new class from the margins?<sup>38</sup>
- Class struggles are also moments of intellectual and material production. How can anthropology capture these processes, at once material and intellectual, without objectifying them and reducing them to abstract categories – such as “horizontalism,” “workerism” or “class”? Can our fieldworks combine participant observation with moments of reflection, taking place in the immediate and with our informants, on the life forms emerging in moments of political struggles?
- Latin America developed its own tradition of socialism, based on collaborations between middle classes and subaltern formations – informal laborers, unemployed unions, migrants’ coalitions and indigenous organizations – as an integral part of its anticolonial struggles. Horizontalism is also re-emerging in anticapitalist struggles in Argentina,<sup>39</sup> Bolivia<sup>40</sup> and Brazil.<sup>41</sup> Traditionally suspicious of such “Bolivarist”<sup>42</sup> alliances, European Marxism is now coming to terms with these horizontal forms of class composition, as it has become evident in the urban struggles in Spain, New York and Greece. But horizontalism, starfish organizations, decentralized networks, consensus and leaderlessness are also the modus operandi of mafia organizations, al-Qaida franchises, tea parties and the creative industries. Raymond William famously argued that “there are in fact no masses, but only ways of seeing people as masses.” So what is the right balance, between verticalism and horizontalism, through which we can imagine ourselves as new masses? Ex post, the most positive consequence of the June events was the re-articulation of the left around both horizontal and vertical processes and organizations.

## EPILOGUE

After the events of June 2013, different strands of the left – old and new trade union confederations (CUT and CONLUTAS), subaltern organizations (MST and homeless) and the vertical and the horizontal left (MPL, PT and PSOL) – came together in a series of meetings, discussions and movements. The radical changes in the electoral

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<sup>35</sup> David Harvey, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Piketty, 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Saskia Sassen, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Göran Therborn, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Marina Sitrin, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Raul Zibechi, 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Andre Singer, 2012.

<sup>42</sup> I am referring to Marx’s essay on Bolivar, which inspired some Marxist orthodox readings of Latin American politics.

system and expansion of public services linked to oil venues announced by Rousseff after the protest communicated clearly that the government took seriously the demands of the protesters and felt democratically accountable toward them. In spite of the damaging effect of the events in June 2013, Rousseff was re-elected a year later, mostly due, as for Lula before her, to the vast support of the urban poor and the rural masses.

But a recent public investigation in the kickback schemes of Petrobras – Brazil’s mighty state-run oil company, listed by Forbes as the twenty-fifth most powerful oil corporation in the world – is triggering a new wave of mass protests against the president. The top echelons of the PT, including the party treasury and the president of the lower house – appear to have received kickbacks from Petrobras or have connived with the company on bribes, money laundering, misinformation and illegal tendering. Thirty-five Petrobras top managers, including the CEO, have resigned, and the company faces a \$98 million lawsuit from US shareholders. The Congress is paralyzed, and there are continuous calls for the impeachment of the president. In March 2015, half a million Brazilians took the street in anticorruption demonstrations. But this time, demonstrations had a strong right-wing component, especially in Rio, home to Petrobras’s headquarters and main facilities, where the company cut 40,000 jobs since January.

During recent demonstrations, people advocated for a military coup and the return to a dictatorship<sup>43</sup> and open condemnations of the left-wing regimes that came to dominate Latin America.<sup>44</sup> These demonstrations were led by the movements Free Brazil (*Movimento Brasil Livre* – MBL) and Join the Street (close to the main political opposition party PMDB and business elites), which emerged from a texture of smaller right-wing and even fringe organizations.<sup>45</sup> Because the scandal involved the entire political spectrum, their anticorruption slogans are directed against the whole political system. Inspired by the dubious legacies of seventeenth-century *bainderantes*,<sup>46</sup> Margaret Thatcher and Rand Paul, the MBL disseminated a *Free Economy* manifesto, which, in classic “Friedman economics” style, advocates extreme privatization, tax cuts and labor deregulation. Brazil has a long tradition of developmentalism and CEPALISM and was historically immune from the North American ideology of free market. But the rapid deterioration of Brazil’s economy is increasing the popular appeal of these free market manifestos and opposition to state regulation.

How can the events of June 2013 be reassessed in the light of these contemporary developments? For one thing, the recent proliferation of free-market and authoritarian slogans does show the isolation of the PT – and more general of the “neoliberal left.” In line with the Brazilian tradition of populism, the PT brought together big capital and the dispossessed masses, but as an expanding section of the working class (the so-called “center”) finds itself impoverished, the social pact broke down. In order to build a new political consensus, the PT needs to reconnect with the working class and

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<sup>43</sup> For instance, a banner reading “Army, Navy and Air Force. Please save us once again of communism.”

<sup>44</sup> Such as “Brazil does not want and will not be a new Venezuela” or “Nation + Liberty = PT (Workers Party) Out!”

<sup>45</sup> Such as Revoltados Online and SOS Forças Armada.

<sup>46</sup> Explorers in the interior of Brazil hunting for gold, minerals and slaves.

grassroots organizations that propelled it into power. Besides, economy does matter. In time of economic prosperity, horizontal forces may turn popular anger into progressive a movement, as it happened in 2013. But in the times of economic downturn, cross-sectionalism may take dangerous right-wing turns. Even if Brazil did not experience dictatorship in such radical forms as other Latin American countries, the immense popularity<sup>47</sup> of Jair Bolsonaro, a military reservist supporting dictatorship, in Rio de Janeiro is worrying.

In spite of these new developments, Brazil is one of the few countries in the world where both poverty and inequalities are decreasing; the new and the old left are coming together and a party with a tradition of grassroots activism, participatory democracy and working-class militancy is still in power. Even when they do not lead to proper revolutions, urban mobilizations such as those of June 2013 may sketch the contours of new articulations of power and be prefigurations of possible futures.

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<sup>47</sup> Bolsonaro won in Rio de Janeiro more votes than any other congressional representative in the 2014 elections.



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