

Book Review

- *Street matters: A critical history of 20th century urban policy in Brazil*, by Fernando Luiz Lara, Ana Paula Koury. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022

In June 2013, at the height of what was perceived as an unprecedented decade-long period of socio-economic prosperity and democratic stability, Brazilians took to the streets in large numbers to protest. What started as a local reaction to transport fare increases grew to a nation-wide and multifaceted movement fuelled by a growing sense of frustration with poor social services, corruption scandals and misguided priorities. Fernando L. Lara and Ana P. Koury take this watershed event as a starting point for their investigation on the two-way relationship between street protest and urban planning in Brazil. This book presents a fresh and broad overview of how urban policy and planning, at the federal and local levels, have co-evolved over the twentieth century in response to working-class protests, and how urban struggle responded to elitist, technocratic, or simply failed planning policies. Although the authors do not bring novel first-hand historical evidence, they rely on a large and updated literature on many different topics. To put this huge volume of sources together into a single historical narrative, the book applies a theoretical framework inspired by both Manuel Castells' pioneer research on urban movements, the modernity/coloniality Latin-American group, and the Brazilian school of critical urban studies (Fix & Arantes, 2021). To operationalize their analysis, the authors propose a "double tripod" theoretical model which puts at the top a wealthy minority with access to landownership, cheap labour and security provided by repressive policing. At the bottom sits the poor majority whose lives are structured around informal housing, precarious work and state repression. This model, albeit used sometimes in an overly deterministic manner, pays attention to how disputes around the land property, labour, security and transportation have unequally shaped Brazilian cities.

The book is structured around six chapters, roughly following an already established political-economic periodization of modern Brazilian history. It starts by highlighting the colonial roots of present-day urban inequalities, showing how access to land ownership has always been denied to the majority of the population. The authors discuss failed attempts to democratize access to land,

especially after the end of slavery in 1888, and the explosion of land-related struggles, exemplified by the Canudos rebellion in Bahia (1893-1897). It then moves on to discuss the troubled period of the late-nineteenth century and early twentieth century, including the military coup that established the Republic in 1889, early industrializing efforts and the first general strike of São Paulo in 1917. This moment was marked by deep popular discontent with exclusionary modernization plans, such as the urban reform of Rio de Janeiro (1903-1906). The third chapter deals with the years of the Getúlio Vargas populist government (1930-1945), which brought major changes through state-building, heavy industrialization, and labour legislation (to a few).

The Vargas administration was the first to advance social housing production for formal urban workers through social security, and the 1942 Tenement's Law was to have a significant impact on the long-term shift of working-class housing from rental to homeownership. This period also saw the first local public responses to the rise of *favelas* (squatted settlements). The next chapter covers a larger period of "darker clouds over the city", encompassing both the height of Brazilian developmentalist democracy with President Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961), responsible for the construction of the new modernist capital Brasília, and the authoritarian civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985). Authors stress how the military deployed technocratic and top-down urban policy to deal with the mounting urban crisis, to which the creation of the National Housing Bank (BNH) in 1964 was a major breakthrough. But they also pay attention to the seeds of the progressive Urban Reform movement born during the tumultuous period of left-wing president João Goulart (1961-1964). Although strong urban protests were registered during the first years of the military regime, they weakened as political repression got tougher after 1968, which deepened inequality in the exploding urban peripheries.

But as soon as the country started again its "slow and gradual transition" to democracy in the late 1970s, urban social movements resurfaced and had a major role during the "lost decade" of the 1980s. This is discussed at length in the fifth chapter, which highlights how progressive ideals, such as the social function of property, participatory planning, land value capture, and the right to housing were advanced by the National Movement for Urban Reform (MNRU), and ended up being guaranteed by the democratic Constitution of 1988 and the City Statute in 2001. Those years also saw important experiments in bottom-up participatory processes, community self-help and advocacy architecture in the peripheries. The last chapter discusses the neoliberal governments of Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992) and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002), the Lula years (2003-2011) and beyond. Authors assess the fate of many innovative municipal urban programs during the 1990s, such as *Favela Bairro* (a slum upgrading project from Rio de Janeiro) and *Orçamento Participativo* (participatory budgeting schemes from Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte). These programs paradoxically evolved into large-scale and top-down urban infrastructure and housing programs during the Worker's Party government, especially the *Programa*

de *Aceleração do Crescimento* (Growth Acceleration Program) and *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (My House My Life). They rightly stress that, despite important gains in income and social rights for the poorest, the land question was not confronted in order to democratize the right to housing. Conclusions take us back to the streets in June 2013, and to the dramatic social and economic crisis that accompanied and followed the overthrow of president Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), paving the way for the election of far-right Jair Bolsonaro in 2019, who slashed progressive urban policies.

This book does a very good job in trying to stitch together the historiography of planning and protest in urban Brazil, although at times it pays more attention to the institutional and policy changes which emerged within the state than to the complex social, political and cultural dynamics of diverse social movements which emerged out of peripheral urbanization (Holston, 2008). It also overlooks the deepening connections between urban and rural movements under a process of extended urbanization (Monte-Mór, 2014) beyond the major centres that continue to dominate urban studies in Brazil (and the narrative of the book), namely São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. A closer look easily dismisses any attempts to put all street protests into a singular theoretical model, as ideological motivations, strategies and forms of organization and outcomes have varied widely over time and space. Nonetheless, *Street matters* provides a great critical outline of how policymakers and urban dwellers have responded, not always in accord, to a massive and sometimes violent urbanization process. In this sense, this book is not only interesting to urban and planning scholars but mainly to anyone interested in understanding Brazilian society and history through an urban lens.

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