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Urban uprisings between Revolutionary Openings and Reactionary Outcomes: making sense of the 2013 "June Days" in Brazil

Celina Myrann Sørbøe[a,b]

aDepartment of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, Norway; bNorwegian Institute of Urban and Regional Research, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

ABSTRACT

Through a Rancièrian reading of the political as a performative staging of egalitarian dissent, this article conducts an event analysis of the 2013 Brazilian "June Days" uprisings. It identifies and challenges two broad narratives on these uprisings' emergence and significance: a narrative of June's "Revolutionary Openings" that views June as a sociopolitical opening that brought new actors and imaginaries into being, and a narrative of June's "Reactionary Outcomes" that foregrounds June as paving the way for the rise of a revived, authoritarian right in Brazilian politics. Through an in-depth case study of one demonstration originating in Rio's largest favela, the article provides much-needed empirical depth to interpretations of the June uprisings. It shows how these events fruitfully can continue to be framed as an open source of emancipatory politics, even in current political circumstances marked by an authoritarian, right-wing leadership. The article introduces three main lessons with relevance for broader debates in the urban studies literature: (i) a Rancièrian lens is fruitful for capturing the political dynamics of urban uprisings, however, (ii) a contextually embedded analysis of his abstract political logics is necessary, and (iii) the temporal dimension must be considered when assessing the transformative political potential of urban uprisings.

Introduction

The last decade has been characterized as a "time of riots" (Badiou, 2012) and "urban rage" (Dikeç, 2017). Uprisings[1] have erupted in cities across the globe as gestures of protest against various social, economic, and political transformations under late neoliberal capitalism (Bassett, 2014; Douzinas, 2014; Harvey, 2012; Mayer, 2013; Merrifield, 2014). While these events have succeeded in disturbing normative neoliberal agendas, they have generally done so in contradictory ways (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017). This has inspired debate about the political dynamics and consequences of urban uprisings.

While some observers view them as revolutionary openings for a new urban era, others view them as ephemeral apparitions that have proven to be incapable of adequately countering the neoliberal restructuring of urban space and politics, or that have even had certain reactionary outcomes (Mayer et al., 2016; Monno, 2016). The transformative and emancipatory potential of such events thus remains contested.

This article explores the transformative politics of urban uprisings in present-day Brazil through a case study from Rio de Janeiro during the 2013 "June days."[2] The June uprisings were the largest street demonstrations in Brazil's history, and they expressed widespread popular discontent with the governing of Brazilian cities (Vainer et al., 2013). This article identifies two broad narratives regarding the June days. The first focuses on June's "Revolutionary Openings" and the ways in which the uprisings brought new progressive actors and imaginaries into being. This narrative, interestingly, has largely given way to a (counter)narrative concerning June's "Reactionary Outcomes," which sees the uprisings as having paved the way for the rise of a revived, authoritarian right in Brazilian politics in the ensuing years. To examine the political dynamics and consequences of the June uprisings, this article presents a case study of one demonstration originating in the Rocinha favela in Rio de Janeiro. It follows four protagonists and examines the ways in which June was subjectivized (that is, internalized, enacted, and transformed) by them in 2013, as well as the demonstration's longer-term impacts and outcomes. The article then uses that case to ask the following question: How are political subjectivities produced and transformed through urban uprisings, and how can we assess the political outcomes and consequences of such events?

To frame this inquiry, the article draws on the work of Jacqués Rancière (1999, 2006) and his understanding of the political as a performative staging of egalitarian dissent that ruptures and dislocates a socio-spatial order. It argues that uprisings, as disruptive and inaugurative events, introduce dissensus and new political subjectivities and imaginaries to the field (see also Bassett, 2014; Davidson & Iveson, 2014, 2015; Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017; Swyngedouw, 2014b). While Rancière's understanding of the political helps us to capture the ways in which urban uprisings open up a new political space, his focus on the aesthetic and imaginative dimensions of political disruptions distances us from the practical realities of power (Badiou, 2009; Zizek, 2006). I will therefore argue that it is crucial to read Rancière in light of theories that take into account how existing structures of inequality are produced and defended on the ground. This article therefore finds intersections between Rancière's abstract political philosophy and critical urban theory, underlining how the urban as a social space is fundamental to the political (see also Enright, 2017; Enright & Rossi, 2018; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2017, 2018). By conducting a contextual and processual reading of the political, we are able to capture the ways in which events like the June days can emit emancipatory impulses beyond the moment of their eruption while acknowledging that any examination of their political dynamics and consequences must be grounded in actually existing urban spaces and politics.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. First, it outlines the aforementioned grand narratives of the June uprisings in Brazil – the "Revolutionary Openings" and "Reactionary Outcomes." Second, it presents my theoretical-analytical approach. Third, it depicts the methods, and fourth, it turns to the case study of the demonstration in Rocinha. The subsequent discussion relates the findings from the Rocinha case to wider debates on the June days. Finally, the article concludes with three main lessons

for wider debates in the urban studies literature on the transformative political potential of urban uprisings.

Scholarship and debates on the June uprisings

The June uprisings started in São Paulo at the beginning of June 2013 as a small protest against a 20-cent increase in the bus fare. The protest was brutally repressed by the police, whose excessive use of violence in turn provoked new protests over the ensuing days and weeks. By the end of June, millions of people had taken to the streets in hundreds of cities across the country (Vainer et al., 2013).

The June uprisings were heterogeneous yet had a distinctly urban character, politicizing a range of social and political challenges facing Brazilian cities and populations (Vainer et al., 2013). They revealed an until-then unrecognized malice with the development model of the Workers' Party (PT) governments of Inácio Lula da Silva (2002–2010) and his successor Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016) (Rodrigues, 2019; Saad-Filho & Morais, 2018). While the PT seemingly had brought steady economic growth and prosperity for all segments of society, investments in public services had been neglected. Brazilian cities were in an "urban crisis" (Rolnik, 2011), characterized in particular by inadequate public transportation, health, education, and security services (Braathen et al., 2013). In this situation, the nation's unbridled spending on sports mega-events – Brazil and Rio hosted both the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympics – became a target of popular rage. The uprisings also expressed a general impatience with politicians who "do not represent us" (Alonso & Mische, 2017). A popular catchphrase put it as follows: "it is not just about 20 cents. It is about rights!"

While many alternative interpretations have tried to make sense of the June uprisings and the legacy they have left on the political scene, two broad narratives have emerged, the first focusing on the uprisings' "Revolutionary Openings" and the second on the uprisings' "Reactionary Outcomes."[3]

The Revolutionary Openings narrative situates the June uprisings as part of a "new age of resistance" (Douzinas, 2014), one that cannot be grasped by conventional political grammars (Assy, 2017; Holston, 2019). The June uprisings, that is, had no distinct identities binding participants together, no obvious organizational structures, and no clear leader figures. They were inspired by experiments with horizontal and autonomous forms of direct action occurring elsewhere, such as the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, and the Gezi Park protests in Turkey (Alonso & Mische, 2017; Assy, 2017; Bringel & Pleyers, 2015). According to the research institute Ibope (see O Globo, 2013), 46% of the protesters participated in a demonstration for the first time and 96% were not affiliated with any political party.

The uprisings thus challenged traditional structures of representation and redefined what counts as political action. Assy (2017) argues that the demonstrations took the political out of the sphere of representational politics and re-situated it in the streets – turned into an arena of democratic innovation by insurgent subjectivities. In a similar way, Cava and Cocco (2014) suggest that June constituted "a new revolutionary multitude." Meanwhile, Bringel and Pleyers (2015, 2019) connect the uprisings to a "geopolitics of global indignation." They point to how June brought new actors, spaces, and imaginaries to the field, thereby politicizing Brazilian society by

challenging the codes that had dominated the political scene since the transition to democracy in the 1980s (see also Arantes, 2014; Avelar, 2017). These scholars all point to June as an *opening*, highlighting elements of it that entailed a reconfiguration of forms of social activism and of the political scenario.

In contrast, the Reactionary Outcomes narrative situates the June uprisings within a larger societal and structural context and places its analytical focus on their *outcomes*. In fact, much of what has been written about June in recent years does not focus on these events in their own right. Instead, it points to June as an origin or explanatory key for the subsequent rise of a revived, authoritarian right.

While the uprisings erupted as a leftist critique of the PT years, the backing of the powerful establishment media saw much of the social unrest ultimately channeled into a focus on crime and corruption. Even though corruption is an endemic problem across the political scale, the PT was largely portrayed as the perpetrator (Anderson, 2019). Thus, some argue, the dissatisfaction with Brazil's corrupt political class was largely transformed into an anti-left sentiment.

Saad-Filho and Morais (2018), for example, argue the uprisings were watered down, co-opted, and hijacked by the political right due to their unclear political and ideological profile and lack of leadership. While they are sympathetic to the demands made during the uprisings, they are skeptical of the transformative potential of chaotic and unpredictable events like June. As Saad-Filho (2013, p. 664) puts it, "spontaneous mass movements with a mixed class base and fueled by unfocused anger can be destabilizing without being constructive." Building on a similar argument, Chaui (2013) contends that the amorphous and ambiguous aspects of the uprisings facilitated their appropriation by an "anti-democratic and moralist rightwing movement" while Santos (2013) claims that a "fascist equation"[4] took control of the streets.

Some draw this timeline well beyond June. Scartezini (2016) describes a "fascistification of indignation" in Brazil following the June uprisings. Both he and Avritzer (2016) argue that June ruptured the political left's monopoly of the streets and thereby paved the way for the anti-PT, right wing protests that took place in 2015 and 2016. Santos and Guarnieri (2016) claim that Brazil went from "protest to parliamentary coup", connecting the June uprisings through cause and consequence to the highly controversial impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (PT) in 2016. Avritzer (2019) extends this timeline to include the rise to power of the current far-right President Jaír Bolsonaro.

Given the current political circumstances in Brazil, the Reactionary Outcomes narrative has largely come to dominate critical scholarship on the June uprisings. While there is no denying the turn to the right in Brazilian politics in recent years, I challenge the idea that June was an event that only the right was able to capitalize upon. The scholars who subscribe to the Reactionary Outcomes narrative struggle to see a transformative political potential in messy and unpredictable events like June – a potential that those subscribing to the Revolutionary Openings narrative emphasize above all else. However, the latter scholars tend to focus on the 2013 events in and of themselves, which sheds little light upon their longer-term consequences and impacts. In this article, then, I view the June uprisings through a Rancièrian lens to examine how/whether the June days indeed had politicizing effects that lasted beyond the moment of their eruption.

Theorizing the transformative political potential of urban uprisings

The June uprisings were part of a new type of urban movement in cities around the world– seemingly spontaneous and unorganized unrest. Urban uprisings challenge conventional understandings of the political in social movement literatures as "a strategically-organized confrontation between the dominant and dominated" (Mayer & Boudreau, 2012, p. 288). The protagonists of contemporary urban uprisings are often not the traditional subjects of politics, and they tend to lack shared goals or well-structured organizations. Social movement scholarship can therefore struggle to discern a transformative political potential in such events. According to Dikeç and Swyngedouw (2017, p. 7), "urban social movements scholars have not developed the theoretical tools to study such incidents, much less to study them as politics."

A growing body of urban uprisings literature has therefore turned to strands of political thinking that place the disruption of order and structure at the heart of politics (Bassett, 2014; Davidson & Iveson, 2014; Dikeç, 2007; Douzinas, 2013; Enright & Rossi, 2018; Karaliotas & Swyngedouw, 2019; Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014). In contrast to social movement scholarship's focus on the socio-spatial characteristics and organizational structures of given protest movements, these analyses emphasize the more universal structures of antagonism, subjectivity, equality, and freedom at stake in disruptive acts (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017; Enright, 2017). My entry point for this argument is through the work of Jacqués Rancière.

Rancière (1999, 2006) perceives politics as a disruptive and inaugurative affair and distinguishes it from everyday practices and institutions through which socio-spatial order is created, that is, what he terms the "police." Broader than a state apparatus, the "police" refers to society's inevitable need to distinguish and ground a social order and distribute advantages and entitlements accordingly (Rancière, 1999, pp. 29–30). Such "police" orders can only ever be contingent, however, as there will always be a constituted outside, lack or surplus that is not accounted for (Dikeç, 2005, p. 174). Politics arises when those not accounted for in the "police" order – "a part of those who have no part" – oppose, thwart, or interrupt that order and declare their axiomatic equality to the whole (Rancière, 1999). The properly political moment is thus "the assertion of agonism, conflict, and disagreement, marked by a rupture that calls into question the prevailing urban order and makes visible, thinkable, and/or sayable, alternative ways of organizing collective life" (Enright & Rossi, 2018, p. 13). Centrally, there is no privileged political subject prior to the political moment. Although always initiated by a part, "parties do not exist prior to the declaration of a wrong ["wrong" meaning denial of equality]" (Rancière, 1999, p. 39). In other words, the political is not a reflection of social, cultural, or economic domains but rather manifested in the process of subjectivization that arises in the interruptive act (see also Badiou, 2012).

By taking equality as the starting point of politics and by arguing that it can potentially emerge from anyone and anywhere, Rancière offers a framework for studying ruptures that come as a surprise in a given social order. This, in turn, opens up an approach to urban uprisings as politics "even when, or perhaps especially when, … [they] fall outside institutional forms or lack the organizational form or legitimacy of social movements" (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017, p. 1). Read through a Rancièrian lens, urban uprisings can be conceptualized as a statement by those who have been marginalized by

contemporary forms of neoliberal urbanism. These unaccounted-for supplementary actors demand recognition and stage this demand publicly by occupying, claiming, and thereby potentially transforming the urban space (Swyngedouw, 2011, 2014a, 2014b).

While a Rancièrian analysis enables an understanding of urban uprisings as politics, a focus on the abstract, political logics at stake in such events risks losing sight of the dynamics and power relations through which given socio-spatial orders are produced and defended on the ground. An evental view of politics, that is, struggles to capture how actual political acts come to be or how they move into the real world (Enright, 2017; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2017; Tambakaki, 2009). Centrally – and contrary to Rancière's notion that equality claims can emerge from anyone and anywhere – there are in fact specific conditions that nourish challenges to the status quo and make such claims more likely to emerge (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2018). While no single basis for politics need be determined in advance of activity itself, one must strive to recognize the material and structural antecedents of the political (Enright, 2017). Furthermore, attention must be paid to what happens when politics is inevitably met with *policing* – that is, processes of neutralizing and pre-empting challenges to the social order.

In this article, I will argue for a contextual and processual reading of the political. Uprisings are always situated in existing space and act on/against power dynamics embedded in and articulated through territory (Enright, 2017). Particular events therefore must be examined with the functioning of situated social, political, historical, economic, and spatialized orders in mind. Drawing on insights from critical urban theory, I will underline the necessity of examining sedimented power relations and conditions in given urban settings, as well as the ways in which they shape the emergence and outcomes of particular urban uprisings (e.g. Brenner, 2011; Harvey, 2012; Lefebvre, 1996).

Methods

This article conducts a case study of one demonstration in a Rio favela. Case study research is a fruitful approach when the aim is to generate in-depth, multi-faceted understandings of complex phenomena within their real-life context (Yin, 2009). The Rocinha demonstration raised issues that touched upon nation-wide grievances linked to *lulismo*[5] politics as well as more Rio-specific urban political issues. As such, it is an illustrative case to examine the openings and outcomes of the June uprisings.

This article builds on longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork in Rio and Rocinha. The primary data was collected through 12 months of research in 2016. The article also draws on prior research conducted in 2012 and 2014 as well as a visit conducted in 2019 (see Braathen et al., 2013; Sørbøe & Braathen, 2022; Sørbøe, 2013, 2021). The fieldwork consisted of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and collection and analysis of newspaper articles and policy documents.

The case study below relies primarily on in-depth interviews with four individuals ("João," "Ana," "Valéria," and "Roberto") that I conducted in 2016. The historical timeline has been reconstructed through the narratives of these activists and complemented with information from interviews with other Rocinha actors and third parties. The analysis thus draws on the facticity of the four protagonists' political experiences to provide a contextual account of the June days.

Brazil's June uprisings as seen from Rocinha

Revolutionary Opening? "Breathing politics" after Rocinha's demonstration

> Before that demonstration I was not interested in politics, I did not understand much about it. Now, we are breathing politics.

João, a man in his mid-20s born and raised in Rocinha, eagerly gesticulated as he described the impact that the June uprisings had had on him. With the phrase "breathing politics", he captures the ways in which his life had changed after he helped to organize a demonstration during June.

While João had always considered himself a socially engaged person, he had largely steered clear of community politics and political activism, claiming an inherent skepticism regarding the way community politics worked in Rocinha. He did respect some of the community activists – the "good ones," he called them, referring in particular to grassroots movements and community leaders with ties to political parties on the left, including the PT, the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), and the Democratic Labor Party (PDT). Others gave him more pause, including the residents' associations, which were renowned for forging shady bonds with politicians (such as those from the Democratic Movement party [PMDB])[6] and drug gangs.[7] He viewed these actors as "inefficient and closed off." Rather than engaging with community politics, then, João had channeled his energy into his university studies. However, he would be thrown into a position of leadership overnight through his role as organizer of the June demonstration – "breathing politics" as he dealt with its considerable aftermath.

João was part of the alleged "new middle class"[8] that had experienced upward mobility during the PT years. He had received a scholarship to study at a prestigious university, and his family's levels of poverty had changed significantly. Still, limitations remained for the inclusion of this "new middle class" in the city. On the one hand, new consumption possibilities did not automatically bestow one acceptance into the traditional middle class. Skin color and place of residence largely continued to trump purchasing power as a marker of class status (Larkins, 2015). On the other hand, Rocinha had been subjected to a series of unpopular interventions in infrastructure and security that residents connected with neoliberal "branding" practices ahead of Rio hosting the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics. Most notably, this included a proposal to construct a cable car that would require mass evictions (see Sørbøe, 2021). The nature of these interventions exposed the way the city has been planned and governed to benefit some people over others (Sørbøe, 2018).

João participated in several of the protests taking place in the center of Rio in mid-June of 2013 together with Ana, another Rocinha resident. As the uprisings escalated in scope and force, the two of them decided to organize a demonstration in Rocinha. The idea was a "spur of the moment" decision João insisted, while Ana recalled that it was something they had discussed "between one class and the next" at the university they both attended. João and Ana made a Facebook-event for Rocinha's demonstration, scheduled for June 25. The catchphrase was "White Elephants? No! Basic Sanitation? Yes!" – a demand that the government would prioritize much-needed investments in basic sanitation infrastructure in the community over the planned cable car. The demonstration also

brought forth more universal claims of social and political inclusion connected with nation-wide grievances linked to *lulismo* politics.

On the day of Rocinha's demonstration, the protest march coiled along the Niemeyer highway hugging Rio's dramatic shoreline. Its destination was the high-end neighborhood of Leblon, approximately three kilometers away, where protestors occupied a public square in front of the home of Governor Sérgio Cabral (PMDB). Along the way, participants from the two smaller favelas of Vidigal and Chapeu do Cèu also joined in, forming one of the largest demonstrations in Rocinha's history. Rio is a deeply segregated city and the fear of *o morro descer* – that the dangerous "other" from the hills of the favelas will descend upon and invade the city – has always been strong in the social imaginary of Rio's elites (Perlman, 2010; Silva, 2008; Souza, 2008). Anticipating chaos and looting, denizens of the neighborhoods adjacent to Rocinha barricaded the doors of their shopping malls and stores, and dozens of police officers in full riot gear accompanied the protesters. The demonstration, however, remained peaceful, with no reported incidents. João argued:

> It was a slap in the face to society. I think it called attention—it was a political collaboration of people from the favelas, and society was not, is not, prepared for (…) the *favelados* to position themselves socially and politically. I think this is the greatest significance of the demonstration.

In other words, what was important about the demonstration was not its specific demands but the political significance of creating a space of appearance where favela residents became visible to themselves and to others as political subjects. By descending on the city and occupying a public square in front of the governor's home, these favela residents both disrupted and challenged the distribution of roles through which they found themselves marginalized. Read through a Rancièrian lens, this act represented a disturbance in the generally taken-for-granted order of the "police." Such a rupture can serve as a powerful vehicle for social change by constructing a scene in which the existence of what Rancière calls a "wrong" is verified and subjectivized. As noted, João went from not being interested to "breathing politics" through this experience. Ana likewise pointed out that the experience filled her with "a lot of hope, determination, and motivation" to engage with community questions. These experiences are individual but resonate with a number of similar stories told by June activists during my fieldwork in Rocinha. These accounts also resonate with a Rancièrian theorizing of the ways in which disruptive politics invites a reflexive withdrawal from the accepted givens that enables their interrogation. This, in turn, can force a reconfiguration and, ultimately, the inauguration of a new set of givens (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017, p. 15).

While a Rancièrian analysis provides a fruitful way to unpack the demonstration's disruptive political logic, his abstract philosophy of politics struggles to explain how and why the political moment will erupt (Tambakaki, 2009, p. 103). As Uitermark and Nicholls (2014, p. 4) point out, the process through which a marginalized group comes to stage its equality needs to be explained rather than assumed as a spontaneous and momentous event.

While Rocinha's demonstration was based on a "spur of the moment" decision, Valéria, another community activist in Rocinha, described the existing context of João and Ana's initiative:

> There was momentum—they did the event and all the already-organized groups in Rocinha embraced it. I think that if it had not been for this collective embrace from the already-organized political groups, cultural groups, social and religious groups, many groups (…) it might not have worked so well; it might not have mobilized so many people.

Valéria had a slightly different background from that of João and Ana. She, too, was a university student but had long been an active member of grassroots movements in the community, which she saw as having done the important groundwork for Rocinha's demonstration. To fully recognize the antecedents of rupturing events such as the June days, as well as the contextual factors that shape their forms and dynamics, I second Uitermark and Nicholls's (2014; see also Nicholls & Uitermark, 2017) argument that even the most spontaneous of political acts result from a gradual and incremental formation of relations among diverse actors that ultimately make it possible to question a "wrong" and push for change. Valéria hints at this underlying process above.

Furthermore, if the political is best understood as resulting from an incremental process, what follows from ruptural and inaugurative moments is likely also a gradual and far-from-straightforward sequence of developments. Because Rancière grants prevalence to the moment of rupture itself, he largely locates the success of a claim to equality in the fact of its expression while its consequences and effects on power holders and state policy are secondary (Brown, 2015, p. 24). Protesters, however, are inevitably met with countervailing agendas and strategies for imposing (or reimposing) order. If one wants to assess the actual impact of urban uprisings, then, one must acknowledge and examine the ways in which such neutralizing forces seek to keep the insurrectional event from starting a transformative political sequence.

Reestablishing order: dialogue with the state government

Immediately after Rocinha's demonstration, its organizers were invited to a meeting with the governor to discuss their demands. A commission of ten people – six from Rocinha and four from the two other favelas – was quickly established to represent their communities at the meeting. This invitation to a more localized dialogue paralleled the nationwide response to the June uprisings, led by President Dilma Rousseff's pledge on June 17 to "listen to the voice of the streets". The protesters were no longer dismissed as violent anarchists and troublemakers but instead acknowledged as an energetic young force for exposing dysfunctionalities in the country (Saad-Filho & Morais, 2018). This represents a recoupeation tactic – whereby holders of power, through inviting protesters to dialogue, reduces what at first seemed like universal demands (i.e. the whole social order must be replaced) to a dialogue on particular demands (Davidson & Iveson, 2014, pp. 148–49).

The organizers of Rocinha's demonstration held open meetings in the community to discuss with residents who would participate in the commission and what demands to bring forth to the state government. As with the broader June uprisings, they insisted on an anti-party-political profile. In Rio's favelas, the relation between the state, the political parties, and the local population had historically been structured by political clientelism and patronage (Burgos, 1998). One of the people who participated in the commission, Roberto, explained:

> It is always the same party [PMDB] and group who have been together here for years, they exchange favors to get votes for certain parties and never think of the community.

Against this backdrop, the organizers of the demonstration decided to exclude the "old" generation of leaders with ties to political parties. As Roberto recalled;

> It was a young group that wanted to show itself off in 2013. We wanted to show the old leader figures that they no longer were the reference points, and they rejected that [designation]. But in the formation of the commission, we did not accept any of the old leaders, only the new generation.

Valéria had felt otherwise and wanted some of the more experienced members of a key grassroots movement in the community to participate – some of whom João initially described as the "good ones" among the existing leaders. When this was voted down, she took it upon herself to represent that movement. The commission's members eventually reflected different levels of experience with political activism; some, like Valéria, were activists, while others, like João, were not. What they shared, however, was their disidentification with the clientelist politics that had long structured favela – state relations. Likewise, they all had high levels of education and were part of the generation that had been socially raised up during the PT years. Roberto underlined these aspects of the commission:

> It was a leadership that consisted of educated people. One had a bachelor's degree, one was a lawyer, one had a degree in design, the other had a master's degree. Rocinha managed this. Our parents let us study—they worked hard for that that [outcome]. Today, it is a politicized group that understands what is going on. There has been a change in the thinkers in Rocinha.

As Roberto observes, the commission's members were part of a generation that had a different upbringing from that of their parents and grandparents. While they enjoyed higher levels of education, some had little actual experience with political activism. As such, they were representative of what scholars such as Caldeira (2015) and Saad-Filho and Morais (2018) describe as a generation that is more individualistic and inexperienced with collective action due to changes under neoliberalism in Brazil.

On July 28, three days after the demonstration, the meeting with the governor took place. The state government was represented by Governor Sérgio Cabral (PMDB), vice Governor Luiz Fernando Pezão (PMDB), the secretary of public works, the president of the State Company of Public Works, and the government secretary. The presence of such important figures during the still chaotic June days points to the demonstration's great impact, and the members of Rocinha's commission felt optimistic regarding their negotiating position. What they felt likely derived from having the moral upper hand. One of the main issues raised during the June uprisings was corruption, after all. Governor Cabral had been accused (and was later convicted) of graft. As his popularity plummeted over the course of the June days, the symbolism in occupying the square in front of his home gave Rocinha's demonstration visibility and sympathy. The commission members also perceived the economic conditions to be on their side. Rocinha had recently been pledged public investments for 1.6 billion Brazilian reais[9] through the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC), an unprecedented commitment of public resources to a single favela. The problem was that the state government wanted

to spend over half of the PAC budget on the "white elephant" project of constructing the aforementioned cable car, which residents dismissed as an urban branding project related to the approaching Olympics (Sørbøe, 2021). The commission asked that the money be spent on more pressing needs.

João argued that the "critical part of the meeting" occurred when the governor's team proposed the establishment of a supervising committee for the PAC works. While such a move does imply promising opportunities for participation and influence, the introduction of civil society into political managerial roles is also a common method of co-optation (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). João explained:

> State secretaries from Cabral's government called me aside to a separate room and said that they would ask for a commission to supervise the works (…) They asked me what I thought about them paying us to do this work for them, suggesting we put together a commission of 5 to 6 people (…) or even 2 or 3 people, whom they would give a total budget of BR$7,500.

Considering that the average annual income in Rocinha according to the 2010 census was BR$488 (IBGE, 2010), a shared salary of BR$7,500 would be a generous amount. Valéria, however, sensed danger:

> We saw Cabral coming—he was very much a politician with his discourse, making promises while trying to co-opt this group. He wanted them to be part of a new group linked to the state in terms of supervising the works, with remuneration.

The commission ended up rejecting the offer, arguing that the money needed to go towards investments in the community rather than supervisory groups.

Reactionary Outcomes? Revival of the right and clientelist incorporation of the Rocinha activists

The meeting with the state government did produce a promise that basic sanitation infrastructure would be prioritized over the controversial cable car. The commission was given concrete dates for the completion of a series of key interventions, and members were invited to schedule meetings with the state secretaries of education and transportation and with Mayor Eduardo Paes (PMDB), to discuss issues that fell under the responsibilities of these administrative bodies.[10] The subsequent meetings did take place, and more promises were made. Nevertheless, as the weeks and months passed and the June uprisings lost momentum, the deadlines that had been given came and went. In 2016, João lamented:

> The state did not do any of what it had promised, and the municipality did 15 percent of what it had promised (…) I believed in what they were promising—I thought it would come true. Today, I do not believe in it anymore.

He went on to describe the impact this had on him:

> We saw that it was not helping at all. When we thought we were helping with something, we were not helping with anything (…) The wish was just to delete everything that we had done.

These quotes and similar statements from other Rocinha activists involved in the process resound with disillusionment. The commission fell apart, and, according to Roberto, its

members "started working in a more individualized manner." Valéria continued to engage with grassroots movements, while Ana and Roberto started writing about community issues on social media and in online newspapers. João said that he would occasionally reach out to contacts in the state government via messaging apps, though with little success. They all experienced a sense of fatigue. Roberto and Valéria, respectively, summed it up:

> You end up burned out—people judge you, and not everyone is up for that. I think that, before long, we will need other people, because we are not going to be young anymore and we will need others to follow up.

> We sometimes feel exhausted, tired. We should not get tired, I know, but sometimes there is nothing to do—you have tried going to all three levels of government, mobilization, external support, and we have not been able to make them finish the works.

The new generation's rise to a position of power had begun as an explicit rejection of the previous generation of leaders, due to their links to party politics – particularly to the PMDB. These young activists had viewed the previous generation as ineffective at generating progressive change, and they were idealistic and optimistic about their capacity to do better. As they became disillusioned about the meager results of their own activism, however, they began to turn to similar kinds of political relations. João stated:

> I thought it had to be non-partisan, but being non-partisan, you do not get things done. Negotiations—there is a lot that lies behind things getting done, agreements and alliances (…) There comes a moment when you can no longer escape involvement in party politics in Brazil.

In the 2016 municipal elections, then, João and Roberto became outspoken supporters of a PMDB politician who João recalled had approached them with

> A proposal that we would work together. He was the only one who really helped—he did his work, and that is what distinguishes a politician, doing what he is paid to do. (…) We will put together a group of activists here for his cause.

Roberto described him as "the only one who 'climbs the hill' outside of elections," meaning that he was not among the politicians who only came around in search of votes. Several other members of the new generation, including Ana, supported another PMDB candidate. She noted that their support was based on the need to vote for *gente que faz* – politicians who get things done. In other words, as they were forced to move beyond the more universal claims of social and political inclusion raised during the June uprisings, they came to put their trust in individual politicians' short-term electoral promises on localized issues in the community. Does this mean that they were simply de-politicized and folded back into the old "police" order?

Neither pristinely political nor simple preys of manipulation and co-optation

The protagonists of the Rocinha demonstration represented a new generation of resourceful activists who were thrown into a position of leadership through the June uprisings. While initially highly optimistic, they were deeply disappointed by the subsequent lack of real participation. Their waning influence seemed to end up incorporated into the existing clientelist political relations instead of transforming them. Rather than describe this

profile as a coopted and depoliticized subject, however, I would argue that the new generation's eventual support of PMDB in the 2016 elections reflects a strategic and pragmatic choice given the context at the time. Within the ever-deepening political and economic crises that enveloped Rio de Janeiro from 2013 onward, the prospects of seeing the materialization of large-scale public works and broader societal change were slim. These activists therefore took advantage of the only opportunity at hand: the electoral promises of opportunistic politicians. Supporting this interpretation is the fact that, in the 2018 state and federal elections, these same subjects voted for candidates from the PT (for president) and the far-left PSOL (for state representative) on the basis that, in these elections, those candidates were the best options for Rocinha and for favela residents. In other words, it was political pragmatism rather than personal opportunism that guided their votes in the years following the June days.

Evaluating the longer-term impacts of the June uprisings on young people in the community, João and Valéria, respectively, observed the following in late 2016:

> We are in a political moment where, for good or for bad, young people are becoming interested in politics. I think it is easier to have an organized base, for people to position themselves. I did not see it before 2013.

> I think 2013 in some ways helped awaken an interest in politics. I think some people gained an understanding that they did not have before, which is that it is important to talk about politics—that all forms of human action are political. With some young people in particular, I perceive this change, like with these new protagonists [João, Roberto, Ana]. I think that is a positive legacy.

These quotes illustrate how the June uprisings gave rise to new actors and new visions of political alternatives. Despite their later disillusionment, these people were changed by June, and grounded analyses help us to assess the longer-term consequential impacts of messy urban uprisings.

Discussion: Revolutionary Openings or Reactionary Outcomes?

The case study presented an in-depth account of a single demonstration in Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro, during Brazil's 2013 June uprisings. What relevance does it have for wider debates concerning the June uprisings and the role of such events in urban transformative processes?

The first part of the case study looked at the ways in which the June uprisings acted as a catalyst for the emergence of a "new generation" of leaders in Rocinha. Rancière provides fruitful analytical concepts for making sense of the coming-into-being of new political subjectivities through such events. In contrast to thinkers who view the political as deriving from subject positions within given social, cultural, or economic domains, Rancière (1999) postulates that people become political subjects through practice. The Revolutionary Openings narrative draws on this type of political thinking to capture how the June uprisings brought new actors and political imaginaries into being – the way the Rocinha protagonists were "breathing politics" following the demonstration. This framing opens up for capturing an inherently political dimension in urban uprisings even when they are not part of organized movements, parties, structures, or institutions (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017).

There are, however, challenges with an evental understanding of politics. In granting theoretical prevalence to the moment of rupture and "concrete political acts that interrupt the history of oppression *in the here and now*" (Assy, 2017, p. 124, emphasis added), some of the Revolutionary Openings scholarship has tended to present June as if retained in a vacuum wherein the aura of autonomy and revolt is preserved (Hajime & Sawamura, 2018). As the case study from Rocinha showed, though, celebratory accounts of outbursts of indignation as political in and of themselves are both premature and of limited relevance if we want to understand the longer-term outcomes of actual uprisings.

In drawing attention to the extended political processes and consequences of the June uprisings in Rocinha, the second part of the case study emphasized that the new generation of activists was situated within deeply embedded structures of power, domination, and exclusion in Rio and Brazil. They were met by a state machinery that mobilized to depoliticize and coopt them – one that they were ill-equipped to stand up to. The actual, concrete outcomes of the June demonstration left much to be desired. Disillusioned by this reality, several members of the new generation turned instead to the electoral promises of clientelist-opportunist politicians. In coming to terms with such tendencies, scholars subscribing to the Reactionary Outcomes narrative have painted June as simply a form of "Facebook activism" undertaken by unorganized and inexperienced protesters vulnerable to capture by the political right. Underlying this narrative is a preference for organized social movements as the drivers of progressive change, and, in turn, an inherent wariness of uprisings as disorderly disturbances with little transformative potential (see, for example, Saad-Filho, 2013).

A closer look at the longer-term consequences in Rocinha adds relevant nuance to the Reactionary Outcomes narrative about the June days as well. The case study showed that the activists should not be dismissed as easy prey of manipulation and domination by those holding power. While the new generation did not revolutionize local (or urban) politics as such, it also was not subsumed back into the old social order. Through the lived experience of subjectivizing change, a new generation of leaders in Rocinha became a force that demanded some acknowledgement. This demonstrates the necessity of a longer-term, grounded analysis of urban uprisings to properly evaluate the transformative politics of such events. Ethnographic research allows for unveiling the reverberations of uprisings in messy, real-life contexts. The before- and afterlives of June as narrated by the four main activists in Rocinha also indicates that the significance of urban uprisings is not limited to their immediate and measurable results. Instead, it extends to the fact that uprisings exemplify the power of all people to stage a dispute at any time, as such revealing the social order's susceptibility to reordering and the possibility of alternative worlds (Inston, 2017).

The approach undertaken in this article thus illustrates that it matters from where and from when we assess the political significance of urban uprisings. Monolithic accounts of June's reactionary outcomes focus overwhelmingly on urban middle classes (particularly in São Paulo) and the anti-PT, right wing protests that took place in 2015 and 2016 while overlooking other actors and actions that also found new openings and means of expression following the uprisings. Most notably, the election of Marielle Franco[11] (and many others like her) is a clear example of how the *lulismo* generation – those favela residents whose life conditions were improved during the PT years – is bringing a new agenda to the political game. Its anti-racist, feminist, LGBTQI+, and de-colonial

content is changing the very grammar of politics, and–potentially–urban politics. Despite the abiding current political context in Brazil, we should therefore not "close down and bury" the political narrative of June (Avelar, 2017), limiting it to an event that only the right was able to capitalize on. In contrast, the June uprisings can fruitfully be interpreted as an open source of emancipatory politics that continues to define people's sense of political identity in multiple ways.

Concluding remarks

This article has analyzed the Brazilian June uprisings through the lens of a demonstration originating in a Rio de Janeiro favela. It placed the Rocinha case into dialogue with two broad narratives of the June uprisings that foregrounded in alternative ways the Revolutionary Openings or Reactionary Outcomes of these events. Through a Rancièrian interpretation of the political as a performative staging of egalitarian dissent, the article has seconded the Revolutionary Openings narrative's focus on how the uprisings brought new political actors and imaginaries to the political arena. However, whereas some scholars subscribing to that narrative have focused narrowly on the 2013 events, this article has emphasized the necessity of a contextual and processual analysis of the uprisings' political logic. Through this approach, the article has argued for the fruitfulness of viewing the June uprisings as remaining a source of emancipatory politics, even in the current political context marked by the rise of a revived, authoritarian right.

We can take three lessons from the article with relevance to broader debates concerning the transformative political potential of urban uprisings. First, a Rancièrian lens is fruitful for capturing the political dynamics of urban uprisings. These events are engendered by the internal contradictions of neoliberal urban regimes whose consensualizing forms of depoliticizing governance cannot fully suppress the antagonisms that cut through any social order. In contrast to analyses that view uprisings as fleeting apparitions that erupt and subside with little transformative impact, a Rancièrian notion of the political enables the recognition of urban uprisings as events that produce and transform political subjectivities. Regardless of their immediate outcomes, urban uprisings' ruptural and inaugurative logics have an inherently transformative and emancipatory potential in showing that the social order can be challenged and rearranged.

Second, a contextually embedded analysis of the political is necessary. Much of the literature that views urban politics and resistance through a Rancièrian lens, reads uprisings allegorically and thus detaches them from the historical and structural contexts in which they are embedded. Urban uprisings, however, are always initiated by geographically located subjects acting on and against their material conditions of existence. Finding intersections between Rancière's abstract political philosophy and critical urban theory, this article has underlined the centrality of granting analytical attention to the social, economic, and spatial configurations that condition the emergence of uprisings and their outcomes in given urban contexts. In other words, and in contrast to Rancièrian analyses' tendency to focus on the aesthetic and imaginative dimensions of political disruptions, this article has foregrounded the territoriality of urban uprisings as providing context and content to the political.

Finally, the temporal dimension must be considered when assessing the transformative political potential of urban uprisings. Rancière's eventual view of politics largely

locates its success in the fact of its occurrence, but such an understanding should not divert attention from the gradual and far-from-straightforward processes that lead up to, and follow, political events. Here, again, critical urban theory plays a strategic function in drawing attention to how sedimented power relations are produced and defended on the ground. As shown in this article, a processual reading of the political through in-depth and over-time analysis is fruitful to assess and understand the consequential impacts of turbulent urban uprisings in real-life contexts.

Read along these lines, political change as induced by urban uprisings stands forth not as a tumultuous transformation, but as an evolutional and open-ended process that is best grasped through contextual and processual analysis.

Notes

1. A host of concepts bearing slightly different connotations has been applied to analyses of these types of events, including riots, revolts, rebellions, insurrections, insurgencies, urban activism, and urban unrest. This article favors the term "urban uprising" to refer to a moment of rapid spread of highly visible, militant, and autonomous forms of collective action in an urban context (Balibar, 2007; Mayer et al., 2016).
2. *As Jornadas de Junho* – the June days, or simply June, in Brazilian analyses. While they take the name of the month in which they erupted, the demonstrations continued for months and even into 2014 in Rio de Janeiro (Cava, 2016).
3. These two narratives recall both Hajime and Sawamura's (2018) distinction between a "Fascist June" and an "Autonomist June" and Avelar's (2017) distinction between those who want to "forget and bury" June, viewing it as the culprit for the impeachment proceedings against Dilma Rousseff, and those who want "to keep June open," viewing it as a source of further emancipatory potential.
4. In the current Brazilian context, "fascism" manifests itself via suspicion directed toward democratic institutions or mechanisms of representation and via calls for strong leadership and political order.
5. The political ideology characterizing the PT presidencies, see Singer (2012).
6. PMDB has been renowned for clientelist patronage relations (see Nobre, 2013).
7. The international drug trade found a stronghold in Rio's favelas in the 1980s and drug trafficking has since had a strong influence on community politics and social life (Larkins, 2015; Silva, 2008).
8. The Class C, an income-based approach to determining social classes in Brazil (Neri, 2010). Over fifty percent were brought into this class during the PT years. Key Brazilian scholars criticize the notion of this class C as a new middle class, arguing that the limited and consumer-based social mobility merely created a new "precariat" (Braga & Purdy, 2019), "proletariat" (Singer, 2012) or "informal working class" (Saad-Filho & Morais, 2018).
9. Approximately US$670 million according to the 2013 exchange rate (1 BRL/0.42 USD).
10. For the commission's report from the meeting, see https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B2DLEveo1hIFam1XZV83X2Y4YlU/edit.
11. Marielle Franco was a black, bisexual favela resident who became Rio's fifth most voted city councilperson in 2016. She explicitly pointed to June as the inspiration that pushed her to public candidacy (Ellwanger, 2018). While she was murdered in a politically motivated attack in 2018, she has become a symbol of these new political actors and contents.

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