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Social Vulnerability and the Right to Housing in Brazil: An Example of Urban Resistance

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Abstract. The awareness of a given phenomenon involves the implementation of an organised and defined solution based on the perception of social insecurity and exposure to different forms of inequality (economic, social and cultural). From these processes emerge forms of resilience and resistance, i.e. the capacity of an individual, a community or a society to adapt, endure and emerge from problematic and critical situations. In Brazil, there are numerous examples of social movements as a collective form of resistance that fight for land and housing, both in rural and more urbanised areas. Such as the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto (MTST). Starting from the concept of resilience and social resistance, this work aims to analyse the forms that these take, through the actions of the Movement, to provide social responses to combat inequality and poverty. In the first part, more of a theoretical nature, the different declinations and modes of expression of the concepts of resilience and social resistance will be highlighted. In the second part, these concepts will be declined by analysing the work of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto (MTST), in the implementation of rights, opportunities and in defining criteria for social justice.

Keywords: resistance, resilience, social vulnerability, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto, culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

Worsening social inequalities in contemporary societies represent a structural challenge to the full realisation of fundamental rights. The right to housing plays a central role. In Brazil, the housing issue reflects the historical dynamics of land concentration, racial and gender marginalisation, as well as a process of urbanisation marked by profound territorial asymmetries. The persistent housing deficit, significantly localised among the poorest segments of the population, is an emblematic indicator of the insufficiency of public policies in guaranteeing minimum conditions of housing dignity.

Social movements play a fundamental role in denouncing structural injustices, while also promoting alternative models for the production and distribution of urban space. The Movement of Roofless Workers (MTST) stands out for its capacity to not only mobilise but also for the pressure it exerts on institutions, demanding the right to the city and the adoption of inclusive housing policies.

Starting from the concepts of resilience and social resistance, this contribution aims to analyse the ways in which these dynamics manifest themselves in the collective actions of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto* (MTST). Set in a context of the struggle for the right to housing in Brazil. The first section has a theoretical-conceptual perspective and examines the main interpretations of the two concepts, highlighting their critical potential in the analysis of social practices. The second part presents an overview of the Brazilian housing situation, illustrating the role of the MTST in popular mobilisation, political pressure and the construction of concrete alternatives for access to housing. The movement's initiatives represent a form of social response from below, capable of articulating strategies of survival and transformation, while expressing adaptive capacities and collective protection practices for the communities involved.

2. RESISTANCE AND SOCIAL RESILIENCE: THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY

Resilience and social resistance are two concepts that have become increasingly visible in the social scene in recent years due to crises and the continuous increase in inequalities. They are two different concepts that are expressed differently, but which represent the ways in which individuals express themselves in relation to a specific event. Pentland (2014) states that the meaning of individuals' actions is determined by the mechanisms of their social interaction, which allows for specific and well-defined reasoned reactions to arise that aim at the expression of strategies for change, while also overcoming social phenomena. It materialises the notion that social and individual responses to phenomena depend on the combination of social and individual learning (Pentland 2014). Resilience encompasses the capacity of subjects and the social system to persist in specific situations to be structured in such a way as to respond to events by not succumbing to them. The capacity for social resistance is the implementation of specific actions defined by and in agreement with the social system (Clarke 2003). In social resistance, individuals and communities express their

empowerment, emphasising the processes of social interaction and community dynamics (Antonucci, Sorice and Volterrani 2024). In social resistance we find the capacity of a community to reproduce a certain social process in such a way that it can address the political and cultural struggle conducted by social actors to challenge and counteract the negative actions implemented by the dominant political system with a structured social process in the form of movements. Resistance may be well organised and present itself in the form of social movements or community organisations. It may also be visible in the practices and attitudes of everyday life (Dello Buono and Fasenfest 2012; Kennis 2022).

Social resistance aims to challenge the dominant power, promote social change and imagine alternative futures (Vander Zanden 1959; Poulakidakos, Veneti and Rovisco 2024). Moreover, it seeks to overturn the existing situation by attempting to reverse the difficult and crisis situations in which the community lives through strong actions and resistance (*Ibidem*). Demonstrating and resisting are carried out by following the cultural and social process of belonging as well as by activating social movements, parties and activist groups. There are various ways of resisting, that can manifest themselves on different levels and situations. These include actions to oppose political power or mechanisms of social and cultural violence, climate change, poverty and inequality, or the effects of digital platforms and social (Bonini and Trerè 2024).

The theme of resistance is different, which takes into consideration the response modes and activated capacities. In the dynamics of resistance, the capacity of the community to succeed in activating actions that allow them to return to existing mechanisms and conditions is expressed.

The concept of resilience is the other theme that has returned to the analyses of social systems. This is the case when considering the concept of how the community reacts and how it can be an engine of social reactivation as a dynamic process (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker 2000) that has a positive adaptation in relation to significant adversity.

The community has always played a fundamental role in social construction as well as the implementation of social growth and regulation actions (Cohen 1985; Delanty 2018). The same relational dynamics determined by the community involve the construction of resilience processes that guide individuals in the manifestation of their choices. The mechanisms that determine community dynamics are given by social culture, which in turn determines both resilience and social security mechanisms.

Social systems and communities defined as resilient act not only by renewing themselves but also by maintaining their functionality and recognisability of the systems themselves (Gunderson and Holling 2002).

However, resilience does not imply the restoration of an initial state or a return to previous conditions, but rather the restoration of social functionality through change and adaptation (Martini 2025). Resilience is the potential of a system to remain in a particular configuration and maintain its feedback and functions. Building resilience into a system configuration often requires the improvement of structures and processes, highlighting the crucial role of adaptive capacity in ensuring the survival and success of such systems in increasingly complex and changing contexts (Martini 2012). Moreover, it can be characterised by three different distinctive elements that manage and define its modes of expression. These include the amount of change a system can undergo and maintain the same controls over function and structure; the degree to which the system is capable of self-organisation; and the degree to which the system expresses the capacity to learn and adapt (Walker and Meyers 2004). It depends not only on the personality system of the individual but also on the culture system (Sorokin 1948). The community plays a central role both in the relationship and construction of the social system as well as in the expression of resilience of individuals. It is a drive that comes from the community and facilitates social construction and reconstruction (Malaguti 2005).

For this reason, it is possible to speak of a culture of resilience that is proposed by the community itself and that fosters investment in programmes, communication and policies, including by activating latent resources in the relationships between different actors (Rampp, Endreß and Naumann 2019). This makes it necessary to provide actions in response to the events at local, national and international levels that promote the resilience of communities (Wright 2022). This includes those segments of the population that, due to phenomena of a different nature, are more vulnerable than others.

Resilience enables reconstruction through social collaboration, policy activation, and the investment of programmes and contexts to foster resource activation by ensuring collaboration and support within the community. The resilience mechanism makes it possible to continue planning the future. The resilience mechanism allows to undergo an event and manage it (Poulakidakos, Veneti and Rovisco 2024).

Community resilience refers to communities working with local resources together with local expertise to help themselves prepare for, respond to and recover from difficult and extreme situations (Twigger-Ross *et*

al. 2015). It is necessary for survival to understand what resources they can invest in and build their resilience for future livability.

Faced with critical social situations, the community has to create situations that can be the expression of its own social resilience, activating its social mechanisms to cope with such situations and, at the same time, through a process of resilience, setting in motion social dynamics that can be expressed under an opportunity where the future could be different from the past, through a proper analysis of the possible conditions to improve social life for the future dimension (Johnson *et al.* 2021). The community presents itself as a set of bonds, common goals and shared interactions between members. Interactions help community members to be resilient and overcome difficult situations (Colazzo and Manfreda 2019). Social dynamics play a key role in the enactment of resistance and resilience practices through networks, interpersonal relationships and active participation. It is also determined by the social capital (Coleman 1988; Portes 1998; Putnam 2000) of communities, which refers to the value of social connections and mutual relationships within a community (Colazzo and Manfreda 2019). The concept of community as a resource in the context of social resilience highlights how a community's social dynamics, support networks, collaboration and sharing of resources are essential for coping with and overcoming difficulties. They play a central role (Cohen 1985; Delanty 2018). It is through cultural dynamics that they guide individuals leading them to the realisation of a path that is based on trying to improve one's condition with well-being at its core. Living in a community implies the need to reconstruct what was lost in the events of trauma, to return to social dynamics already in place. The community expresses its capacity and resources through social cohesion and solidarity actions, in which they try to find a possible solution in line with the reconstruction of social ties. The community allows for a condition of support, resistance but also resilience through dynamics of participation and collaboration as a social reconstruction guaranteeing a reproducibility of the social system (Colazzo and Manfreda 2019). The community generates a social drive that moves the different social partners, giving them social responsibility for the role they play (Betz 2023).

The participation triggered by social institutions such as schools and families is also fundamental to be able to set up information, education activities (Prati and Pietrantonio 2009) on risk, crisis and emergencies, building a knowledge base for the creation of a resilience culture for such events.

The community is a fundamental resource for human growth and development. Moreover, relationships, interactions and active participation can contribute to creating a thriving community environment that can be resilient and regenerative in situations of maximum vulnerability. In the actions that the active community takes, we observe how it wants to respond to events, difficulties and forces external to it. At the same time, community capacities present themselves in the form of movements and activist groups.

3. OVERCOMING SOCIAL VULNERABILITY: BETWEEN RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability of a community to continue its development by organising itself against external shocks that may increase its vulnerability and even its existence. Talking about resilience means understanding the social and political role of different actors as well as the role communities play not only in resilience and immediate response but also in the strategies used for the resilience, adaptation and transformation (Wright 2022) of events into socially beneficial situations. When looking at the concept of a resilience culture, we have to understand the community, what are the elements of vulnerability and what are the emotional, social resilience and finally what are the cultural, social and economic capitals that distinguish them. We can also speak of a multi-resilience (Fathi 2022) in which there are different aspects on which the community can cope with events. It is these characteristics that succeed in rebuilding a social system, at the basis of which there is a community that, being formed, is aware of its own characteristics and of the reconstruction and regeneration plan that is to be undertaken.

The condition of social vulnerability considers several dimensions such as socio-economic status, household characteristics, type of housing, services and possessions (Cubeddu 2022; Aksha and Emrich 2024). Social vulnerability is determined by the different types of inequalities within the community and the individual.

It is necessary to specify that the condition of inequality changes not only depending on the social system to which it belongs, but also on the type of development existing at a given historical stage. The type of society and development in a specific time phase are determining factors in the change of each individual's condition. The type of development proposed at an economic level also influences social development and political actions. Focusing only on an increase in economic development very often worsens the social aspects, as this is not only

determined by the economic dimension, but also by the political, social and environmental context. As Sen (1994) states, the idea of inequality contains two different aspects: the actual heterogeneity of human beings and the multiplicity of components of inequality with which it can be assessed and determined. Whether inequality can be defined depends on the different parameters by which it is measured and the country in which it is analysed. The social and urban context is defined by the political context. This is why marginality itself is mostly represented by the most peripheral contexts. The periphery is par excellence the visual representation of social and economic inequality in cities, although especially after the health emergency, it is not the only urban form of marginalisation, exclusion and vulnerability since we observe that even in large city centres the so-called social peripheries (Martinelli 2008), in which we can find degraded, precarious and makeshift occupations and housing, are also manifested. All large European cities testify to this (Cubeddu 2020). Just as marginal and border areas are observed in the central areas. These border areas have different names depending on where they belong: slum (English term for slums); Bidonville (mostly used in French-speaking countries); Favela or bairro da lata (name for Brazilian slums). The context of housing inequality highlights all the social problems that lead people to live in these contexts. The context of poverty encapsulates the situation of social malaise experienced by the subjects. The social context also structures a cultural condition itself. So much so that we can speak of a culture of poverty (Lewis 1966) as well as of two types of inequalities: acceptable or unacceptable (Franzini 2013). The former have opportunities for equality and mobility. The latter, on the other hand, do not have a serious opportunity because they are blocked by the family condition of origin and the deprivation of economic, human capital. Achieving acceptable inequality, for economists, means being driven by individual work and having a social and political structure, that can set in motion actions to counter these dynamics.

In societies with a high degree of inequality between rich and poor, we can observe the impossibility of meeting people's needs and achieving not only economic, but also social, psychological and political well-being. These characteristics highlight the central role that communities play in the implementation of resilience and social resistance actions.

Latin America is characterised by different policies in each country. It also has different types of development mutations and multiple forms of vulnerability. The different countries that make up South America have realities that its inhabitants experience differently, not

only economically, but also socially and environmentally. Housing is synonymous with dwelling and is the expression of the satisfaction of housing need. Its lack is the manifestation of an imbalance between the flow of demand for housing and its availability. A housing distortion is also generated by a lack of housing design (Cubeddu 2021).

Housing and its representations differ according to the social class to which one belongs. The difference between rich and poor is observed in the condition and structure of the dwelling as well as in the place where one lives. From this point of view, we therefore begin to talk about housing deprivation) and housing poverty (Adorni and Tabor 2019; Cubeddu 2020). The house has a central value in the life of the subjects since it is not only a physical place but also represents the family and the subject's living with its interiority. Since antiquity, the house has been the place that stands out as a primary good for man, so much so that Maslow (1954) already placed it on the second step of the pyramid of needs, in the area of security needs. It is a necessary good for man to feel safe, protected from the elements, a home where he can build a family and where he can confront himself. This is why it was stated earlier that housing is the primary distinguishing feature of social inequality and at the same time an indicator of poverty. Housing represents on a social level the condition in which individuals live, their dimensions of social vulnerability, strong economic inequalities but also the person with their psycho-physical well-being. Individuals, as well as social groups, respond to the situations they experience according to their cultural responses. The latter learned – as already observed – in the dynamics of social interrelation with the community. The same capacity for resistance and resilience is determined by the social context. Therefore, the activation of resilient groups and actions such as movements are often stimulated and guided not only by the community but also by some external members who are able to show in situations of extreme vulnerability and fragility the possible elements of resilience on which to generate change (Cubeddu 2022).

The housing context is defined as 'the mirror of the world' in which we live (Caprioglio 2012). This implies how important it is to activate resilience actions and social resistance movements that have as their objective the well-being of the subjects as well as the change of conditions. Working for the reduction of inequalities envisages the same life chances for all subjects and the recognition of their skills and competences within the social system. Guaranteeing the same starting point, as well as the achievement of the goal (Cubeddu and Manganone 2024).

Movements that want to spread awareness that the freedom of subjects, equality and the idea of social justice. Finally, the human being cannot live as if they were a bee in a beehive because they always needs horizons that show them the possibility of a different future (Cubeddu 2021) and that guarantee them continuous social interaction.

Latin America, specifically Brazil, is one of those contexts where the condition of living is fundamental as a propensity to the activation of resistance movements and specifically the movement of homeless workers (MTST). It relates social dynamics with economic, cultural and political ones. At the same time these work on the activation of people and their resilience. In the following paragraphs, we will look at the dynamics of resistance activated by this movement.

4. THE URBAN RESISTANCE OF MOVIMENTO DOS TRABALHADORES SEM TETO (MTST)

Inequality, as noted in the previous paragraph, is a phenomenon that manifests itself in different forms, with it being the result of the historical, economic and political movement specific to each territory. Observing the development of capitalism in the Brazilian and, more generally, Latin American reality, its agrarian, racial, slave, colonial and patriarchal traits are evident. Renata Gonçalves (2018) states that the racial question and racism, as historical products, constitute the founding elements of bourgeois society.

In the process of the formation of Latin American states, there is a common, transversal element. They have all lived – or are still living – the experience of colonialism. Frantz Fanon (2008) highlighted with extraordinary lucidity the intrinsic relationship between colonialism and the (re)production of racism. Underlying the colonising action was the oppression of the 'other', based on the subjugation of their colour, religion, language and way of life.

In Brazil, social inequality is profoundly marked by the racial dimension, which acts as a structuring factor. If today, among the poorest segments of the population, we find predominantly people who identify as black¹. This is due to the fact that racism has played a fundamental role in the configuration of Brazilian social classes.

¹ According to the official classification adopted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the black population comprises two distinct categories: 'pretos' (people who self-identify as black) and 'pardos' (people of mixed origin, often with African ancestry). This distinction is used to analyse racial inequalities in the country more accurately. This definition was confirmed by the 2022 Census.

Sociologist Clóvis Moura (2019) observes how Brazilian society has not only failed to democratise its fundamental social relations but has also failed to democratise its race relations. As a result, it is much more difficult for black descendants of former slaves to access effective social mobility. Added to this element is the fact that all Latin American countries were built on a latifundist regime, founded on the domination and exploitation of indigenous and enslaved lands and peoples.

Brazil has been no exception. Its land structure has historically excluded significant segments of the social base. An emblematic example is the Land Law (Lei de Terras, Law No. 601 of 18 September 1850), the first initiative to regulate private property in the country. Enacted decades before the legal abolition of slavery (Law No. 3,353 of 13 May 1888²), this law prevented the freed Afro-descendant population from accessing land, forcing them to occupy marginal and difficult-to-access territories, such as hills and ravines. The denial of access to land has been, and continues to be, one of the most persistent structural obstacles for the Brazilian popular classes. Although Article 6 of the 1988 Federal Constitution recognises the right to housing as one of the fundamental social rights, the problem of housing persists. Having a house means having a safe and dignified space in which to live. However, throughout the country – and particularly in the large urban centres – there are precarious housing conditions, often lacking essential services such as sewage, drinking water and rubbish collection. The struggle for the right to decent housing has always characterised the reality of large urban centres. Since the 1970s, when Brazil became a predominantly urban country, cities have been unprepared to receive the large contingent of migrants from rural areas. This phenomenon led to a significant increase in irregular housing occupations.

The Fundação João Pinheiro (FJP) is the authority in charge of calculating the housing deficit in Brazil, in collaboration with the National Housing Secretariat of the Ministry of Cities. In the latest published report, with data referring to the year 2022, a housing deficit of six million housing units was found, which corresponds to 8.3% of the total occupied housing in the country.

According to the analysis of the Foundation (FJP), the housing issue in Brazil is complex and includes a multiplicity of factors that hinder the access, availability and adequacy of housing. For this reason, the institution adopts an expanded conception of housing need, which

has two complementary dimensions: a quantitative one, represented by the housing deficit, and a qualitative one, relating to the inadequacy³ of existing housing. This perspective makes it possible to grasp not only the numerical insufficiency of housing units, but also the material and structural conditions that compromise their decent residential function. This is compounded by the need for access to a home of one's own, as in the case of unwanted family cohabitation. Situations in which separate households aspire to establish an autonomous residence but lack the necessary resources. Furthermore, the deficit also includes low-income households living in urban areas who devote an excessive share of their household budget to rent payments, compromising their ability to meet other essential needs.

According to data from 2022, the housing deficit in Brazil is mainly concentrated among households with monthly incomes up to two minimum wages (equal to R\$ 2,640⁴), with a higher incidence in urban areas in the South-East, South and Centre-West regions. In contrast, in the North and North-East regions, the phenomenon occurs with greater intensity in rural areas. The profile of the households affected shows a marked gender and racial dimension: 62.6% of households are headed by women and 66.3% are composed of black people, who represent the majority in almost all the categories analysed, with the exception of the South region.

Among the main factors contributing to the housing deficit is the so-called 'excessive urban rent burden', i.e. the situation of households with an income of up to three minimum wages who spend more than 30% of their monthly income on rent. This category alone accounts for 52.2% of the national housing deficit, corresponding to 3,242,780 housing units, and reflects the structural difficulty of millions of families in accessing decent housing without compromising the satisfaction of other basic needs. An analysis of inadequate housing in Brazil in 2022 shows that households composed of black people with incomes of up to three minimum wages are the most affected segment, accounting for 36.5% of all the dwellings considered inadequate. This incidence

³ The concept of 'inadequate housing' adopted by the João Pinheiro Foundation comprises three main dimensions: (i) building inadequacy, relating to urban housing units that lack minimum standards of comfort and health, such as the absence of a private bathroom, earthen floors, tin roofs and lack of water supply; (ii) inadequate urban infrastructure, which concerns the lack or poor provision of essential services such as electricity, piped drinking water, sewerage or waste collection; and (iii) inadequate land tenure, referring to properties located on land that is not regularised, even if owned or in the process of being purchased.

⁴ As of May 2025, two minimum wages in Brazil correspond to 2,640 Brazilian *reais* (BRL), equivalent to approximately 406 euros (EUR), according to the average exchange rate of 1 EUR = 6.50 BRL.

² Known as the *Lei Áurea*, this was the legislation that officially abolished slavery in Brazil. Signed by Princess Isabella, it legally ended the practice of slavery, although its social and economic consequences persist to this day.

is even more pronounced in cases where the domestic responsibility falls on women. In this context, the housing issue takes on a structural dimension in which class, gender and race relations intertwine, producing forms of social inequality. Access to decent housing cannot therefore be treated as a sectoral issue, but rather as an indicator of broader dynamics of material power distribution in Brazilian society. According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in 2022, 8% of black women lived in extreme poverty, compared to 3.6% of white women. Among men, 7.4% of black men were in the same situation, compared to 3.4% of white men. These inequalities are also reflected in access to housing, revealing that the black population suffers more acutely from housing shortages. This is a tangible expression of a historical process of material marginalisation. The persistence of which continues to widen the gaps in the country's social structure. In this scenario, the housing issue cannot be understood simply as a lack of resources or public policies, but as a concrete expression of the contradictions inherent in Brazilian society. Brazil's large cities, transformed into real estate speculation grounds, are progressively expelling the poorest to suburbs lacking infrastructure, consolidating a segregated and hierarchical urban model. It is in this context of structural inequality that various collective actions and social movements have taken shape, among which the Homeless Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto – MTST) stands out⁵.

5. THE MOVIMENTO DOS TRABALHADORES SEM-TETO – MTST

The Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST) was founded in 1997 under the strong influence of activists from the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST)⁶, who understood the strategic need to extend their action to urban areas to strengthen the implementation of agrarian reform.

In the context of the 'National March for Agrarian Reform, Occupation and Justice' held in 1997, the MST

decided to send activists to consolidate its presence in urban centres. This decision marked a crucial moment of strategic transition, indicating the recognition of cities as central spaces in the struggle for social and territorial rights. As a result, MST activists living in the Campinas region began to take part in urban occupations that were already underway. As a legacy of this experience, the urban movement in question adopted, among its main tactics, the occupation of territories located in urban areas close to major roads, a strategy that allows for greater public visibility of the actions undertaken (Simões, Campos and Rafael 2017).

The MTST affirms that its struggle is aimed at securing housing, work and bread. However, it recognises that achieving these rights requires the construction of a popular project capable of articulating alternatives to 'counter the commodification of housing, build popular power, link the struggle for housing to workers' rights and combat hunger' (MTST)⁷.

In the early 2000s, occupations advanced in several cities in the state of São Paulo, namely: Campinas, Guarulhos, Osasco, Santos Dumont Highway, Bandeirantes, Dutra, Castelo Branco, Anhanguera, Raposo Tavares. In 2003, an occupation involving 4,000 families took place in São Bernardo do Campo, in the ABC Paulista region⁸, on a Volkswagen site called 'Santo Dias'.

According to Simões, Campos, Rafael (2017), it was in the early 2000s that the MTST became a nationally recognised movement because, thanks to its coordination with other organisations, such as the Comunidades Eclesias de Base, the MTST began the Anita Garibaldi occupation, which involved more than 2,000 families who settled on a huge plot of land on the outskirts of Guarulhos, near the international airport (Cumbica) and the Presidente Dutra motorway. In 2002, it occupied an urban estate in the city of Osasco (Greater São Paulo), an occupation called Carlos Lamarca. In 2004, the Chico Mendes occupation took place in Taboão da Serra. It is worth noting that these actions have unfortunately been accompanied by a great deal of repression, as foreclosure and eviction proceedings involving the use

⁵ See the official website of the Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST): *About us*. Available at: <https://mtst.org/quem-somos/o-mtst>

⁶ The Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) is an important Brazilian social movement founded in 1984, committed to the struggle for agrarian reform and equitable access to land. Through the occupation of unproductive large estates and the organisation of rural settlements, the MST has built self-managed communities based on agroecological practices and principles of social justice. Beyond the national context, the movement has gained international recognition as an emblematic example of peasant mobilisation and the defence of human rights in the Global South.

⁷ Cfr. See *About us*, Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST). Available at: <https://mtst.org/quem-somos/o-mtst>.

⁸ This is a region located in the south-eastern part of Greater São Paulo. The acronym ABC refers to the cities that make it up: Santo André (A), São Bernardo do Campo (B) and São Caetano do Sul (C); sometimes Diadema (D) is also included in the acronym. Since the 20th century, it has been considered the main industrial area of the São Paulo metropolis, becoming the first centre of the Brazilian automotive industry in 1950. This characteristic contributed to the region being recognised as the cradle of the contemporary trade union movement in Brazil. At the end of the 1970s, following numerous workers' strikes in the area, the Workers' Party (PT) was founded and, at the beginning of the following decade, the Central Workers' Union (CUT).

of police force and coercion have been commonplace for the movement over the years.

In addition to occupations, the MTST also resorts to political actions such as hunger strikes, such as the one that took place in São Bernardo do Campo, in front of the home of then-President Luís Inacio Lula da Silva, which lasted three days. Thanks to this strike, the prospect of building the João Cândido condominium, with more than 800 apartments, became a reality (Simões, Campos and Rafael 2017). The MTST has three types of organisational bodies: political collectives, composed of national and state coordinators; organisational collectives, whose function is to carry out specific activities in the occupations, through community centres, and regional collectives.

To ensure a better organisation, the MTST created regional centres aimed at maintaining grassroots organisation even outside the occupied territories. To this end, regular meetings were held in public places. The Associação Periferia Ativa (Active Periphery Association) was also created, 'a network of local leaders who, together with MTST coordinators, discussed and mobilised their communities for struggles that went beyond housing: against police violence, for social electricity tariffs, against fires in the favelas and other problems' (Simões, Campos and Rafael 2017: 31).

Another important aspect was the need for national expansion, which began as a process of state creation. This led to a proliferation of occupations between 2006 and 2007 in the regions of Campinas and ABC, southwest of Greater São Paulo.

The first decade of the 2000s was marked by a growing wave of urban occupations and popular demonstrations in Brazil, particularly in the years leading up to 2014, when the country hosted the World Cup. Considered the most important football event in the world, preparations for the tournament involved the allocation of large areas of land for the construction of stadiums, resulting in expropriation and significant property price increases in the areas surrounding the construction sites. This led to an exponential increase in the value per square metre and, consequently, in rents, forcing many families to abandon the homes they had lived in for years.

A prime example of this situation is the Ocupação Copa do Povo, which began on 3 May 2014 on a 150,000 m² plot of land that had been abandoned for over 20 years and located just over 3 km from the Corinthians Arena in the eastern part of São Paulo. The resistance of the occupying families and the pressure exerted by the movement led the Federal Government, on 9 June of the same year, to recognise and accept the occupants' claims (Simões, Campos and Rafael 2017: 49).

Building on this experience, the MTST gradually expanded its presence to other states of the federation: in 2010 to the city of Brasília (Federal District); in 2012 to Paraná; in 2013 to Palmas (Tocantins); in 2014 to São Gonçalo (Rio de Janeiro) and, in the same year, carried out its first occupation in Fortaleza (Ceará); in 2015, the movement reached Aparecida de Goiânia (Goiás), Minas Gerais and, in the same year, the outskirts of Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul); finally, in 2016, the first occupation took place in Recife (Pernambuco).

In 2015, during the MTST National Meeting, the political front *Povo Sem Medo* (People Without Fear) was created, defined as an expression of the reconfiguration of the popular camp and the Brazilian left (Simões, Campos and Rafael 2017: 119). The initiative brings together organisations with different political orientations: from entities historically linked to the Workers' Party (PT) governments, such as the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) and the National Union of Students (UNE), to autonomous movements such as the MTST itself, to critical currents of the PT, represented by various sectors of the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL).

The Frente Povo Sem Medo aims to represent a popular alternative to national needs, in a particularly difficult context marked by the advance of the far right not only in institutions – as highlighted during the government of Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2018–2022) – but also within civil society.

Operating for almost thirty years in the urban peripheries of Brazil, the MTST has understood that living in and owning decent housing is a fundamental right of human dignity. The movement is therefore committed to ensuring not only a roof over people's heads, but a home that meets standards of liveability, equipped with essential services (such as drinking water and sanitation) and access to public transport and essential public policies (health and education). This struggle goes far beyond the simple right to housing but is a battle for social justice and the right to a dignified life, as enshrined in the Brazilian Constitution. This movement fights for 'a roof, work and bread' (basic needs to be met), as its promoters and members themselves affirm.

The Movement is oriented towards guaranteeing social security and represents the community's resilience to inequality and poverty. This can be understood by observing how, on a daily basis, the leaders are committed to organising the community by strengthening resistance and fighting against the politics and culture of inequality and poverty to promote the construction of a more just and egalitarian Brazil.

In conclusion, the expansion of the MTST and the creation of the *Frente Povo Sem Medo* represent not only a concrete response to growing social inequalities and housing shortages in Brazilian urban areas, but also an attempt to politically reorganise the popular camp in a period of great instability and the advance of conservative forces. Urban occupations, such as the emblematic *Copa do Povo*, have demonstrated the capacity of social movements to articulate effective practices of resistance and protest, gaining public visibility and dialogue with institutions. In this sense, the MTST has established itself as a relevant political actor, capable of building bridges between the struggle for the right to housing, broader social rights and the construction of an alternative popular project for Brazil.

In this context, the action of popular movements, such as the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto (MTST), takes on a central role not only in denouncing injustices, but also in developing practices of collective resistance and social reappropriation of space. Through occupations, mobilisations and proposals for alternative public policies, the MTST does not merely claim the right to housing but builds a concrete critique of the existing order on a daily basis, laying the foundations for a project of social transformation that starts from the bottom up.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

An analysis of the housing deficit in Brazil, in light of the most recent data, highlights the scale and complexity of the problem. In addition to reflecting the quantitative shortage of adequate housing, the phenomenon is closely linked to the historical and structural dynamics of poverty, rooted in colonial, racial and patriarchal processes. The state's inability to guarantee universal access to housing cannot be understood without considering the historical inequalities that still characterise the urban layout and land distribution in the country.

The state must take a proactive role not only in housing production, but also in land regularisation, control of property prices and the promotion of the right to the city as a collective right. Housing cannot be reduced to a commodity. It must be recognised as a fundamental right, interdependent with other social rights such as health, work, education and mobility.

In this context, social movements fighting for housing play an essential role in denouncing inequalities and building popular alternatives to urban exclusion. Among these, the Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST) stands

out for its organisational capacity and direct action in claiming the right to housing. The occupations promoted by the movement are not only acts of resistance, but real political pressure strategies that have brought the housing issue back to the centre of the national debate. The role of social resistance movements is central to triggering social change towards the pursuit of well-being. This social movement highlights how it is possible today to use resistance actions to mobilise a political force and, at the same time, generate social resilience that pushes people to seek possible solutions to their difficulties, trying to activate all the social mechanisms available to the community. Through widespread local organisation and dialogue with other popular forces, the movement has succeeded in influencing the public agenda and achieving concrete gains for thousands of families. Its existence represents a collective response to the inaction of the state and an expression of the organisational capacity of urban peripheries. In this sense, the recognition and strengthening of social movements are key elements in the construction of more just, participatory public policies that are sensitive to the real needs of the population. It is therefore possible to affirm that the practices of the MTST are oriented towards social justice and the expansion of opportunities, through forms of collective action that express an adaptive and transformative capacity from below, contributing to the protection of the most vulnerable communities.

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