

# Informal settlements, mega-events and conflict: a case study from pre-2014 Brazil<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses the conflict over the eviction of Vila Recanto UFMG, the first community to be entirely displaced due to construction works for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. This informal settlement was formed by approximately 70 families and occupied since 1999 an abandoned lot in a (upper-)middle-class and touristic area of Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Proud of having autoconstructed their houses, the dwellers of Vila Recanto UFMG struggled against their eviction which, however, took place in 2011. In this context, this eviction makes evident how such mega-events especially impact informal housing. More generally, mega-events tend to lever a process of urban regeneration promoted by the state, affecting especially those groups and urban landscapes that do not belong to the image of the ideal city as imagined by local governments and elites.

**Key-words:** conflict; informal housing; mega-events; 2014 World Cup Brazil; place identity.

## 0. Introduction

Demolished in May 2011, the informal settlement *Vila Recanto UFMG* in the city of Belo Horizonte (Brazil) was the first example of a community that was entirely evicted due to a 2014 FIFA World Cup<sup>2</sup>-related project. Its removal came about after a long conflict polarized by community dwellers and public authorities. On the one side, there are the 70 families of dwellers who (auto)constructed their own houses and gave meaning to that *place* as a home for their *community*<sup>3</sup>. In the context of the conflict, being united in their identity as dwellers of Vila Recanto UFMG, they had been struggling for the legitimization of their occupation by the government of the Municipality of Belo Horizonte. On the other side, the government planned the occupation of that *space* through a new viaduct which should facilitate the access to the city's main soccer stadium.

The confrontation between both sides forms the conflict over the eviction of Vila Recanto UFMG. The 'conflict' is taken here as the core category for further analyses, as I agree with

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on research done by the author within the research project "Map of Environmental Conflicts in the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil" at GESTA – Grupo de Estudos em Temáticas Ambientais (Study Group in Environmental Themes) at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, under supervision of Andréa Zhouri.

<sup>2</sup> International soccer championship that takes place every four years promoted by the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association*.

<sup>3</sup> The term *comunidade* was largely used by Vila Recanto dwellers when referring to their neighbourhood.

Victor Turner (1974:35) in his statement that “the conflict seems to bring fundamental aspects of society, normally overlaid by the customs and habits of daily intercourse, into frightening prominence”. Following Turner’s concept of conflict as a ‘social drama’, I will analyze the presented conflict throughout its four different observable phases: breach, mounting crisis, redressive action and reintegration (Turner 1974).

Moreover, I draft an analysis focused on each of the two actors which polarized the conflict over the eviction of Vila Recanto UFMG. Firstly, I make some considerations on the actions of the community dwellers. In order to understand their political mobilization, we should examine the place identity shared by them in the context of their struggle. As the interviews show, such identity is strongly connected to the process of autoconstruction of their homes and their community. Therefore, before we get to the conflict, I recount, in the first section of this paper, the formation of Vila Recanto UFMG in the urban context of Belo Horizonte, for which I evoke dwellers’ accounts on the process of (auto)constructing their homes.

Secondly, I analyze the public authorities’ action in the context of the conflict process. Here, I try to elucidate both the public authorities’ motivation and strategies towards the reorganization and occupation of that space. Moreover, I argue that such performance of the public administration takes place in the context of an urban regeneration project towards the hosting of the soccer mega-event, which will take place in June/July 2014 in 12 different cities in Brazil. Typically, such mega-events can have a big negative impact on informal housing.

The present analysis is based on ethnography conducted over the first semester of 2011, which also counted with interviews with dwellers and other actors related to the conflict. One should note that such interviews happened only a few months before the final eviction deadline, which to some extent explains the ton of the interviewees. Methodologically inspired by Van Velsen’s (2010) situational analysis, I also observed events such as public hearings and conferences debating either the eviction or the road project. Besides, I also analyzed juridical documents and media reports related to the conflict.

## **1. Vila Recanto UFMG**

Informally constructed in an abandoned lot from the 1990s on, Vila Recanto UFMG is a symptom of the housing issue – a very vivid problem of Brazilian cities. In Belo Horizonte, the issue was already raised by its construction in the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Based on the haussmannian model and precursor of the modern functionalist urban planning in Brazil, Belo Horizonte's urbanistic project did not predict to include poor populations in the urban space. as The first *favelas* emerged as the construction workers who built the city could not afford formal housing. Many decades later, following the same line, the niemeyerian project of Pampulha District in Belo Horizonte also counted with an extremely rigid urbanistic legislation, guaranteeing that only economically favored groups could formally occupy that space.

It was exactly in the touristic, mainly (upper-)middle-class district of Pampulha in Belo Horizonte where Vila Recanto UFMG was formed. This favela used to be located at the region's main avenue, Av. Antonio Carlos, and in front of the campus of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG). *Vila* stands for 'village', being in Brazil often used as a euphemism for favela, and *Recanto* means 'nook'. Its total area had approximately 4196m<sup>2</sup> and was previously occupied by a car dealership which went bankrupt in the first half of the 1990s, leaving the lot abandoned until the subsequent occupation by the new dwellers. Absent from official historic accounts, the origin of Vila Recanto dates back to 1995, when the first dwellers arrived and started the occupation for housing.

In 2009, Vila Recanto UFMG had already at least 65 families. The origin of its dwellers is diverse – many, especially the first, were street dwellers before; some came from other poor neighborhoods of Belo Horizonte or even other cities. In general, the adult dwellers worked in less qualified positions. In the case of the interviewees, their jobs (e.g. cleaning ladies, construction worker, recycling material collector) were practiced in Pampulha or surroundings, or somewhere else not further than 'one-bus-ride away'. Their children – as many interviewees emphasized – went to public kindergartens and schools in the neighborhood.



**FIGURE 1** –Alleyway in Vila Recanto UFMG, main public space for encounters between community members. May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011.

In order to give a historical review of Vila Recanto UFMG, I present below some extracts of the interviews conducted with dwellers. The ex-street dweller and community leader Ana<sup>4</sup> recalls:

This used to be an abandoned place... a place where even the police would come without any respect, invading and kicking the doors... until they had the conscience that no, there really existed a group of workers here, this wasn't just a place where every crime, everything that happened in the surroundings should be searched here. Because slowly they changed this vision, you know, that there were only criminals here. It was a big triumph for all this community. Later on, more people came, and the family grew. In the past, when I came here, there was like six families, we reached now 65 families, because, really... [...] The fight here was with a lot of sacrifice from everyone. You can notice that here is a community where everybody put a lot of effort; everybody dedicated all their work, their little money they had, maybe from a little

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the conflictuality of the context when the interviews were conducted, real names are withheld.

pension, from their savings, and invested in this dream of having a dignified housing. [...] When we came here, there was no water. There was only a water tank, but the water there was dirty, with a lot of clay. We picked water at the airport; with a little trolley we went to the airport to pick water that we could cook and drink with. There was no electricity. So it was a process to prove to Cemig [electricity distribution company]... We conquered, with a petition, involving all the wonderful guys from the university who passed by, we asked them to give us a signature, so we could make that Copasa [water distribution company] came and turn on the water for us. At the beginning, it could set only one water input. So after we made the division of the lots, we did all the process of buying wire, to make the division so all of us would have their own space, you know, and then subsequently, it got bigger and every day we made it better, right? (Ana, dweller of Vila Recanto UFMG, interview, April 17, 2011, Belo Horizonte, translation mine).

As the dwellers were visibly dismayed by the process of eviction and by the uncertainty about the resettlement, their speech along the interviews is permeated by references to the difficulties of the house construction and to the value of their houses – although this topic was not directly evoked by any interview question. The dweller Aparecida, for example, recalled:

I came here with [Ana], one day after my grandchild's birthday [...]. I came on May 5<sup>th</sup>; on the 6<sup>th</sup>, Monday, the construction material arrived. [...]. Even [Ana] helped, she helped with the bricks. At my house, I tightened all the metals of the whole house, from the house foundations to the cement. Back then it was hard, you know [...]. You'd put half meter of sand on the street, if you didn't take it away, the Municipality would come and take it away. So then, the guy of the construction materials put two meters of sand, two thousand bricks, two thousand grit, it was 5 pm. [Otávio] and I began to put it inside, [Ana] came to help us. We put two thousand bricks inside, two meters of sand, two thousand of grit, on our back. Me, [Otávio] and [Ana]. So that they wouldn't take it away, it couldn't spend the night outside. Sacks of cement, there was a lot of sacks of cement, we would put it, we would hide it. So then, it is a lot of suffering. You see, all that's been done in that house, everything, since the foundation until how it is now, it was me working. My hand got calluses and wounds until it bled. (Aparecida, dweller of Vila Recanto UFMG, interview, 17th April 2011, Belo Horizonte, translation mine).

João, a trash collector and one of the first dwellers also mentioned the difficulties at the beginning of the occupation.

I used to live in [a favela], I paid rent. Then, this thing of getting unemployed, you know, things got tight... So then I met the people here, at that time it was empty, right? So we got here inside, we cleaned everything here, all the... this here was a big garbage! So we cleaned it up and organized ourselves, then other people came, and we organize ourselves little by little, until we got everything we have it here now [...]. With a lot of sacrifice. This here, at beginning, no one would give us anything, everything bad that happened in the surroundings, we were blamed. With the time we... we got more recognition [...]. We had to put water here inside, we didn't have it. Five years it took to get one water system input, at that time for 17 families. And then, at last, electricity, it's been six years that they, Cemig, decided to give us electricity. And now, when everything is good, everybody established, we are evicted because of a viaduct (João, dweller of Vila Recanto UFMG, interview, 17th April 2011, Belo Horizonte, translation mine).

## **2. The conflict**

The 'viaduct' mentioned above by João is an old construction project by the Municipality of Belo Horizonte, but just recently implemented. Finished in December 2011, it was part of a series of urban interventions that are supposed to be made in preparation of the infra-structure of Belo Horizonte for the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

In the following subsections, I will present an account of the conflict over the eviction of Vila Recanto UFMG. For Turner, a conflict or, in his terms, a *social drama* has typically four different observable public action phases. First, there is the initial *breach*, by which formal and norm-driven social relations are broken off. The second phase is the *mounting crisis* – the breach can widen to the point of becoming “coextensive with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the conflicting or antagonistic parties belong” (Turner 1974:39). The third phase is the *redressive action*, which comprises the moment when formal or informal adjusting and regenerative mechanisms are operationalized. As Turner remarks, it is in this phase that “both pragmatic techniques and symbolic action reach their fullest expression”. (1974:40-41). The fourth and last phase is the *reintegration* of the ‘disturbed social group’. Nevertheless, we cannot infer much on the last phase, since the fieldwork for this paper was conducted during the previous phase.

## **2.1 Breach: eviction order**

If we consider the different parts involved in this conflict, we can think of two moments of breach, each one according to a certain perspective over the conflict. The first would be the one of the real estate company *Beagá Imóveis*, former owner of the lot occupied by Vila Recanto UFMG. Under this perspective, the conflict's founding breach comes about in the moment when – in the company's terms – ‘wanderers’ invaded the lot that belonged to the company. So, in October 1999, Beagá Imóveis filed a police report, stating that its property had been being invaded for six months already. In the following year, the company filed a ‘possession reintegration’ suit against two occupiers of the lot (one in each extremity of the area). In the course of the suit analysis, Beagá Imóveis requested the dispatchment of a Possession Maintenance Warrant twice – which would mean that those in the current possession of the land would be officially required to leave -, but in both times the judge denied it.

In 2004, a new factor incremented Beagá Imóveis' motivation for the judicial restoration of its possession. Although it was hard to me to find out during my research – and also to all interviewees – the exact moment the Municipality of Belo Horizonte came in in the conflict, the judicial case documentation shows that in March 2004 the Municipality requested expropriation of the same area due to public interest and signaled that it would give a compensation to Beagá Imóveis. Despite the lack of transparency concerning such expropriation procedures, we can think that it was done with means to the project of construction of the road intersection, which was leveraged years later by the perspective of the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

Thus, more motivated since it would receive a compensation for the highly valued lot, Beagá Imóveis tried again a new request for dispatchment of a Possession Maintenance Warrant. The substitute judge granted this request and the warrant was dispatched.

Yet, if we consider the other perspective of the conflict, the one of the dwellers of Vila Recanto UFMG, we have then another moment of breach, according to which I will organize the coming categorization of the different conflict phases as proposed by Turner (1974). It is on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, 2004 that – in Turner's terms – the social relations driven by the norm – in this case, the everyday life norm of Vila Recanto and the constitutional principle of social function of property – are broken off. On this day, the community dwellers were surprised by the arrival of several policemen, a Beagá Imóveis representative and the court reporter who carried the Possession Maintenance/Reintegration Warrant.

## **2.2 Mounting crisis: eviction threats and negotiations**

Then the eviction warrant came, in 2004 [...]. When they got here, it was Friday 6pm, a heavy rain was forming; everybody got desperate [...]. Then the court reporter came and said it was an eviction warrant, we all would have to leave in that moment. So I said like: 'Come on, it is 6pm; it's about to rain; our partners, our husbands are out working; how are we going to leave our homes, if we don't even have any idea of what place we are going to?' Because until that moment, everything was quiet, no one knew anything. [...].

So they said "Look, let's do the following: we are going to give you a prompt, a deadline, so you can get your things done, go to some relative's house, anything, because Tuesday at 8am we are going to come here, already with the tractor, with everything, breaking everything down." So they left. Everybody was desperate. So I said "People" – and at that time we already had telephones! – I said "look, everybody start making phone calls, call whoever you know, let's call

the press, everyone.” It was a rush! [...] Then from Monday to Tuesday, we had a barn, we occupied that barn, we made posters, signs, everything [...]. We spent the whole night awake, we made food and so on. Then, on Tuesday, oh, what a happiness, boy, what a relief. [...] Besides all the people who came for the vigil from Monday to Tuesday, you could see cars from Globo, Record, Itatiaia, Manchete [different broadcast stations] [...]. So when they came here on Tuesday, the press asked directly: “well, you are going to take them out of here and put them where?” And so on. They had no answer. (Ana, dweller Vila Recanto UFMG, interview, 17 April 2011, Belo Horizonte, translation mine).

As Ana and also an interviewed social worker of the Pastoral Care for Street Dwellers told, the mobilization of the whole Vila Recanto UFMG community for resistance was quite remarkable, as expected in a case of social conflict<sup>5</sup>. Dwellers and Pastoral Care made then an articulation with other urban occupation communities and street dwellers. All together they made a one week long (night-)watch at Vila Recanto UFMG, in pressure against the eviction. The dwellers also made a connection with public prosecutors and with the Legal Service of the Catholic University, which gave them legal aid since then.

As the eviction did not take place on that day, there was a meeting between Police, community dwellers, public prosecutors and Legal Service lawyers. As a dweller recalled,

So they left! And then we started to negotiate with the police [...], and there was a meeting with the police, with the people who helped us; the public prosecutor wanted to attend the meeting too, because they found a clause that was wrong. For this eviction warrant to exist, one had to have the name of each dweller, but one only had two names [...]. So [the Legal Service lawyer] made an embargo to the warrant (Ana, dweller Vila Recanto UFMG, interview, 17 April 2011, Belo Horizonte, translation mine).

Hence, doing as Vila Recanto dwellers asked, lawyers of the Legal Service tried to invalidate the eviction warrant through the juridical way. The court accepted the request for embargo against the warrant and then annulled the last decision that had granted the request for dispatchment of a Possession Maintenance Warrant.

Faced with this victory of Vila Recanto UFMG, Beagá Imóveis filed a new lawsuit for Possession Reintegration in August 2004, this time naming all affected occupying dwellers. The court decision came five years later. Until then, the everyday life of Vila Recanto dwellers went ahead, without new eviction threats.

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<sup>5</sup> As Simmel (1983) reminds us, social identities and community mobilizations are especially reinforced in situation of social conflict.



Despite having already filed a police report against the 'invaders' of its lot in 1999, the company Beagá Imóveis affirmed in the new lawsuit for Possession Reintegration that satellite photos would prove that the lot was unoccupied until 2002. A technical investigation report ordered by the court in 2006 confirmed such affirmation. By then, the report counted 30 houses in the lot, but, based on Google satellite photos, it affirmed that none of those houses had existed by 2002 and, therefore, did not complete the minimum of five years of possession to be awarded property rights according to the legislation (usucaption right). Yet, as the lawyer representing the community explained, the first dwellers used to live in a building that already existed in the lot and therefore one could not see any houses by satellite photos, which, however, should not refute the fact that the occupation existed.

Besides, the technical report asserted that the extension of the invaded lots was superior to 250m<sup>2</sup> - this is the maximum size that an occupied domicile area can have so that the occupying family can have property rights by possession. The report did not specify how many families lived in that area though.

Nevertheless, the court supported the technical report and upheld the Possession Reintegration lawsuit filed by Beagá Imóveis against the dwellers of Vila Recanto UFMG. The controversy between the report and the fact that the company had already registered the occupation in 1999 by the police was not seen as a problem by the court. The court used both facts independently as proof in favor of Beagá Imóveis and also dismissed the need of oral hearings and further proofs. In his decision text, the judge affirmed:

there is no possibility of recognizing property rights to the occupiers, **as Beagá Imóveis itself has been trying to get back the real estate property since 1999, being sure that the invasion of the area examined by the technical report happened after, when various families started building their houses.**

Therefore, besides the inexistence of exceeding any limitation period to make the recognizing of the usucaption property rights possible, the respondents never had the pacific possession.

As if this were not enough, the invasion lacks any good faith, what impedes the right of having any compensation for betterments or for adding value to the property, as the respondents knew that the area was not abandoned [...].

I highlight that [...] **it is not reasonable that the Judiciary colludes with invasion acts [..]. [One must] reestablish the social peace** and preserve the magnificence of the constitutional law,

**repressing routine practices of invasion of rights and citizenship with the goal of reestablishing social pacification to the society.**

Therefore, one must guard the society from intentions and actions that are handled with the aim to obtain advantages before the patrimony of others, indiscriminately using unfair methods without reasonable parameters (Minas Gerais 2009:6, emphasis added, translation mine).

Facing this court decision against Vila Recanto UFMG, the Legal Service of the Catholic University, in name of the community dwellers, entered a plea. Nevertheless, the court maintained its last decision, confirming the judge's argumentation quoted above and also raising up the fact, as an argument in favor of Beagá Imóbeis, that this company "received compensation of the Municipality of Belo Horizonte due to expropriation of part of its lots in March 2004 [...], what proves that the property was not abandoned" (In: SAJ, 2010).

Since such court decisions against the claimed property rights of dwellers of Vila Recanto UFMG, and especially throughout 2010, a series of events, meetings and articulations characterized the conflict, in a way that it is hard for the dwellers themselves and other people involved to recount or list all facts. Notwithstanding, as it seems according to all accounts, from 2009 on, that is, after the confirmation that Belo Horizonte would be one of the 12 hosting cities of 2014 FIFA World Cup<sup>6</sup>, the Municipality matured its project of construction of viaduct and road intersection that would occupy Vila Recanto UFMG's area.

In the beginning of 2010, Belo Horizonte Urbanizing Company (URBEL) and other agencies of the Municipality promoted a meeting with Vila Recanto dwellers to inform them about the construction of the road intersection. Having participated in this meeting, a member of the university program *Polos de Cidadania*, who assisted the dwellers since then, recounted in an interview:

[...] So there was this event, URBEL would talk with the dwellers about the construction project. [...] So we got there, in the evening, the dwellers were all packed in a room of the Pampulha District office; over 200 dwellers were there, waiting for the meeting. The meeting started with over an hour delay [...]. In the meeting was an engineer responsible for the viaduct construction work. The engineer talked in a total technical language, you know? A very sophisticated vocabulary that wasn't accessible to anyone who doesn't work with engineering, not to mention to the dwellers. He talked about the construction costs, the architectonic project, the influence it would have in the traffic, about the material that would be used, the percentage of cement,

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<sup>6</sup> The nomination of the host-cities was signed by FIFA in May 2009. See: <http://www.umatodo.com/cidades-sedes-da-copa-2014/>. June 20, 2011.

some crazy engineer things like that, showing the power point slides. So, at some point of his speech – as the community wasn't convoked to speak about the speech at any time [...], the community was there just watching – so one of his slides showed the areas in the map where the construction was going to happen, and there was a part of the map that was marked in red, and he went on like: 'this is where the viaduct is going to be, here'. And the area in red was simply the houses of the people who were watching the speech! [...] In fact, by the end of the speech, the community dwellers didn't have realized that they would have to leave their homes [...].

At the end of the speech of the [engineer], we from [the university program] *Polos* had to, get the microphone, cause a major embarrassment in the meeting; people from URBEL wanted to take the microphone of us [laughs]. We had to go there on stage and say 'Guys. watch out! What that man is trying to say is that you are gonna be expelled of the place where you live; you will lose your place of housing; you will not be compensated', etc., etc. So the community woke up for what was happening. Because if we counted only on the Municipality, everything would happen as if they didn't have [...] the right to the place where they were living, as if they were illegal. Until the first moment, the Municipality presented the project, and the proposal was 'we have homeless shelters for you, [...] you can go there after you have been removed', that is, treating the dwellers as street dwellers [...]. Afterwards, they started talking about compensation (F.M., member of Programa Polos de Cidadania, interview, May 4, 2011, translation mine).

At first, the dwellers thought of resisting the demolition of Vila Recanto UFMG. Dwellers and their advisors tried to negotiate alternatives to the road intersection project with the Municipality, in a way that the permanence of the dwellers in the same place could be possible. Yet, as the member of the university program *Polos* recounted,

F.M.: For a moment, there was even the possibility that they wouldn't have to leave. For a moment, we constructed together with them an alternative proposal for the construction project. We proposed, for example, that the viaduct, instead of passing over the community, could be built over another corner, where there is a parking lot [...]. So, why did the viaduct turned to the side of the favela and not to the side of other lots, where there was no housing? We made all these questionings... There was a moment when the pressure against the Municipality for it to change the project and not remove the dwellers.

Me: What was the answer?

F.M.: We failed [...].

Me: But was there any answer to why the viaduct had to be in that exact place?

F.M.: Their answer was always simply technical; the engineer answer that said 'look, this viaduct has its technical structural viability only this way, not another'. So, against the scientific-technical argument, they had little to say, you know? (F.M., member of Programa Polos de Cidadania, interview, May 4, 2011).

Facing the solid resistance of the Municipality against any alternative to the project of the road intersection as originally conceived, the dwellers of Vila Recanto UFMG decided then to try to do negotiations with means to postpone the eviction deadline and to guarantee their right to compensation or the possibility of resettlement.

### 2.3 Redressive action: the eviction

Due to political mobilization in articulation with diverse entities such as Pastoral Care for Street Dwellers, Public Prosecutors, Legal Service of the Catholic University and Programa Polos de Cidadania, dwellers of Vila Recanto UFMG managed to arrange many meetings with local government agencies to negotiate the eviction process. In short, after intense and troubled negotiation, the dwellers achieved the postponing of the eviction from December 2010 to mid-2011. They also managed that the Municipality of Belo Horizonte through URBEL conceded two options as compensation for eviction. Each evicted family could choose one of the two. The first option (initially presented as the only one) would be an apartment in a housing project. The second (achieved after dwellers protested against the first one) would be a monetary compensation.

For the first option, the Municipality would offer some of the new apartments built within a favela urbanization program in the nearby favela Pedreira Prado Lopes. This option was extremely criticized by Vila Recanto dwellers, in generally for two reasons. First, living in an apartment would implicate some problems and limitations in comparison to the old housing in a shack or a house, such as: not being able to have a garden or animals; having new bills to pay; little space; not being able to, as some said in interviews, 'give the kids a future', for the apartment is not susceptible to structural alterations as enlargements or construction of new rooms<sup>7</sup>; etc. The second reason for critique refers to the location of the apartments – dwellers complained about the insecurity in the favela Pedreira Padre Lopes, which is, in fact, the place with the highest homicide index in Belo Horizonte and an area marked by violent drug gangs (Zilli 2004). According to estimations made by interviewees, around 20 families of Vila Recanto picked the first compensation option.

On its turn, the second option of compensation offered by the Municipality for the eviction of the dwellers of Vila Recanto UFMG was also the cause for extreme dissatisfaction by all interviewed dwellers. As usual in the Municipality, since the dwellers did not legally have the

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<sup>7</sup> Typically, a house in a Brazilian favela is reshaped and enlarged (usually upwards) as the following family generations within the household form new families.

property of their lots, the value of the offered compensation was only based in the evaluation of property improvements. Hence, the dwellers were extremely frustrated when informed by the value – much less the expected – of their houses according to evaluation done by the Municipality through URBEL. Such frustration was unloaded by many dwellers in interviews, as shown by the following interview extracts:

Ana: So when they told us about the famous money, many people thought they were gonna get about R\$100,000, or 50,000, or 30,000... Like my compensation, for example... Man, I'm gonna tell you, it is ridiculous [...]. When they did the evaluation on my house, right, they offered me R\$21,023 [EUR 7481,60] [...].

Fátima: Yeah, but it is even better than mine!

Ana: What is it worth? What is it compared to all the fighting, all the historical process we lived here that nobody will take from us?

Fátima: Yeah!

Ana: But at the same time, it comes and pushes you in a way that throws away your dreams, all your life dreams, all away...

Fátima: All away!

Ana: And that for so little money!

Fátima: Hers was even better than mine. They offered me; that is no good! [...] Where am I gonna find a house, a shanty for [EUR 6,521], tell me? [...]. You see, that is happening here. It's the humiliation they make to the people (Ana and Fátima, dwellers of Vila Recanto UFMG, interview, 17th April 2011, Belo Horizonte).

Joana: One day, I got really macho, really furious with [the state agent] here at home, dear. She, inside of my house, a house that I took so long time to get, I told her "you're gonna tell me that my house is worth that? If there wasn't any soul here on the alleyway, besides us too, I'd close this door and punch you so hard. You cannot prove it's me who punched you! You're crazy to tell me that my house is worth this!"

T.P.Barbosa: Worth how much?

Joana: [EUR 6266]. "You're crazy, a house is something we take the whole life to get!" (Joana, dweller of Vila Recanto UFMG, interview, 17th April 2011, Belo Horizonte).

If their house value was less than R\$ 30,000 (EUR 10,714), the dwellers had the option to get a new house through the Municipality's Assisted Resettlement Program (PROAS). In this program, the evicted dweller would receive R\$ 30,000 for buying a house of her/his choice, but only if the house suited the Program conditions: the house had to be in a geologic safe area (unlike most favela areas in the city), present 'adequate constructive security' and urban infrastructure such as access to water, electricity and sewers. As only three houses in Vila Recanto UFMG were

valued more than R\$ 30,000, most dwellers wanting to find a new house chose to participate in the Assisted Resettlement. Yet, most of them were extremely frustrated by the huge difficulty in finding a house under the estimated value and which would be approved by the Program technical inspection according to the program rules. In many interviews, they complain about it and about the pressure they were under as the deadline for eviction was close.

On the other side, the Municipality agencies were generally indifferent before the complaining of the dwellers who could not find a suitable new housing. As many interviewees recounted, the Municipality did not do much more than affirming, in response to such critiques, that if it weren't for the public construction project in the area of the community, the dwellers would be evicted without any compensation or resettlement.

In this phase of the conflict, we saw, as Turner (1974) highlights, the full expression of the pragmatic techniques applied to redress the conflict. Such techniques were especially visible by the Municipality's normative and technical apparatus for the realization of evictions. Also symbolic actions for such reached their plenitude, being perceptible in many factors, such as: argumentation extolling the benevolent compensations given by the Municipality; use of technical, non-counter-argumentative discourse and justifications; pressure concerning the eviction deadlines; ceaselessness of the construction work of the road intersection, which already started in July 2010, blocking the street in the back of the community; and demolition of the houses right after its dwellers moved out.

By June 2011, almost all houses in Vila Recanto UFMG had been already demolished.



**Figure 2** – Child watches demolition of neighboring house in Vila Recanto UFMG. May 8, 2011, by Fabio Merladet.

#### **2.4 Reintegration: new housing**

Not only when asked by me what they expected for their future, but also in many other moments of the interviews, Vila Recanto UFMG dwellers expressed their expectations and their concerns. Those who still did not know where they would move to were especially worried and afflicted concerning the difficulties in finding a new house and the tight eviction deadline. Such worry is translated in the joke told by two children while their mom was being interviewed - they say they were going to live 'under the new viaduct'. As we could perceive by some interview extracts, all interviewees were visibly sorrowful about the destruction of their neighborhood, where they built their homes and constituted a 'real community', 'like a family'. In this regard, many dwellers considered regrettable that the eviction would implicate the loss of community ties and the loss of contact with friends/neighbors, besides, in some cases, causing separation between members of the same family group, as in the case of interviewee

Aparecida. Aparecida's mom, sisters, daughter and grandson, who used to be neighbors in Vila Recanto, moved to different neighborhoods or cities.

On the days I spent in Vila Recanto UFMG, I could notice how the community's little public state - the alleyway – was used as a meeting point, as a place for long chats and coffee sessions among neighbors and children games. On the first day, while I was interviewing some dwellers in the alleyway, I witnessed a dweller moving house and being helped by (soon ex-)neighbors. Some interviewees commented about the sadness they felt at seeing their neighbors moving. Other two dwellers cried when showing me some houses of ex-neighbors that had been already partly demolished. Many mothers who were interviewed demonstrated concern about the issue of their children's school – would they find a vacancy in a public school near their new home? In short, all interviewees externalized and verbalized a feeling of sadness and profound dissatisfaction about the eviction process.

Moreover, the process of evicting the dwellers of such a central and valued area and the limited possibilities of buying a new house in the city due to the low value received as compensation indicate a more general phenomenon: peripherization of poverty or, in the words of some dwellers, the expelling of the poor out of the city. In fact, the neighborhoods or cities pointed out by the dwellers as future or possible loci for their new home are very far away from Pampulha or from Belo Horizonte downtown.

In this regard, the interviewees expressed their sorrow about having to move far away and from an area with many positive attributes which were recurrently listed in: job, bus lines, short distance to downtown, schools, kindergartens, health center, and university. Some of the dwellers were afraid of losing their job, as their new neighborhood would be very far away from the by then current job in Pampulha District.

The following speech of a dweller of Vila Recanto summarizes the feeling of many other interviewees:

[Finding another neighborhood like this one] is going to be hard. This neighborhood here, man... This neighborhood is a neighborhood that is like... more than neighbors. It is a family, you know? Because everybody here knows about everybody's suffering [...]. Taking us out of here is such a



lack of respect! We all know all the struggles we had here [...]. now, everybody leaving, going there to that corner, others going to another corner. Because of a viaduct! [...] Because of a ball that is going to roll for a month, they will take loads of families out of here [...]. People are leaving here with a pain in the heart, because they don't wanna leave. It's a place here, here is everyone, a place... (Fátima, dweller of Vila Recanto UFMG, interview, 17 April, 2011, Belo Horizonte).

### **3. Dwellers, identity and conflict**

In interviews and also in speeches made in political events, the dwellers of Vila Recanto UFMG repeatedly highlighted the long – physical and financial – effort that they put into building those houses themselves, in that place. Moreover, this effort goes beyond the investment of the ‘sweated little money’ and the hand calluses by laying bricks in each house. As usual by new informal settlements, forming Vila Recanto demanded joint mobilization of the dwellers to get access to water and energy systems and to achieve the right to other public services in the region, such as school and health center, since those local services are only provided to those who can prove their registered (formal) address in the region. Besides, as recounted by interviewees, the dwellers had to struggle for the recognition that they were ‘a group of workers’, instead of ‘outcasts’ or ‘criminals’ as they were stigmatized by the police and by their middle-class neighbors in Pampulha.

As Holston (2007) and Holston and Caldeira (2008) remind us, the long and arduous process of autoconstructing a whole new neighborhood requires a high degree of political mobilization from its dwellers. Such experience of struggling for rights or of, in Holston's terms, ‘insurgent citizenship’ empowers them as political actors.

Such process of citizen consciousness and political action is to be observed especially in the life story of the women who lived in Vila Recanto UFMG. As observed in field, the more active political action was mainly performed by the women, as exemplified by Ana, one of the interviewees and community leader. To some extent, such predominance of the women can be explained by the fact that those women – many of them being housewives and/or mothers – were more connected than the men to the household environment and to the domestic and family sphere.

In short, the autoconstruction of their houses and of their place, their nook (*recanto*), not only motivates the community political mobilization in the struggle for rights, but it is also an integrant part of the idea and identity of place. Certainly, such place identity gains importance in the context of the conflictive struggle for the formalization and legitimization – as wanted by the dwellers – and against the destruction – as done by the Municipality – of that place.

Analogous to what happens in many (mega-)projects which implicate eviction, the vision of the Municipality of Belo Horizonte towards that space occupied by Vila Recanto UFMG fundamentally differs from the vision of its dwellers towards their community place or neighborhood. Such discrepancy between these two different visions is emblematically exemplified by the frustration and cholera felt by the dwellers towards the value of the *property* according to *technical* evaluation by Municipality agents.

#### **4. Public authorities, mega-event(s) and conflict(s)**

By analyzing the conflict of Vila Recanto UFMG and, especially, the motivations involved in its eviction by public authorities, one is confronted by questions related to the political context in which this eviction comes about. Such context is marked by the future hosting of the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

As urban theories scholars (e.g. Harvey 1989, Sánchez 2003, Vainer 2003) reminds us, the high visibility of the FIFA World Cup seems to local governments as an opportunity to promote the (host-)city to the international sphere. Shaping the (merchandise-)city for such, city marketing strategies have been activated by urban governments (Vainer 2003), as we can currently observe by the process of reformulation of the touristic image and the diverse urban interventions in Belo Horizonte (Capanema Álvares et al. 2013). Much beyond complying with the requirements set by FIFA and preparing the city for the coming tourists, such urban interventions directly or – through real estate valuation – indirectly tend to activate a wider urban regeneration process. As dictated by the city marketing, this process is guided by values considered characteristic of an ideal global city: dynamism, cleanness, organization, etc. (Sánchez 2003).

In the search of such an ideal city, urban regeneration implies invisibilization of the poor and other groups which are associated to delay or backwardness. This can be done for example by using walls, as in Rio de Janeiro<sup>8</sup>, or, in general, by reappropriating and reshaping the space occupied by the poor (Vainer 2003). Many poor people are, in a typical gentrification process, displaced for being unable to pay increased living and housing costs; others are even evicted by the government to make space for new parks, roads, etc. In one way or another, they are impelled to the city's margins or to other nooks of the city where they cannot be seen.

Among the poor, especially those in situation of informality are affected by mega-events and by this process of urban regeneration leveraged by them. As other reports on the impacts of mega-events in Belo Horizonte and, in general, around the world show (Capanema Álvares et al. 2013, COHRE 2007), street dwellers, street sellers, squatters, slum dwellers and others also dispossessed of the rights granted by formality are the ones who have the most conflictive and difficult struggles when confronted by the State.

Not coincidentally, the first community to be entirely displaced due to construction works for the 2014 FIFA World Cup was Vila Recanto UFMG. The favela was informal and located in a point of high touristic visibility – very near to the city's main stadium and at the main avenue which gives access to it.

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Analyzing the conflict of the eviction of Vila Recanto UFMG, I strove to show how this social drama fits within the broader context of a pattern of urban development pre-(or pro-)mega-event. Marooned in a sea of real estate valuation promoted by a series of public urban interventions, the dwellers of Vila Recanto struggled since 2000 against the eviction threats endorsed by the formal owner of the occupied lot and also by the local government. The conflict was marked by the political mobilization and resistance by the dwellers. They organized themselves in a network with other entities (Legal Service, Pastoral Care, Public Prosecutors,

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<sup>8</sup> Here I particularly refer to the wall built a few years ago alongside the highway which connects the international airport to Rio de Janeiro downtown and touristic zones, isolating the favela (Complexo da Maré) from the road. The wall is decorated with touristic photo posters of Rio de Janeiro. Besides hosting the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Rio is also hosting the 2016 Olympic Games.

etc.) and managed to avoid the threat which was announced by court order in 2004, postponing it for seven years later. Still in 2004, the Municipality of Belo Horizonte filed an expropriation process of the lot occupied by Vila Recanto, having in mind the construction of the road intersection of two avenues. Years later, after Brazil was named host-country and Belo Horizonte was chosen as host-city of the 2014 FIFA World Cup, the project of construction of the road intersection revived, resulting in an increase of the pressure against the dwellers. In 2009, the court decided against all the more than 65 families living in Vila Recanto UFMG, denying their usucaption right to the property, and dispatched an eviction warrant. Afterwards, tense confrontations between dwellers and Municipality took place. The dwellers first attempted to struggle against the eviction, but, as this seemed not to be possible anymore, through negotiations they achieved the right to resettlement or compensation.

Notwithstanding the fact that the eviction finally happened in the pre-2014 World Cup context, we need to note that the struggle of Vila Recanto UFMG is anterior to this context. Years before the concrete eviction threat in 2004, another construction work done by the Municipality threatened Vila Recanto dwellers. According to report of the Pastoral Care (Pastoral de Rua da Arquidiocese de BH 2004:11), in 2001 a Municipality agency threatened the dwellers of eviction due to the construction work of a canal at the back of the neighborhood. Nevertheless, after negotiations, the situation was reversed and the threatening ceased.

Considering such incipient threat under the excuse of a public work, we go back to the spatial coincidences within the road intersection project which officially justified the eviction of Vila Recanto UFMG. According to this project, the new viaduct should be built exactly from the area of the first house at one edge of the space of Vila Recanto, until the area occupied by the last house of the other edge, demanding, thus, exactly and only the entire space occupied by this favela. That is, according to the project all houses of Vila Recanto had to be destroyed. None of the very close neighboring middle-class houses was affected. As stated by interviewees, the placement of the viaduct as it is and the impossibility if any alteration in this matter were justified by technical arguments by government agents.

Thus, it can be assumed that both the eviction threat due to the canal construction in 2001 and the technically defended spatial-material precision reveal that public urban interventions are politically used as justification for the removal of informal settlements and, in general, of 'undesired groups' from certain areas of the city. Once free from the previous occupations, these spaces are free to be (re)shaped, (con)forming the landscape of the ideal city as imagined by local governments and elites.

Furthermore, the anterior attempts of evicting Vila Recanto and the fact that the eviction was only made possible in the pre-2014 FIFA World Cup context demonstrate two things. On the one side, they show that the creation of a consensus over urban projects – a typical tool of strategic-entrepreneurial urban planning – is intensified due to mega-events, tending to the annulation of the conflict dimension or to its simple resolution, for the sake of 'development' of the home-host-city. This is especially evident in the current Brazilian context: most construction works justified by the FIFA World Cup are hard to be altered or criticized in the 'country of soccer'. On the other side, such facts make evident that mega-events, although not being the only cause for evictions, are indeed a powerful lever for such urban regeneration public interventions.

Mega-events function therefore as a catalyst for capitalist development and accumulation. In this process, the State with its diverse and contextually adaptable urban management tools appears as a central agent. It is the government who to a great extent promotes spatial transformations and guarantees the infra-structural conditions for the capital, even if for such possible human hindrances must be taken out of the way.

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