Solidarities in Network and Networks of Solidarity: Humanitarian Reception and Housing Policy in an Urban Occupation of Palestinian Refugees in São Paulo

DOI
https://doi.org/10.11606/1678-9857.ra.222911ing

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I describe the genealogy of the networks of relationships and events that led the Terra Livre housing movement and the pro-Palestinian Mop@t movement to create an intercultural urban occupation in São Paulo. These networks consist of actors, causes, and territories that become denser and expand through coalitions and events of high political and social impact. The Leila Khaled occupation became possible through the meeting of actors who constituted networks and created a space for cohabitation for Brazilian families, Palestinian families, and social movements. The building, once occupied by these movements, became a laboratory for NGOs, public figures and other social movements and political collectives.

KEYWORDS

social movements, networks, Palestinian refuge, Syrian conflict, housing, humanitarianism

Solidariedades em rede e redes de solidariedade: acolhimento humanitário e política de moradia em uma ocupação urbana de refugiados palestinos em São Paulo

RESUMO Neste artigo, descrevo a genealogia das redes de relações e dos acontecimentos que levaram o movimento de moradia Terra Livre e o movimento pró-Palestina Mop@t a criarem uma ocupação urbana intercultural em São Paulo. Essas redes são compostas de atores, causas e territórios que se adensam e expandem por meio de coalizões e eventos de alto impacto político e social. A ocupação Leila Khaled se tornou possível através do encontro de atores que se articularam em redes e criaram um espaço de coabitação para famílias brasileiras, famílias palestinas e movimentos sociais. O prédio, ao ser ocupado por estes movimentos, se tornou um laboratório para ONGs, agentes públicos e outros movimentos sociais e coletivos políticos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE
movimentos sociais, redes, refúgio palestino, conflito sírio, moradia, humanitarismo

In 2013, São Paulo began receiving a new wave of refugees from the Syrian War, which started in 2011, due to a relaxation of the tourist visa - which gained a humanitarian purpose - by Dilma Rousseff's government, through Normative Resolution No. 17/2013 of CONARE. In the subsequent years, the city experienced an effervescent context for migrations, with the action of migrant social movements articulated with humanitarian NGOs and public managers. These articulations not only expanded networks and reception services but also the discussion of public policies and the participation and representativeness of migrants and refugees. One of their main results was the enactment of the New Migration Law in 2016.

At that moment, Europe was going through the "refugee summer," with an increase in asylum requests, the creation of reception NGOs, and public demonstrations of solidarity with refugees. In contrast to this movement, an anti-immigration policy emerged among conservative sectors, materialized in the rhetoric of the "refugee crisis" (Schiocchet, 2017). Although this rhetoric never gained momentum in Brazil, glimpses of it were seen, particularly in headlines about Haitian and African refugees (ObMigra, 2022), with an evident racial(izing) focus. In our media, there was a reframing of the Syrian war to a humanitarian perspective after an image went viral on social media: a Syrian child, Alan Kurdi, who died trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea with his family by boat.

As I have described at other times (2017, 2022), the impact of this image provoked a wave of solidarity among Brazilians towards war victims, which would directly affect the newly created urban occupation called "Leila Khaled"[1], in the Liberdade neighborhood in São Paulo. Formed by approximately 200 people, including low-income Brazilians and Palestinian refugees from Syria, the occupation was coordinated by the Terra Livre housing movement in partnership with the pro-Palestinian movement, Movimento Palestina para Tod@s. As I mentioned, this visibility affected residents and movements, defining their relationships, particularly provoking tensions between Palestinians and supporters, between Brazilians and Palestinians, and among the movements. At the same time, it produced connections with new institutional networks of migrant reception (religious and secular), the job market, and activism, becoming a laboratory for new experiences of cohabitation, work, politics, and Portuguese language schools for foreigners.

Upon observing how networks operated, I noted a pattern of segmentation, that is, of aggregation, dissolution, and reaggregation, with different intensities and durations among the actors and institutions, which can be referred to other "important moments" of connection between them. In this article, I will trace the genealogy of the connections and intersections of these networks, to shed light on their logics and mutual impacts, as well as a pattern of segmentation that made the emergence of the Leila Khaled occupation possible.

1 | An urban occupation is defined by the takeover of buildings, houses, or land in a state of abandonment, aiming for social use. The occupations are collectively named in the General Assembly of foundation. In the case of this occupation, the suggestion of the name of the Palestinian guerrilla who participated in the national liberation movement "Black September" in the 1970s came from one of the militants of Terra Livre.

This text is a product of my doctoral thesis (Manfrinato, 2022), developed at PPGAS/USP between 2017 and 2022. I conducted immersive fieldwork in the "Leila Khaled" occupation between 2015 and 2017, in addition to semi-structured interviews in 2021. During the immersive period, I integrated the occupation as a militant of one of the movements at the forefront of the building, the Mop@t. This participation was the subject of systematic methodological reflection in my thesis, where I adopt a "partial" and "parcel" perspective (Goldman, 2006), also affirming, as Haraway (1995) states, my highly embodied position "in the field." Here, the analyzed material is the result of interviews conducted after this immersive period, a phase of the ethnography that I qualify as "reflective," that is, informed by the retrospective dialogical analysis of the actors involved in an agonistic daily life marked by political hopes.

Autonomist Connections

The relationship between Terra Livre and the Movimento Palestina para Tod@s (Mop@t), both social movements that will be described in this article, predates the occupation and unfolded in the terrain of the autonomist social movements[2] of São Paulo. It began in the 2000s and was updated in 2013[3], through alliances forged during the June Journeys of 2013 and the political articulations promoted by the Popular World Cup Committee in 2014[4].

In this context, neither Mop@t nor Terra Livre existed as such, but an important actor in this field, the Brazilian-Palestinian Abbas[5], who came from Rio Grande do Sul to São Paulo involved in left-wing activism, approached the Movement for Urbanization and Legalization of the Pantanal, the "MULP," which operated in the Jardim Pantanal. Jardim Pantanal is a region located in an APA (Environmental Protection Area) subject to flooding, covering the territory of at least nine peripheral neighborhoods in the East Zone of São Paulo[6]. The MULP was the social movement that organized the main demands of the residents and the neighborhood.

Abbas arrived at the MULP through members affiliated with Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL) who were already working in coalitions with *grassroots movements*[7], so-called because they are led by the subjects of the struggles around which social movements articulate. The MULP was a hybrid of residents and militants from left-wing political parties, and, in some cases, both, residents who became militants of other collectives. The participation of militants from political parties was welcomed and contributed to the training of residents, as long as it did not interfere with the autonomy of the social movement.

2 | "Autonomism" and "autonomist" are terms that can refer to different theories, movements, and political lines as long as they are identified with an anti-hierarchical, anti-systemic, anti-capitalist, and anti-authoritarian perspective. They originate from the Italian workers' and autonomist movements of the 1960s, a period during which, especially after the May 1968 revolution, many "autonomist practices" flourished, such as mass occupations and rent strikes, workplace strikes, and street demonstrations (Garland, Christian. International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest, Immanuel Ness [ed.], Blackwell Publishing, 2009, pp. 322–325).

3 | A set of street demonstrations in protest against the increase in public transport fares, not only in São Paulo but throughout Brazil."

4 | A set of political mobilizations in protest against the implementation of exclusionary urban policies for the 2014 World Cup.

5 | All names presented in this article are fictitious, aimed at preserving the privacy of my interlocutors.

6 | The occupation of the region occurred in 1989 at the initiative of the governor of the State of São Paulo, Orestes Quércia, who relocated the population from an urban occupation in Itaim Paulista to that area. The residents were not organized in a housing movement at that time, but there were popular leaders linked to the Workers' Party who formed some residents' associations. After arriving in the neighborhood, the new residents discovered that it was an environmental area, which made it difficult to implement basic urban structures."

7 | "The words in italics indicate native concepts and aim to create what Goldman called 'ethnographic theory,' which is the use of 'very concrete elements collected in fieldwork (...) in order to articulate them into somewhat more abstract propositions, capable of providing intelligibility to events and the world' (Goldman, 2006)."

When he began to frequent Jardim Pantanal and the MULP meetings, Abbas proposed to contribute to the *struggle* by teaching classes about Palestine at the local preparatory school. Additionally, he created a residence for the *Satyros* theater group and secured cultural funding from a public tender. Abbas was part of a broader movement occurring there, with many connections and articulations being formed between students, universities, artist groups, and popular educators, which even resulted in the formation of a radio station in Pantanal. At the same time, residents' engagement in the MULP's ranks expanded, sometimes even with party affiliation.

This moment of pure cultural and political effervescence was followed, a few months later, by a *rift* within the MULP. The *rift* is defined as a rupture of a political group into two or more groups stemming from a conflictual process. Marcel, a militant of the MULP (and future member of Terra Livre), stated that in this *rift*, on "this side" were the residents, and on "that side," the militants from *outside*, more interested in participating in high-visibility cultural projects than in the daily life of the neighborhood. Although the presence of these actors expanded the political, cultural, and educational repertoire of the residents, according to Marcel's assessment, this internal differentiation produced power asymmetries between residents and *outside* militants, to the detriment of their political agency in the struggle. Being an outside militant, Abbas was "on that side," and thereafter distanced himself from the MULP and the activities in Jardim Pantanal. However, Abbas's encounter with the housing issue and with the future militants who would compose Terra Livre did not break with this distancing.

In this abbreviated description of the encounter between Abbas and the MULP lies the origin, according to Marcel, of the relations between Terra Livre and Mop@t. The most important aspect is that in it, it is possible to identify some relevant aspects that will repeat in the future: the partnership that connected distinct agendas and actors from politics, education, and culture produced an effervescent movement, with mutual affections between actors and collectives, as well as mobilization of political, public, and social resources for Jardim Pantanal. From this, I deduced that the hybrid nature of this political grouping allowed for the creation of favorable conjunctures for the engagement and visibility of the MULP and Jardim Pantanal, which expanded its capacity to make connections and relationships for the neighborhood. At some point, these connections produced a "peak" of effervescence engaging more people, creating more ideas, events, and mobilizing resources.

What I described is, in other words, what activism calls the creation of a *political fact*. A *political fact* is desirable and signifies the capacity to generate attention for an agenda, bring people together, and engage supporters of various types and importance, usually close to centers of political, institutional, cultural, and media power. This *political fact* is also a temporal event, and its success can be measured by

its durability, that is, by how consistent they are and how much they can generate relationships and projects that ensure the continuity of interest, relationships, and/or projects that come to be developed from it. It is clear that it is not always possible for *political facts* to be durable, but even if they are not, the relationships engendered by them can remain in a latent state and be reactivated in another context.

In contrast, the *rift* is the antithesis of the *political fact*: instead of the enormous gravitational attraction that connects actors, the *rift* operates an equally intense force of dispersion that segments (Goldman, 2001). The dissolution and rupture that occur with the rift will introduce a movement of segmentarity (Deleuze, 1995 apud Filadelfo, 2015) into these compositions. The emergence of a dissident force towards not only unforeseen but deviant directions helps, on one hand, to expel undesirable elements from the collective, and, on the other, to drive the creation of other collectives. The MULP split due to the opposition of a dissatisfied part of its members with the direction the movement took in conducting *outside* militants away from the most important projects, affecting even the continuity of many of them. The MULP then claimed the *autonomy* of the movement and the political agency of the *grassroots* concerning *outside* militants, expelling its undesirable elements. The rupture did not cease to produce mutual and important affectations between residents and *outside* militants. Some of the resident militants of the MULP began to integrate the Socialist Left Movement, the MES, a trend of PSOL. Marcel, for example, was one of those cases, as he was interested in the type of influence that a *grassroots* movement could have in a political party.

This period, between 2003 and 2004, was very fruitful in terms of meetings between social movements, parties, and left-wing collectives. The circulation of militants from political parties in social movements (and vice versa) allowed various forms of struggle, repertoires, and agendas to intersect, creating exchanges and composite situational collectives that unfolded into new organizations. In Marcel's opinion, these significant rifts in the left-wing political movements and parties of the time formed Terra Livre[8] a few years later, in 2007.

The "groups" here do not function as discrete holistic units in the realm of inter and intra-group relations, although they may present themselves as such in the realm of political representations. These "groups" are, in fact, formed by networks of multiple relationships (Strathern, 2014), which both mobilize the formation of groupings and their dissolution and recombination. Thus, a holistic perspective should give way to a network observation approach that helps visualize movements of dissolution and regrouping of people. This approach also allows us to visualize the simultaneous connection between hybrid actors, as well as their flow and movements of densification, emergence, expansion, and interruption, in ruptures and dissolutions. This constant movement expands the potentials for

8 | The Terra Livre housing movement, which will coordinate the Leila Khaled occupation, is a national movement operating simultaneously in both agrarian and urban fronts.

new connections, agency, and encounters, and therefore, the resonance between political agendas and the intercrossing of collectives and militants.

The dynamics of aggregation, reaggregation, and dissolution take shape in a variety of militants, divided between those who show solidarity (*partners*, *supporters*) and the *protagonists* or *subjects* of their political agendas. Aggregation through engagement requires a series of coding operations according to the *struggle* parameters of social movements. Among them, certain disciplinary practices that militants must incorporate, bonds of solidarity, and narratives that frame populations in specific political situations in a narrative that enables their visibility/political expressiveness.

The year 2007 will be the year of the foundation not only of Terra Livre but also of Mop@t, and will be marked by characteristics similar to those that produced the movements of aggregation and dispersion in Jardim Pantanal. Mop@t, in particular, will be influenced by a crucial external factor, the arrival of a little over a hundred Palestinian refugees from Iraq, which will mobilize humanitarian networks, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among other sectors of the federal government, in addition to the usual militancy.

Mop@t and the Palestinians from Iraq

In 2007, Brazil implemented a program to resettle 100 refugees from Iraq[9]. The resettlement program was implemented through a partnership between the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Caritas, and the Palestinian Federation (FEPAL), an organization designated to mediate the "adaptation" process of Palestinian refugees. The arrival of these refugees in Brazil reverberated in the country's refugee reception networks but also in Palestinian and leftist organizations, particularly for Abbas. Alongside Brazilian militants and a Palestinian militant, he founded Mop@t.

Mop@t was formed by the initiative of Abbas and Sumaya, both Brazilian of Palestinian origin, trained in the Palestinian Brazilian youth as future leaders but also in socialist militancy. Abbas and Sumaya were the only Palestinians in Mop@t who knew *community* members, a concept used by non-Palestinian militants to indicate families and Arab organizations articulated by their own language, religion, nationality, and "culture." Thus, the trajectory of the two militants produced the feat of connecting left-wing networks and Palestinian networks.

Abbas mobilized the collective he was part of, the Revolutas, stating that Palestinian refugees needed support, as the "official" Palestinian organization, FEPAL, failed to welcome them. This accusation is also systematized in the

9 | "These Palestinians lived for five years in the Ruwesheid refugee camp, located in the desert, on the border between Jordan and Iraq, from where they fled persecution against the Sunni population following the fall of Saddam Hussein. Gradually, they were resettled in countries in Europe and the Americas, with Brazil being the last country to receive them. In 2007, just over 100 Palestinian refugees came to Brazil, where they were allocated in various Brazilian cities, including Mogi das Cruzes, in the greater São Paulo area, cities with the presence of Arab Muslim communities."

accounts collected by Hamid (2012), who ethnographed the implementation of the resettlement program in his doctoral thesis. The main reason given for FEPAL's low engagement is that the program would weaken the "Right of Return of exiled Palestinians"[10] by "removing them" from the borders of Palestine. FEPAL's argument was that the presence of the camp at the border between Iraq and Jordan configured a line of resistance to the Israeli occupation and a factor of political pressure in the international community[11]. On their part, Abbas and Sumaya also defended the Right of Return but believed that it was wrong to sacrifice refugees to uphold this principle, asserting that it was necessary, first, to ensure their conditions for survival.

Mop@t was formed not by a rift, in the strict sense, as its founders were not part of FEPAL (with whom they always had tense relations, especially Abbas), but by the same principle that inspires it: dissent concerning the status quo, a relationship of opposition that reorganizes relationships and creates new groupings.

Abbas managed to engage other militants and intellectuals directly or indirectly politically and intellectually linked to the Middle East. They arrived through other paths, often marked by negative media representations about Islam, Arab populations, conflicts in the Middle East, particularly Israel/Palestine. The city of Mogi das Cruzes was one of the main places of action for the collective, as part of the refugees were allocated there, close to established Palestinian communities.

Mop@t defined itself as an independent movement of active *international solidarity* for the struggle for the liberation of the Palestinian people. It advocated for the creation of a secular and democratic state for Palestine, from an anti-Zionist[12] and anti-colonial perspective. The group was constituted from a coalition militancy: it sought the support of left-wing parties and movements and promoted actions to bring visibility to the Palestinian issue, while also expressing solidarity with other political agendas.

The so-called *international solidarity* is a junction of the defense of human rights and other international legislations with the principle of "solidarity among peoples," which implies mobilizations of support for the Palestinian people[13]. Thus, the Palestinian cause is inserted into an internationalist framing of the left, but also of "rights," gaining its own specificity, with the capacity to connect with the struggles of other peoples and working classes around the world.

Abbas found in Mogi some journalists who would later join Mop@t. Samara, Dante, and Dalila developed their work incorporating part of the Palestinian critical bias with the previously mentioned resettlement process. The main "denunciations" revealed dissatisfaction with the treatment, condescension, and even abandonment by assistance organizations and UNHCR. According to Dante, the intention of the organizations with the resettlement program was to "objectify and plan the refugees through humanitarian action" and ended up constructing a reading grid of

10 | "Inscribed in UN Resolution 194, the Right of Return was approved on December 11, 1948, following the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from Palestinian territory by Zionist militias during the establishment of the State of Israel in Palestinian territory. It was defined that Palestinians who wished to return to their lands and homes could do so, as well as the payment of compensation for those who chose not to return, or to repair losses and damages to their properties. The Right of Return became one of the main agendas of exiled and refugee Palestinians in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq (AL-HARDAN, 2015), of internally displaced persons in Palestine, and of international solidarity movements for the Palestinian cause."

12 | Antizionism is a critique of the policies and ideologies of Zionism and its nationalist, segregationist, and ethnically exclusivist philosophy embedded in the very conceptual foundations of the State of Israel."

13 | "The transformation of the difficulties, sufferings, and injustices faced by Palestinians into an international cause through the notion of solidarity among peoples is an event observed in many countries. Works such as those by Jardim, Baeza, and Montenegro (SCHIOCCHET, 2015) highlight the composition and codification of a supportive pro-Palestinian activism, with the formation of networks of local, secular, and religious organizations and political coalitions in Brazil, Chile, and Argentina."

the Palestinian as an aggressive and ungrateful *other*, who needs to be controlled.

As we can see, just like in the context of Jardim Pantanal, a critique of external solidarity agents was woven, producing tremors capable of causing ruptures, purges, and new political groupings, such as Mop@t. What Dante perceived - and produces a notable contrast with the context of MULP - is that the positioning of humanitarian organizations denied the refugees' criticisms, calling them *ungrateful*. The humanitarian organization perceived them less as subjects and more as objects of solidarity attention, or, to use a term dear to the assistance sector, as "tutelaged."

In these back-and-forths, Dante and Abbas drew closer. He offered him rides whenever he went to Mogi, and Abbas assisted him in translating interviews with Palestinians who did not speak English. His translation was pointed out by Said, one of the refugees, as imperfect or "broken," a factor that generated distrust between them for not feeling that they were being translated faithfully.

The relationships formed by the militants of Mop@t and the Palestinian refugees from Iraq had varying durations, as this was a period marked by disappointment and distrust towards the federal government, humanitarian organizations, and Palestinian organizations. The refugees reported to journalists a weariness from the excess of interviews, meetings, and participation in events. On one hand, they helped produce the *political fact* that benefited militants, but on the other, they did not improve their lives or the conditions of the resettlement program. Once again, an effervescent conjuncture favored some to the detriment of others, confirming a parallelism between the situations experienced by refugees and NGOs, and militants from *outside* and *inside*.

I will now move on to the next important conjuncture that brought together, after a few years, Mop@t and Terra Livre. Between 2013 and 2015, years of intense political mobilization in São Paulo, the autonomist agendas of housing and mobility converged and a "Brazilian refugee summer."

June Journeys and the Popular World Cup Committee: Mop@t and Terra Livre on the Stage of Struggles in São Paulo

The late 1990s and early 2000s were a period of flourishing autonomisms, a happy meeting of anarchists from the 1930s and 1990s, independent media centers, black and feminist movements, and urban reform movements.

In Brazil, the autonomist movement was composed of punks, anarchists, independent student movements, as well as small feminist, black, and environmentalist collectives, and large social movements, such as the MST. This multiplicity dispersed the imposition of a single political line and was defined in

terms of a "federation" of all struggles against capitalism.

Many political collectives - such as Terra Livre - and some internal trends of parties and social movements considered it fundamental to ensure horizontality in their internal relationships, and engagement in gender, racial, and environmental agendas. In the movement's manifesto, support is reinforced for land and city occupation movements, indigenous and *quilombola* movements, and participation in broad fronts for women's rights, LGBTTI+, against xenophobia and state violence.

The MPL (Free Ticket movement) inherited these prerogatives in the wake of urban occupation movements like Occupy Wall Street and 15M, of the Buzú Revolution in Salvador. With the agenda of the ticket price - understood as a "short-term objective" aiming for "long-term transformation" - the MPL propelled the wave of protests that became known as the June Journeys of 2013.

These collectives - just like Mop@t and others - will meet in the streets in 2013. The Journeys unfolded into new articulations, political groupings, and projection of political agendas, such as the protests in the year of the World Cup hosted by Brazil. The preparations for the "FIFA Cup" in 2014 once again raised the issue of the right to the city, inspiring the creation of the Popular World Cup Committee in several Brazilian states.

As I have mentioned, the logic that permeates the dynamics of grouping, dispersion, and regrouping on the left does not occur only in short intervals but can be updated even decades later in new historical conjunctures. In São Paulo, for example, the Committee was formed by networks that date back to the 1980s and 1990s - when the urban reform agenda was high - and was updated again around the "right to the city," but aggregated to new movements, collectives, and forms of action (Machado, 2015, p.15). This new context, as Machado explains, was marked by a surge of strikes, occupations, but also by the precarization of public transport, evictions, and police violence.

Terra Livre composed the Committee representing the housing and social exclusion agenda. Mop@t denounced "repressive state practices," pointing to the purchase of Israeli military equipment by the Brazilian government, as well as police and military exchanges in surveillance and repression techniques. Its militants crossed paths and began to collaborate parallel to the Committee's activities: Abbas promoted events in the Terra Livre occupations about Palestine, and Terra Livre participated in Mop@t events, such as an act against the Israeli occupation attacks in Gaza (2014). Mop@t's action was almost exclusively in the leftist sphere, always mobilized as a *partner* or *supporter*.

Supporters/partners are those whose actions are intermittent or even ephemeral and encompass a wide range of activities: legal issues, cultural, educational, and political activities, in occupation actions and street protests. They differ from *organic*

militants who are members of the movement and act daily in the occupations. *Supporters* are vital not only for carrying out internal activities with residents but, above all, for strengthening network connections, each offering potential for new connections that can be activated in a moment of need, such as during an eviction action. In the context of the *autonomist* struggle, the logic of collaboration and coalition depends on *supporters* and *partners* for success, and the environment provided by the "situational coalitions" of the Journeys and the Popular World Cup Committee was ideal for creating this type of engagement. Terra Livre requested support from militants for initiatives that consolidated its political identity and formed important partners, such as Abbas and the Front for Housing Struggle (FLM) and established a nucleus in downtown São Paulo. A few years ago, Terra Livre began to operate in downtown São Paulo, moving from the periphery to where urban facilities and job opportunities concentrate in the city[14].

The building that became the urban occupation Leila Khaled began to be inhabited in this context. After a few months of official occupation by the movement and the arrival of Brazilian families, the housing movement decided to accommodate Abbas's request to also take in Palestinian refugee families. This feat was only possible because he found himself in the unique position given by his multiple ethnic and political affiliations, articulating between the left and the networks of the so-called *Palestinians of Brás*.

14 | Despite being a more challenging context for activism due to the aggressive real estate forces in the region, the movements chose to engage in this action in the 1990s (Filadelfo, 2015).

Mop@t and the Palestinians from Syria

The Syrian Civil War (2011) claimed nearly a million lives and displaced 6.7 million refugees outside Syria (with Turkey and Lebanon as the main destinations) and 6.5 million internally (UNHCR, 2019). Of approximately 530 thousand Palestinian refugees[15] living in the country, 80 thousand were displaced abroad and 200 thousand internally, as they found themselves surrounded by areas of active conflict. These refugees moved primarily to neighboring countries, where insecurity prevails due to their precarious legal status.

Many refugees would attempt more distant destinations as an alternative to neighboring countries, which operated with many restrictions at that moment and did not always offer decent conditions for stay. Initially, Brazil was not an option they considered a desirable destination. The reception policy in Brazil is not as robust as that of Western Europe, the United States, or Canada, which offer extensive material support for refugees. Thousands risk dangerous crossings of the Mediterranean to reach Europe to access these rights. At that moment, however, the tightening of borders in these countries forced refugees to seek alternative routes. This was the

15 | According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, the UN organization responsible for Palestinian refugees, there are about 6 million registered Palestinian refugees in countries such as Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, as well as in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In addition to these Palestinians registered as refugees, there are also thousands of others, under different legal statuses, spread across countries in the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas, whose lives are continuously and diversely marked by the effects of the 'ongoing Nakba,' or catastrophe (Hamid & Manfrinato, 2024, p. 2)."

case for Ammar and Samir, who, after spending two years in Lebanon, needed to find a more permanent destination. The brothers learned that Brazil had expanded its visa granting policy for Syrian refugees, so that in 2014, the country granted four times more visas than in the year the war began, in 2011.

This significant expansion placed Brazil on the route of asylum requests in Latin America, leading ahead of other countries on the continent. The expansion was justified by Brazilian diplomacy as a response to the escalation of the "humanitarian crisis" in Syria and accelerated the granting of visas and analysis of refugee requests. This stimulated the arrival of hundreds of refugees the following year to live in large cities such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, Belo Horizonte, and Florianópolis, where there are old Arab communities. By 2015, the country had received approximately 4,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict, according to data from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, with a greater flow between 2013 and 2014.

Among these refugees were several hundred Palestinians coming from the refugee camps of Sbeinah, Danoun, and Yarmouk. Refugee camps have varying degrees of urbanization and are typically located in peripheral areas, with a small local commerce. The education of children and adolescents is the responsibility of UNRWA, as well as the provision of basic assistance for needy families. My interlocutors spent one or two years in Lebanon, living in Palestinian refugee camps near Beirut, in these same molds.

Upon their arrival in Brazil, they sought first to resolve the housing issue. Most already knew or would request taxi drivers to take them to *neighborhoods with Arabs*, such as the Brás neighborhood or even the Pari Mosque. Besides Brás, the city of Guarulhos, where the international airport is located, also constituted an initial destination, as the city has an Arab community and a Sunni mosque.

Another reference destination was a boarding house in Luz, in downtown São Paulo, where many single young men sought accommodation, but which was not very suitable for families. These would resort to the mosque's network of contacts to find better facilities. Of all these destinations, Brás became a reference for refugees, for *living* and *working*, as Ammar explained to me, where they received some help and guidance, especially regarding accommodation in neighboring boarding houses and job recommendations:

> "It wasn't cheap, but at the time the dollar was low, and with a hundred dollars we could pay the rent. And there were donations, food baskets, because those who just arrived didn't have work; out of every five, one worked, the rest were still *finding their way*."

The arrival of refugees from the Syrian conflict mobilized mosques to create new - and update old - reception structures for periods of "humanitarian emergency." It is expected that humanitarian aid operations will have a limited duration, where the emergency condition should give way - at some point - to a state of normalcy[16]. However, these operations can be redone using pre-existing structures and accumulated expertise, a characteristic that fits into the logic of network functioning we have observed so far. In this case, the reactivated networks consisted of mosques, Islamic associations, and local businessmen who established a donation collection system for emergency situations.

My interlocutors reported to me that the reception in mosques left much to be desired regarding the demand for basic information (housing, work, documentation, reception) for newcomers. Still, the mosque was an important initial reference space, with the presence of other Arabic speakers, sharing the same religion and regional origin. Some people (*sheikhs*, for example) even volunteered to accompany refugees as translators at the Federal Police, migrant reception organizations, and other spaces.

Gradually, some refugees managed to find work in retail and in local Arab restaurants. Besides work and housing, *finding their way* meant seeking migration regularization, as well as establishing institutional, religious, and cultural connections in the country. The accumulated knowledge about the country was shared through pages like "*Syrians in Brazil*" and WhatsApp groups. "A refugee always *pulls* others with him," Ammar explained to me, articulating and moving towards organizations that support refugees, creating clusters of people. "Those connected to the *community*[17] and speak Arabic know there are new people," referring to the articulation of Sunni Muslim families from Lebanon, Syria, and other nationalities, because refugees *make noise*. "There is a square next to the Pari mosque, and every day there are twenty refugees sitting together there. You go there, and you find familiar people. The *salat jummah* (Friday prayer) became totally different, many more people."

This novelty did not escape Abbas's attentive gaze. His relationship with what he called the *Palestinians of Brás*, traditional owners of textile businesses in the neighborhood, is long-standing, built through his family's commercial, religious, and political connections in the south of the country, a migratory destination for many Palestinians, but also in São Paulo, where they once had stores on 25 de Março. Even viewed as an exotic and somewhat controversial figure among the wealthy merchants of the region for being a leftist militant, he always maintained contact, turning to them when he needed support for political actions in favor of the Palestinian cause. He contacted them via telephone or WhatsApp groups like "political friends," a "mix of Fatah[18] with right-wing people, FEPAL, with everything,"

16 | The humanitarian emergency situation does not always cease, just as the refugee status for many Palestinians continues, as they are born and remain refugees in host countries. Their situation has been considered 'unsolvable' for 76 years. This status is due to the fact that they cannot access citizenship in the host countries, nor can they return to their homes and properties in Palestine, as these have been expropriated by the Israeli colonial occupation. Even though international resolutions provide for the right of refugees to return to their lands and properties (such as UN Resolution 194), this right is blocked by the current occupying government.

17 | "This concept began to appear in conversations in Portuguese with the refugees, replicated from interactions with Abbas and other members of the activism."

18 | "Fatah is the political party currently in power in the West Bank, with groups in Syria and Lebanon."

as Samir described. This group was made up of offsprings of Palestinian politicians from wealthy families who came to Brazil in the 1950s, with not many common interests but who, *after Oslo*[19], would have been left without prospects for doing something politically relevant *like their parents did*.

My ethnography showed that the arrival of Palestinian refugees from Syria (but also other refugees from the Syrian conflict) created a moment of effervescence for the community, mobilizing solidarity networks, work, and religious ties. For the established Palestinian communities, a political possibility opened up. The parents of these merchants from Brás were a more politically combative generation, at a time when organized Palestinian resistance achieved political successes, centered around the figure of leader Yasser Arafat. The generations that came after the Oslo Accords buried Palestinian agendas once and for all, denying, once and for all, the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes. According to Samir and his brother Ammar, with the arrival of refugees from the Syrian conflict, and with them many Palestinians, a horizon of mobilization around the Right of Return opened up. From increasing the weight of votes within the Palestinian Federation (FEPAL) to the prospect of organizing a Palestinian cultural center, and even circulating donations and financial aid, a common practice among wealthy families, increasing their prestige and power.

For Abbas, the presence of Palestinian refugees meant the possibility of creating a new *political fact* for the Palestinian issue in leftist networks, enhancing the mobilization capacity of Mop@t. He was already in evidence in the post-June 2013 context, as participation in the Popular World Cup Committee (CPC-SP) opened many possibilities for articulation, including with the *community*.

In the protest held in 2014 against the violent bombing of the Israeli army in Gaza, which killed more than two thousand Palestinians, this network of movements, collectives, and unorganized individuals - some of them Muslims - showed up in force. Major mobilizations in favor of Palestine often occur due to acts of extreme violence against Palestinians, even though daily life under occupation is already extremely violent. Suffering, in this sense, is the great mobilizer for justice causes, which can be observed in all contexts described so far. And it will be again with the refugees of the Syrian conflict and in the formation of the Leila Khaled occupation.

The capacity for mobilization around a "cause" or issue relates to the degree of suffering and injustice associated with it. The way this mobilized energy is catalyzed for the formation of networks and political articulations depends on other factors, such as the degree of political and institutional connections of the actors. As described above, the moment was favorable for Mop@t, both in its relationships with the left and with the *community*.

19 | "The Oslo Accords were negotiations between the governments of Israel and Palestine mediated by the USA. These agreements addressed the occupied territories, Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, and the status of Jerusalem. According to this agreement, Israel was to remove illegal settlers from territories and homes expropriated from Palestinian families. The Accords did not address the return of Palestinian refugees, which represented a serious setback for the Palestinian cause and for the millions of Palestinians living in exile."

The first step for Abbas was to assess the housing situation of refugee families, based on information collected from *Palestinians of Brás*. To this end, he invited Lygia, a militant from Terra Livre, to visit some boarding houses in Brás, such as Hotel LM, known for its low price and proximity to the Pari mosque. These Palestinian families found themselves in a hotel known for receiving refugees and being close to Arab businesses and mosques. As mentioned earlier, Brás offered, at the same time, support in the form of guidance and donations at the mosque, job opportunities, and a space for sociability for newly arrived refugees.

Upon arriving there, they met the family of Abu Nabil, a man in his sixties coming from Yarmouk with his wife and six children, four girls and two boys, the oldest being 17 years old. Abu Nabil had not been in Brazil for long and urgently needed a more spacious place, as well as work for his sons, since his health prevented him from working. They also met Abu Khalil, 40, also from Yarmouk, and his children, Khalil, 17, and Soraya, 21, who was a few weeks pregnant and preferred to travel with her father until her husband could come to Brazil. Abu Khalil's wife and their other young children stayed in Lebanon with part of the family that already lived in the country, waiting for the husband to establish himself in the country to be reunited with them. Finally, Um Aziz, a Syrian widow also in her forties, who came with her children aged 14, 10, and 5, completes the group of the first families considered to integrate the occupation.

The presence of refugees and immigrants in low-cost boarding houses in São Paulo is common. Access to housing is one of the main difficulties they face upon arrival. The public shelter structure cannot absorb all the demand, which also includes homeless Brazilians (Perin, 2013). Municipal shelters separate residents by men and women, placing limits on domestic-family cohabitation, and do not allow stays of more than a few months. Apart from these options, one can attempt regular rental (which is more challenging to obtain, both bureaucratically and financially), and, above all, popular boarding houses, as is the case with these families, although this option gradually becomes unfeasible.

The issue of access to housing for refugees and international migrants[20] has been the subject of recent academic work in various fields[21], especially in the city of São Paulo, which has a housing deficit of nearly 300,000 homes. The studies focus on the lack of a robust public housing policy for refugees and migrants and the search for viable alternatives to address the difficulties in accessing rental housing, such as shelters, references, and transitional houses (Perin, 2013), rentals without the mediation of documents, and urban occupations (Charbel, 2019; Drotbohm, 2016; Author, 2017; Martins, 2018; Zelaya, 2016).

The literature describes a variety of housing trajectories, which vary according to gender, nationality, socioeconomic conditions, and legal status, especially for

20 | "The migration of Brazilians within the national territory will not be discussed in this work, but its relationship with urban occupations is known and discussed by Filadelfo (2009). The theme of displacement between the Northeast and São Paulo is addressed by the author as a plural experience when analyzing the trajectory of Brazilian families in search of their own homes in São Paulo."

21 | "Such as Social Sciences, Law, Geography, and Social Work."

asylum seekers, whose documents do not meet the bureaucratic requirements of real estate agencies. Reports from reception organizations such as the Refugee Support Reference Center (CRAI)[22] show that the housing demand concentrates in transitional houses and occupations in downtown São Paulo, particularly in the Sé sub-prefecture, where municipal facilities and assistance organizations for migrants and refugees are located.

22 | "The municipal facility was inaugurated in the Bela Vista neighborhood in 2014, in the city of São Paulo.

Among refugees from the Syrian conflict, temporary housing converges to areas where established Arab communities exist, as already established, with the support of mosques and immigrant businesses. Brás receives other immigrants and refugees, such as Bengalis, Bolivians, Pakistanis, and Afghans, the latter of whom have filled the Pari mosque on Fridays in recent years. For a more lasting housing project, fixed income, documents, and even bureaucratic flexibility at the time of renting are necessary.

The presence of refugees from the Syrian conflict in urban occupations was, until that moment, almost nonexistent. The Cambridge Hotel and the Moroccan Cinema, both occupations in downtown São Paulo, provided shelter for Haitians, Congolese, Senegalese, Bolivians, Peruvians, and also for Palestinian refugees from Iraq, the same ones from the resettlement program. The first political articulation that intersected housing and refuge was carried out at the Cambridge Hotel, through the creation of GRIST, a collective of refugees from various nationalities that would advocate for access to housing for the refugee population, connecting their struggle to that of homeless Brazilians. The Leila Khaled occupation will be created when the collective was active, and its militants will meet and carry out activities together.

The Leila Khaled Occupation

According to Marcel, this name defined the political identity of the occupation among left-wing militants. Among Palestinian refugees, the occupation became known as the *refugees' building*, a financial alternative for an increasingly urgent housing situation. Abbas's contact circulated among them, at a moment when he began to sort families who came to live in the building. By the end of 2015, the group of Palestinians or *Arabs*, as they were called by Brazilians, occupied four floors of the building, totaling over a hundred people.

This "group" was composed of biparental families, single-parent families, and many single men, aged between 20 and 45. Generally, men of productive age traveled first, establishing themselves with work and housing before bringing the rest of the family through family reunification letters. This characteristic brought an innovative element to the social movement, which began to accept single men, as

their families would arrive later. The housing movement prioritizes families, as they tend to remain in the location and advocate for popular housing, in contrast to the higher turnover of people who arrive alone.

Mop@t was responsible for the care and mediation (cultural and translation) with the Palestinian families, while Terra Livre was responsible for the overall organization of the occupation, its daily life, and political activities, with a small group of militants from each side. The first public act of the occupation was an event called "Yarmouk Journeys," aimed at raising donations and partners through political awareness. In this public act, the residents presented the occupation emphasizing the relationship between urban reform in Brazil and Palestinian refugee as causes of social justice, hoping to evoke solidarity from those present. The event was publicized within the networks of social movements, intellectuals, and leftist journalists, as well as some organizations supporting refugees.

This effort gained momentum from the media context mentioned at the beginning of the article. To the political appeal was added a tremendous moral weight, bringing more people, more donations, and more partnerships into the occupation. Lutz (1988) states that politics and emotion intersect on a moral plane, producing the necessary mobilizations and engagements for their causes, claims, and even elections. The occupation became known amidst a global outcry for the victims of the Syrian conflict. The seven hundred people who appeared that day were unexpected, not only linked directly or indirectly to their networks but also unorganized individuals.

After that day, some articles in larger media outlets reported on the refugees, contributing to publicizing the building and expanding the donation network. Abbas took the lead in organizing this new "demand," and in Marcel's words, managed to multiply "tenfold the number of interested parties." He succeeded, in yet another conjuncture of favorable factors, in creating a political fact with the newly created occupation.

Things unfolded in the occupation at an accelerated pace, which made regular meetings among militants impossible to organize and control these processes. Moreover, all the solidarity was directed solely to the refugees, and Brazilian families felt overlooked and even discriminated against. The way to deal with this discrimination was to invoke the category of *family*, which redefined the priority for distributing donations, a solution that was accepted by the Palestinians. *Families* with dependents received donations first, according to each family's degree of need.

This solution helped mitigate the anger of Brazilian families, but not completely: dissatisfaction settled among them and began to threaten the "construction of the political collective," a priority for the housing movement. In this new context of partnership between Abbas (and Mop@t) and the housing

movement, the unbalanced relationship with external actors undermined the equal distribution of resources and attention, and therefore threatened the collective with rupture.

While this visibility captured resources and expanded the institutional relations of the occupation, contributing to its protection against eviction, selective solidarity eroded the relationships between residents and movements. The institutional relationships with the government and organizations unfolded beyond the limits of the building and had variable durations.

Among the less durable were cash donations converted into maintenance fees for the building, and donations of food baskets, milk, and diapers, stored and distributed to families. Among the more durable were partnerships. With ADUS, through some representatives and Mop@t, materials for the Portuguese language course for refugees were provided, such as booklets and volunteer teachers for the classes. With the Reference and Care Center for Immigrants (CRAI), the partnership was built through the relationship between Abbas and Rafael, a fellow militant with experience in popular education who kept him close to social movements[23]. His political experience as a popular educator always maintained his role as a public figure interconnected with social movements. Once this connection with the occupation was formed, he began to participate in events and offer consulting to refugees and movements. He also placed the Leila Khaled occupation on the map of donations that reached CRAI itself, as it concentrated many families in one place and was coordinated by trusted movements.

23 | Note 27.

This experience in the occupation created a new articulation in the relationship between housing movements and public power[24] by coupling services for the migrant population, which has specific demands vis-à-vis what is already contemplated by assistance services for situations of vulnerability. It promoted the meeting between social movements, the Human Rights Secretariat, the Labor Secretariat, and the Housing Secretariat. In turn, it connected CRAI to other migratory networks, such as refugees living in Mogi das Cruzes and other cities in the metropolitan area, or Bengalis and Pakistanis living in Pari, nationalities that were part of the Sunni Islamic networks in São Paulo. In 2019, CRAI created the CRAI OCUPA sector to facilitate relations with housing movements that welcome migrants and refugees, based on the experience at Leila Khaled, which Rafael characterized as a "laboratory" for housing issues for the migrant, refugee, and stateless population.

24 | This is a well-established relationship, as the social movement needs to advocate for assistance policies for families (Filadelfo, 2015).

These catalytic events mobilize and agglomerate people around a question or cause, functioning more or less as producers of political facts. It is an event/image/narrative that morally mobilizes the public and achieves high visibility, producing a "network effect[25]": this mobilizes known partners, new partners, and even agendas for the media and public power. The conjuncture created by the "Alan

25 | I use Appadurai's concept of 'cascade processes' to describe the coverage of global events and their impacts on local Muslim communities, particularly in my master's thesis (Manfrinato, 2016).

phenomenon" produced a torrential movement towards the occupation and created durable connections – like those of CRAI, partner social movements, and Islamic organizations – and contingent links, such as those established with occasional volunteers and unorganized individuals.

Once again, we see the paradoxical effects of *political facts* and hybrid networks of militants, which can be very productive while simultaneously fostering ruptures and internal conflicts. However, once the demand arrives, the movement, NGO, or public facility must filter it through mechanisms of equal redistribution. Here, the principles of *isonomy* come into play, establishing equality for all and fair, non-discriminatory treatment. Thus, they could not separate donations solely for one group to the detriment of another, according to specific solidarities (class, race, cultural, and even religious). This principle generated a redistributive effect throughout the networks.

However, even this principle could not mitigate the latent tensions: in the occupation or the NGO, the feeling was one of exclusion, a sentiment that undermined the desired sense of identification among groups, and thus their unity around a common cause. Another deleterious effect of this solidarity occurred among the Palestinian refugees themselves. They felt treated as *pitiable* individuals, from whom a permanent attitude of *gratitude* was expected, in a relationship of exchange that was impossible to reciprocate. Humanitarianism does not equate to Maussian gift-giving, where the logic of "giving, receiving, and reciprocating" does not occur (Schiocchet, 2017; Rozakou, 2016) in the asymmetric logic of solidarity. Instead of invoking Mauss's theory of the gift, we refer to the "Compulsory Expression of Feelings" (1979) to better explain the obligations embedded in humanitarian solidarity relations.

Conclusions

The genealogy of the networks of relationships that formed the Leila Khaled occupation has been described from major milestones: the action in Jardim Pantanal (2000), the arrival of Palestinian refugees from Iraq (2007), the June Journeys/ Popular World Cup Committee (2013/2014), and the arrival of refugees from the Syrian conflict (2014/2015). Its dynamics involve repetition of movements and discontinuities (ruptures), the creation of political facts, and the composition and recomposition of groups of people and collectives. In summary, a type of rhizomatic segmentarity rather than pivoting defines these social movements[26], with lines of segmentation and escape equally important for their constructions and political durability.

26 | Inspired by the readings of Goldman (2006) and Filadelfo (2015), I draw on Deleuze and Guattari (1995) to resonate the findings of their ethnographies with social movements.

Although they operate with top-down political hierarchies, the character of autonomist movements leaves much room for more flexible horizontal dynamics, among organic militants and partners, residents and movements, and other private or public organizations, secular or religious. Perhaps this is why the networks could be composed of so many different elements: their hybridism allowed for unusual alliances and had unexpected effects, such as the entry of militants from MULP into left-wing parties, theater collectives getting involved with urban reform and Palestinian refuge issues, NGOs for migrants acting in occupations, and even changes in public policy protocols for migrants and housing issues.

The stability of the various political configurations described over a period of more than twenty years did not remain, but their components (people, causes, collectives) remain virtually linked until new conjunctures evoke them. That said, and to conclude this article, the Leila Khaled occupation went through two rifts: between Mop@t and Terra Livre, and later between Terra Livre and an old group of residents who took over the coordination of the occupation. Some of these relationships continued, others did not, while others were updated years after the ruptures. They produced other configurations and territories of work and art, political collectives or fronts, such as the Front for Immigrants and Refugees and localized, *ad hoc* partnerships. For some militants, the migratory theme became an agenda to keep an eye on, while for some Palestinians, distrust towards Brazilian reception organizations became perennial.

The refugee and immigrant reception system in São Paulo is hybrid, as it depends on a vast network of services for diverse demands that the state cannot fully address. The maintenance of material life, with work, food, and housing is still incipient, and most people need to compete in the job market with Brazilians or try their luck with their own business ventures. In unequal cities like São Paulo, the issue of housing, with its bureaucratic demands and high costs, is problematic even for Brazilians, which makes the system of urban occupations, shelters (private or public), and boarding houses inevitable. In this gap, housing social movements operate, extending their rhizomatic networks in solidarity with the migrant population and being affected by it.

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Contribution of authorship: not applicable.

Funding: the research that gave rise to this article was funded by Fapesp (process 2017/26831-7).

Data availability: All data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article.

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Chief-Editor: Guilherme Moura Fagundes
Associated Editor: Marta Rosa Amoroso
Associated Editor: Ana Claudia Duarte Rocha Marques

Received on March 14th, 2024. Accepted on April 28th, 2025

This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Brasil (CAPES) - Finance Code 001