



# **New Homes, New Lives?**

## **Slum Upgrading, Consumptions Dreams and Debt in Brazil**

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My love for Brazil started in the city of São Paulo nearly 20 years ago when I attended a summer camp in the periphery of the city. During this stay, my curiosity was sparked about the urban poverty, stark inequality and high-contrast urban landscape to which I was exposed and wished to understand. This curiosity grew when I later lived in São Paulo for two years. It developed into a research interest and eventually this PhD project.

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## SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

In recent years, slum dwellers have been forcibly removed from their homes in the community of São Bartolomeu, in the city of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. This PhD thesis is an ethnography of this forced resettlement and the new lives the families tried to make for themselves in its aftermath in new state-built social housing (*conjuntos habitacionais*). It is based on thirteen months of fieldwork in Salvador between July 2012 and March 2015. The resettlement of slum dwellers was part of state-led slum upgrading interventions under the urban development project Better Days (*Dias Melhores*), a name that alludes to the optimism it evoked. As a woman expressed before she was resettled: “a new house, a new life”.

The thesis is also an ethnography of ‘Emerging Brazil’ from the perspective of people from the lowest social class, living in the urban periphery. Brazil has been undergoing tremendous change since the Workers Party (PT) assumed office in 2003. As of December 2015, the PT was still in government after four consecutive re-elections. The PT government has strived to position Brazil as a regional superpower and to improve living conditions for all Brazilians including the poor, such as the families in this study who have gained new homes and more access than ever before to consumer credit and credit cards. This has enabled them to realize what they call *consumption dreams*, making dreams and debt two sides of the same coin. This thesis seeks to connect these socio-economic changes in Brazilian society with the changes that slum dwellers experienced in their community in light of the upgrading interventions.

Among the resettled families, replacing the old television with a flat screen TV, or the old rusty fridge with a brand new one, was central to their consumption dreams that resembled those of the middle class. But I argue that achieving these dreams was not about becoming middle class. Rather, residents attempted to achieve distinction and gain social status vis-à-vis other poor people in their community. By drawing attention to how residents tried to position themselves in relation to local social hierarchies, I show how their quest for social status and ‘growing in life’, as they said, was confined to distinguishing themselves from others in their community, while simultaneously being shaped by wider societal dynamics.

The residents’ biggest consumption dream was a house of their own, which is examined by extending the analysis to include the housing struggles of residents who were able to remain and newcomers attracted to São Bartolomeu by the slum upgrading project. Squatters built a new settlement in São Bartolomeu hoping that they, too, would receive a

house for free through forced eviction. I propose that the struggles for better housing among the residents can be understood within what I coin a *housing hierarchy*, in which the housing categories are not only practical modes of living. They are also moral categories of distinction, as the specific categories were established among residents in relation to those from whom they wished to distinguish themselves.

I further explore how residents try to make their consumption dreams come true and climb the housing hierarchy through what I call *futurity work*. It is a concept I elaborate through an investigation of futurity in Brazilian society and anthropological theory on futurity and hope, to explain the optimistic and anticipatory actions the interlocutors undertook in an attempt to bring an imagined future closer. Trying to gain access to credit, squatting to obtain a house, and not least trying their luck with various lotteries are among these actions.

The residents' preferred mode of purchasing consumer goods – as well as lottery betting and food – was *a fiado*, on credit. I explore their credit practices and the ways they got into debt with banks, retailers and with each other, often leaving their debt unpaid. I argue that it was not the creditor who had 'power', but the debtors who did not pay and managed to pass on their debt to the creditors, who in turn were left to deal with the debt and its consequences themselves. These social relations of debt invoked or accentuated unequal relations between neighbours and within households and they were part of a larger pattern of not doing or not returning favours. Among residents there was what I characterize *conflictuous coexistence*. In the new housing complex, this was reflected in the residents' appropriations of communal space in ways that were characterized by social divisions and tensions. It was also reflected in their modes of *doing housing*.

To account for how 'housing was done', and by engaging with anthropological on housing as process, consumption and aspirations, I propose an analytical framework of four modes of doing housing. I argue that for the former slum dwellers, doing housing was about doing away with the life in the slum and the stigma pertaining to being a slum dweller. This stigma persisted in the new neighbourhood even though they had moved away from the slum.

Some residents also referred to the new housing as slum (*favela*). I suggest that this should be understood as a critique of the contested outcomes of the resettlement. It merely provided an upgrade of the built environment of the slum where they used to live.

Brazil receives acclaim for its slum upgrading practices especially by international organisations working with slum upgrading, but I urge that the sharing of these practices with other countries should be done with caution and with attention to the critical findings that this research presents.

## SUMMARY OF THE THESIS IN DANISH

Denne afhandling undersøger ufrivillig genhusning af slumbeboere og livet i de nye huse, som de får stillet til rådighed af staten. Afhandlingen er baseret på 13 måneders feltarbejde i storbyen Salvador, Brasilien, i området São Bartolomeu, der i de seneste år har gen-nemgået indgribende områdefornyelser også kaldet 'slum upgrading'.

Beboerne taler om vigtigheden af at "vokse i livet" (*crescer na vida*) modsat at bo som de boede i slummen, og her er de nye huse centrale for måden 'man skal vokse på'. De taler også om deres 'forbrugsdømme': fx at få udskiftet deres gamle rustne køleskab eller det gamle fjernsyn med et stort fladskærms TV. Med tiden lykkedes det for flere at forbedre og udvide deres huse og udskifte dets interiør. Deres nye forbrugsmønstre er afhængige af nye lønemuligheder, som er gjort muligt for fattige brasilianske siden 2003, hvor Brasilien fik ny regering ledet af Arbeiderpartiet (PT). I december 2015 var PT stadig ved magten.

PT-regeringen arbejdede for at gøre Brasilien til en stormagt og for at øge velstanden for alle brasilianske. Den tog en masse tiltag for at forbedre levevilkårene for de fattigste brasilianske, blandt andet ved at tildele dem almennyttige boliger, som er udgangspunktet for denne afhandling. Den fortæller historien om, hvordan Brasiliens massive opsving (mellem 2003 og 2013) og store samfundsmæssige forandringer ser ud fra denne gruppens perspektiv.

Familiernes nye forbrugsmønstre ligner middelklassens, men deres forbrugsdømme og -mønstre handler ikke om, at de gerne vil være middelklasse. De er meget bevidste om deres position på bunden af samfundet. Derimod argumenterer jeg for, at det handler om at beboerne forsøger at positionere sig i forhold til hinanden og lokale sociale hierarkier. Afhandlingen viser, hvordan deres søgen efter social status er formet af bredere samfundsmæssige forhold, men orienteret imod deres lokalsamfund.

Det nye forbrug og forbedringerne på deres huse finansieres primært af lån. I sammenspil med antropologiske studier af gæld undersøger jeg beboernes lånepraksisser. Familierne opbygger gæld til banker, butikker og til hinanden, og de betaler ofte ikke deres gæld. Dette har konsekvenser for beboerne og især for dem, som låner naboen penge eller deres kassekredit og nu hænger på gælden.

Beboerne spiller også lotto i håbet om at vinde penge, de ellers ikke har let adgang til at tjene. Afhandlingen undersøger disse spillepraksisser, hvoraf den mest populære, *rifa*, også er den billigste, som ofte kan købes på kredit. De spiller i håbet om at vinde, men når de spiller, bliver det også muligt at drømme og midlertidigt suspendere hverda-

gens problemer – lige indtil vindernummeret bekendtgøres. At spille lotto analyseres som én ud af flere måder hvorpå beboerne, på optimistisk vis, forsøger at bringe en forestillet fremtid om et bedre liv tættere på.

Disse fremtidsorienterede handlinger betegner jeg som *futurity work*. Jeg udvikler begrebet dels gennem en undersøgelse af forestillinger om fremtiden i det brasilianske samfund, og disse forestillingers indvirkning på samfundet, og dels gennem antropologisk teori om fremtid og håb. *Futurity work* foretages også af de beboere, der fik lov til at beholde deres huse i São Bartolomeu og nye tilflytttere, som forsøger at få tildelt et hus gennem slum upgrading projektet.

Afhandlingen undersøger også deres kamp for bedre boliger og drømmen om at eje deres eget hjem. Jeg forslår termen ”*bolig-hierarki*” (*housing hierarchy*) til at forstå den sociale og moralske orden, som de forskellige beboere indgår i og forsøger at avancere i.

Det er langt fra alle familierne i det nye boligbyggeri, der er begejstret for livet i de nye huse. Men husene må hverken sælges eller lejes ud officielt set. Selvom det alligevel lykkedes nogle beboere at leje dem ud, så føler de fleste sig nødsaget til at blive og forsøger med tiden at forbedre deres nye hjem. Afhandlingen undersøger beboernes måder at ”*gøre huse på*” (*doing housing*). Dette analytiske begreb udvikles i afhandlingen ved inddragelse af studier om husbyggeri som en proces fra antropologien og bystudier.

Forbedringerne de foretager, og ønsker at foretage, på deres huse følger nogle fælles normative ideer om, hvordan et ’pænt’ hus skal se ud. Jeg argumenterer for, at forbedringerne i bund og grund er et forsøg på at gøre sig af med det stigma, de er underlagt som slumbeboere. Det stigma følger dem i det nye boligbyggeri, hvor deres nye naboer stadig betragter dem som slumbeboere og det nye boligområde som slum (*favela*).

Nogle af beboerne omtaler også selv deres nye boligområde som *favela*. Jeg foreslår at dette kan forstås som en kritik af de nye boliger, der er af dårlig kvalitet og hurtigt forfalder, og af genhusningen, hvori der lå et potentiale for social forandring, som ikke bliver indfriet af genhusningen i sig selv.

Brasilien nyder stor anerkendelse af deres slum upgrading praksisser især af internationale udviklingsorganisationer, der arbejder med slum upgrading. Afhandlingen viser, at der bør ses med mere kritiske øjne på de brasilianske erfaringer, inden de eksporteres til andre lande.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Aim and argument .....	3
Emerging Brazil: A story of contemporary Brazil.....	4
Changes in Northeast Brazil .....	8
From removal to inclusion of slums: Politics of slum upgrading in Brazil.....	9
Anthropology of slum upgrading: approaches and literature .....	12
Slum upgrading in Salvador and the Better Days project.....	15
Slum upgrading São Bartolomeu.....	17
The São Bartolomeu Park .....	19
Salvador: a segregated city and spatialised poverty .....	22
The fieldwork.....	27
About the families in São Bartolomeu and the conjunto Mirante da Enseada .....	38
Structure of the thesis .....	41
<b>Chapter 1. From Slum to Social Housing.....</b>	<b>45</b>
Situating Mirante da Enseada .....	46
The slum Rua das Fontes .....	49
The formation of the community of São Bartolomeu and the development of the Subúrbio .....	53
The emergence of Rua das Fontes and its status as favela .....	54
Prospects of resettlement: A decade of waiting and negotiating .....	57
A contested outcome.....	60
Non-collective action .....	62
Problems of resettlement in the new conjunto .....	64
No formal address and financial disadvantages.....	71
<i>Saudades da favela</i> : Missing the slum.....	77
Reception in the local community .....	79
The conjunto as <i>favela</i> .....	80
Disappointments and new aspirations.....	81
Concluding remarks .....	83

<b>Chapter 2. Doing Housing.....</b>	<b>87</b>
Doing housing. Point of departure.....	88
Housing as process.....	90
A tour of the original houses.....	95
Four modes of doing housing .....	97
1. Expanding the house .....	98
2. Renovating and modifying the house.....	102
Home improvements and security issues.....	104
3. Furnishing and decorating the houses .....	109
Windows and <i>inveja</i> .....	113
4. Daily maintenance.....	116
Housing transformations and willpower.....	119
Doing housing, doing away with... .....	121
Concluding remarks .....	122
<b>Chapter 3. Consumption Dreams.....</b>	<b>125</b>
Dreams for the future .....	126
The burden problem with rented housing .....	128
The dream of a casa própria.....	130
Homeownership as a characteristic of the middle-class .....	132
The struggle for housing in the new squatter settlement .....	136
The housing hierarchy .....	140
Wanting something better .....	146
New furniture for the new house .....	147
New patterns of consumption .....	149
Consumption as inclusion .....	150
The right to dream and consume.....	153
Material progress (is what) matters .....	155
Concluding remarks .....	157

<b>Chapter 4. Futurity Work and Lottery Betting.....</b>	<b>159</b>
Optimism in the ‘land of the future’ .....	160
Futurity work .....	162
Irrational optimism .....	165
Dreaming of winning the lottery.....	167
Betting on lotteries and Jesus.....	170
Rifa.....	171
Elma’s rifa plate with numbers crossed out that have been “signed”.....	173
Elma gives luck.....	175
Lack of luck .....	176
Motivations for gambling .....	178
The subjunctive mode.....	181
Lottery winnings and credit for consumption.....	183
Concluding remarks .....	186
<b>Chapter 5. Debt.....</b>	<b>189</b>
Expanding financial infrastructure.....	190
Expanding bank services .....	191
Financing the new patterns of consumption: credit as <i>financial inclusion</i> .....	194
Debt-financed consumption .....	196
A “floor made of gold” (and household economy).....	198
To “lend the name” .....	201
“Don’t get my name dirty!” .....	203
In quest of a loan.....	205
Unstable work and unstable daily living.....	211
People don’t pay “and they don’t care” .....	213
New and old patterns of debt .....	217
Concluding remarks .....	220
<b>Chapter 6. Conflictuous Coexistence .....</b>	<b>223</b>
“There are poor people who suffer because they like it like that” .....	225
Disappointments and ‘keeping to oneself’ .....	230

Of gossip and “suffocating gossip” .....	231
Appropriations of space in the conjunto .....	233
The social moral spaces of ‘wrong things’ .....	235
Of communal space and its particularities .....	237
Religious divides in the conjunto.....	238
The evangelical church in the conjunto .....	239
Evangelical moral high ground.....	243
Fear of candomblé .....	245
Slum upgrading candomblé temples.....	248
The conflict between the terreiro and the church .....	251
Slum upgrading and blaming candomblé .....	253
The revitalization of the São Bartolomeu Park.....	255
Concluding remarks .....	258
<b>7. New Homes, New Lives? Conclusion and Perspectives.....</b>	<b>2589</b>
Slum upgrading = upgrading of slum .....	260
The conjunto as urbanized favela and reverse transitions of urban space .....	261
Doing housing and aspirations in the housing hierarchy .....	263
Futurity work .....	265
Debt and conflictuous coexistence .....	266
Non-political responses to a highly politicized project .....	268
Exporting slum upgrading practices .....	269
Further research .....	271
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>273</b>
<b>Appendix 1.....</b>	<b>290</b>



