



# Necropolitics and the Covid-19 pandemic: evictions and removals that mark the recurrent housing problem in Brazil

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**ABSTRACT.** This work aims to reflect on the impacts of COVID-19, a disease responsible for the pandemic worldwide status in 2020, on urban housing policies in Brazil, which has faced structural problems since the turn of the century. These problems were accentuated and evidenced with the onset of the pandemic. The paper sought to highlight the dismantling scenario and the setbacks of human rights that are expressed in the manner in which the federal government behaves in the face of the collapse caused by the health crisis. In addition to highlighting that, the housing problem has been sewn with patches that are not effective to supply the gigantic demand for housing in the country currently, besides they do not guarantee the security of tenure to the majority of families in socioeconomic vulnerability. In this context, the focus of the discussion is on the removals and evictions that have occurred during the pandemic, putting at risk an entire population historically neglected by the neoliberal policies of capitalism. Moreover, these policies have been accentuated as a reflection of the recent democratic inflection in the country, which has strongly threatened human and social rights, legitimized by necropolitics, during the pandemic (Mbembe, 2018). The text is presented as a theoretical study carried through an exploratory methodological structure, based on a bibliographic review and documentary analysis of the subject matter. This article does not intend to bring conclusions or final answers, but to present new elements for the debate on the dismantling of Brazilian housing policies, evidenced in the current scenario through the lack of access to decent housing or difficulty in keeping it, mainly for the lowest-income populations.

**Keywords:** pandemic; necropolitics; evictions and removals; housing policies; neoliberalism; housing provision.

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## Introduction

The new Coronavirus (Sars-cov-2), responsible for the Covid-19 infectious disease, was identified in the city of Wuhan in China at the end of 2019, leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a pandemic in March 2020, due to its rapid worldwide transmission and spread. Since then, the extension of the health crisis generated by the virus has brought impacts not only to global public health but also to various other aspects of society, such as urban issues, especially in the absence of effective policies to ensure access to and ownership of housing for low-income families, a remaining problem that was accentuated after the onset of the pandemic. This can be seen especially in the developing nations that adopt neoliberal capitalist policies in the production and management of cities, which have characteristic urban segregation and *peripheralization* regarding the occupation of the land (Lefevre, 2001; Harvey, 2012; Cobos, 2014; Mbembe, 2018).

In force since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the neoliberal logic of urban management seems to collapse in the face of the health crisis during Covid-19. Although the virus affects the city as a whole, the urban population is affected unequally, because some bodies are more able to win the battle of survival in the pandemic, while others are subject to a much higher risk situation (Canetti, 2020), especially regarding the relationship between individual-housing. In Brazil, it is possible to verify that most lethal cases of the new coronavirus are concentrated in the urban peripheries, in ethnic and socially vulnerable groups (Paterniani & Carvalho, 2020). As opposed to what was thought at the beginning of the pandemic, the virus is not democratic, at least not in the production and distribution of deaths.

Another important aspect to be mentioned, as this crisis aggravating factor, is the fact that the Brazilian federal government has assumed, from the start, a negationist discourse on the pandemic of the new coronavirus. The current president of the republic, Jair Bolsonaro, since the first wave of cases in the country,

has underestimated the virus, labeling the disease as, in his own words, "just a little flu", whilst he minimized the importance of health protocols (Conde, 2020). Bolsonaro's management is a reflection of the recent democratic inflection in the country, which has strongly threatened the scope of human and social rights that have presented important advances in recent decades (Cardoso, 2019). It is also one of the faces of Necropolitics (Mbembe, 2018) in urban management, expressed in the way the federal government conducts decisions before the pandemic, which allows imposing the condition of death on the most vulnerable population in socioeconomic terms.

Especially concerning housing, there is a worsening of what was already observed with both the dismantling of urban policies and setbacks of human rights since the coup of 2016 and also with the slow dehydration of the only housing policy aimed at the low-income population (from 0 to 3 salaries), the "*Minha Casa Minha Vida*" Program. This situation has intensified the vulnerability of people who do not have guaranteed access to housing (Cardoso, 2019; Oliveira, 2020), at a time when staying at home is extremely important so that the virus does not spread and the population remains protected, it is also known that following the recommendation to "stay at home" is not possible for those who do not have the security of possessing their own house, especially regarding the most socioeconomically vulnerable population who is subject to removals and evictions.

Therefore, this article emphasizes the removals and evictions that have taken place during the pandemic, putting at risk an entire population historically neglected by the neoliberal policies of capitalism; In this logic, the state in coalition with private capital promotes the neoliberal production of market-oriented cities, at the expense of citizens' rights and diversity in the ways of living, living and relating to urban space (Araujo, Holanda, Lima, & Dias, 2020).

## Material and methods

The text presents itself as a theoretical study, its central theme is the extreme fragility of the right to housing, imposed by removals and evictions, which occur in a scenario of neglect of urban policies, in times of COVID-19 pandemic. This omission has been placed as an action of Necropolitics, coined by the Cameroonian theorist Achille Mbembe (2018), which according to the author, lies in power (political sovereignty) and the ability to dictate who can live and who may die, exercising control over mortality, mainly in the use of social and political power to legitimize the death of some bodies. Thus, this text is structured in three parts that aim, first, to highlight the housing problem rooted in Brazil, which during the pandemic was even more evident because the right to housing was not effective as a fundamental right to life. In a second moment, to demonstrate that the housing problem has been sewn with patches, and the public management has not been able to address it at all at this pandemic time, causing removals and evictions of the most vulnerable population, in a period that staying at home is essential for survival. And, finally, to draw attention to the need of formulating inclusive public policies, aimed at the most vulnerable populations, from incomes up to 3 minimum wages, prioritizing a group that is constantly neglected by current neoliberal capitalist policies and that has fewer means of being in line with the current housing market requirements – which are approved by the State -, in order to buy a home and benefit from it.

The article does not intend to bring conclusions or elaborate solutions, but to add new elements to the debate about the dismantling (or absence) of Brazilian housing policies, noted in the current pandemic through the lack of access to decent housing and difficulty of keeping it, by the population of the lowest incomes. More than that, despite the appeals of national and international bodies, the removals have occurred even during the pandemic, contrary to the main recommendation of social isolation to stay safe made by health organizations.

The methodological structure has an exploratory character, relying on the bibliographic review and document analysis from research and reports on the subject. The approach is quantitative and qualitative, urban housing policies and their reach in the last 20 years are discussed, and the time frame is drawn from the *Estatuto da Cidade* (2001), the legislative framework regulating urban policy and the social function of property. Therefore, it is aimed to highlight the impropriety of these policies to the population of lower incomes, culminating in the current removals and evictions in the Brazilian territory. Statements and discussions from researchers that have mapped the removals in the Brazilian territory before and after the pandemic (*Despejo Zero*, *Observatório das Remoções*, *LabCidade*) are considered in order to construct the text. Thus, it is then proposed a reflection and final considerations on the subject and the issues raised.

## Results and discussion

Historically, housing policies in Brazil have followed the rental model of housing production, creating a durable financing policy, capable of structuring the construction of social housing in a capitalist way, seen above all as a consumer good (Rolnik, 2015). Although the *Estatuto da Cidade* (Law 10257/01) – a legislative framework that regulates urban policy aimed at guaranteeing access to the city – has emerged to establish tools to fulfill the social function of urban property, the access to the real estate market is still restricted and the social policies of housing ownership are insufficient. Causing the majority of the low-income population to rely on informal alternatives, often in places precariously provided with public services (Rolnik, 2015; Maricato, 2014). The government, in coalition with the private sector, produces social housing treated exclusively as property, using the housing purchase policy through private financing. This production of the privately-owned house associated with the expansion of urban borders, which grows oriented by the state for the most high-income classes and leads the low-income population to have as their only option the urban peripheries, is a recurring chapter of current neoliberal urban policy.

It is necessary to mention that since the re-democratization of the country and the emergence of the *Estatuto da Cidade* in 2001, several important advances in urban policy have been observed, however, the capacity to face the systemic problem of housing in Brazil has made little progress. On one hand, the State has a characteristic of decentralization and the strengthening of local power, in addition to reinforcing the participatory discourse linked to normalization in specific laws by the Constitution (C.F., 1988) but, on the other hand, the privatization of several areas of public policy, especially urban policies was strengthened (Moreira & Ribeiro, 2016). Even so, at the institutional level, at the beginning of the 21st century there was a major direction change when, in 2003, Lula's government created the Ministry of Cities, which became part of the Federal Executive Power, and represented an important step towards managing urban policies in an integrated way.

With the creation of the Ministry of Cities, it was sought to promote a process of decentralization of government tasks, creating a favorable environment for autonomy in the definition, conduct, and execution of their public policies by municipalities. To this end, the National Housing Policy (NHP) was at the center, articulating local actions with national policy. According to the Ministry of Cities, NHP's formulation was based on the conception of a social debt accumulated in the country, due to the social inequalities and the concentration of income – characteristic of the Brazilian society – which were expressed in the socio-spatial segregation experienced in cities and the historical restriction of access to land by the low-income population (Brasil, 2004). The guiding principle was participatory and democratic management, adopting the right to housing as a fundamental one and as a vector of social inclusion, as well as the articulation of urban policy and integration with the actions of other social and environmental policies (Bonduki, 2008).

Despite the potentiality of its conception, the principles and objectives of the NHP, in practice, were shaped by the prevailing neoliberal policy, and thus, it has found barriers in its implementation, mainly at the levels of local plans. The plans would be aligned with the NHP based on the guidelines established by the National Housing Plan (PLANHAB), which sought to establish proposals that considered the diversity of the housing problem in the country and both regional and municipal specificities (Bonduki, 2008), in order to equalize Brazilian housing needs. About the axis of land policy, the proposals intended to list strategic guidelines that could be considered by municipal governments in their policies and actions, with two main goals: (1) "to ensure access to urbanized, legalized and well-located land for the provision of HIS. (2) "to regularize informal settlements, ensuring the permanence of low-income residents" (Brasil, 2010, p. 120). The problem, however, was that PLANHAB's strategic guidelines for the axis of land policy should be carried out in the Local Housing Plans of Social Interest (PLHIS), however, it would also be associated with and dependent on other municipal urban policy instruments, in particular, the Master Plans and the complementary legislation, that is, local interests.

According to Moreira and Ribeiro (2016), the absence of other strategies that PLANHAB has considered central in the equation of housing problems, such as institutional arrangements and urban-land strategies, were imbalanced with PLHIS(s) in particular, regarding the relationship between land and housing production. The NHP reflects failures in housing policy similar to those practiced in the past when housing production actions were not accompanied by redistributive land policies but were rather strongly influenced by land problems, which contributed to deepening the situation of precariousness and socio-spatial segregation in cities (Rolnik, 2015; Moreira & Ribeiro, 2016). In this sense, at the same time, it attends to the

structuring of a discourse based on access to urbanized land and the regularization of informal settlements for low-income residents, in the national housing policy the early weakening of this institutionalized structure in favor of a policy of accelerating economic growth is highlighted, guided by a program that detaches itself from its generating assumption and strengthens private initiative in production processes.

Contrary to the objectives of the NHP, in 2009 the *Minha Casa Minha Vida* Program (PMCMV) was created and gained priority and prominence in the theme of housing production. Launched by the federal government in 2009 as a way to mitigate the impacts caused by the international economic crisis, the program was based on the implementation of an investment line, which created real estate credit packages, and on the construction of housing, preferably, for the lower classes. However, even though it included the defense of decent housing in the discourse, the PMCMV had clear objectives to affect the economy through the multiplier effects of the construction industry. In addition to expanding the housing market for families with a monthly income up to 10 minimum wages, maintaining the development of a real estate sector that was beginning to feel the impacts of the international economic crisis that occurred in 2008 (Cardoso & Aragão, 2013). The authors also reinforce eight dimensions poorly balanced by the PMCMV, later identified in the production of Moreira and Ribeiro (2016): (i) the lack of the program's articulation with urban policy; (ii) the absence of instruments to address the land issue; (iii) the locations' problems with new undertakings; (iv) excessive privilege granted to the private sector; (v) the large scale of undertakings (vi) the low architectural and constructive quality of the projects; (vii) the discontinuity of the program about the SNHIS and the loss of social control over its implementation; [...] (viii) the inequalities in the distribution of resources as a result of the adopted institutional model (Cardoso & Aragão, 2013; apud Moreira & Ribeiro, 2016, p. 21).

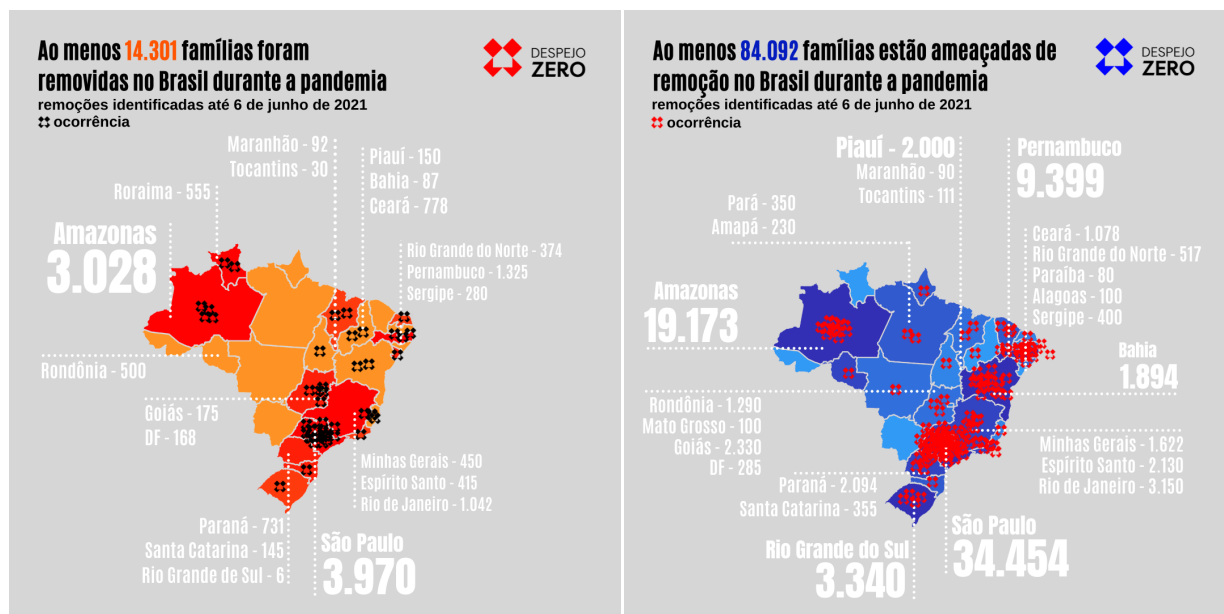
Another aspect that highlights the failure of public programs and the inability of market mechanisms in dealing with the housing problem is the permanence of a high housing deficit concentrated in the lower-income population, even after decades of federal-sponsored housing policy. According to the João Pinheiro Foundation, in 2019, the housing deficit was estimated at more than 5.8 million households, of which 89% are concentrated in the income range below three minimum wages. However, the situation has highlighted the absolute need to formulate more effective strategies to meet the lower purchasing power levels of society (Bonduki, 2008).

For Maricato (2014), the inability to serve families with income below three minimum wages is one of the main negative points of the PMCMV, so such negligence can be directly linked to the capitalist structuring of the market and neoliberal urban policy. Furthermore, according to the author, although it foresees a total subsidy for the bands of 0 to 3 minimum wages, the program loses adherence to the deficit already in the original design, for while these bands constitute almost 90% of the deficit of housing in the country, as quoted in the paragraph above, about 36% of the units built within the program (1.4 million) were destined for this band. For the bands between 3 and 6 minimum wages, corresponding to 8.1% of the housing deficit, the package built about 2.5 million units, that is, 55% of the total.

The relationship between renting production of housing and the land issue is one of the main obstacles to solving the housing problem in Brazil, since limiting access to land by the low-income population is one of the main forms of social exclusion and consolidation of urban and housing precariousness in cities (Rolnik, 2015; Moreira & Ribeiro, 2016). Furthermore, as a central component of the right to housing, the local security land tenure is both a vital and necessary element to guarantee the permanence of this population in their homes, and the absence of this right's guarantee in the legal context has as serious consequence the forced removals, which the UN (2007) defines as being the permanent or temporary withdrawal of individuals, families or communities, against their will, from the houses or land they occupy.

In the current pandemic of 2020/21, when the new coronavirus has led to public health problems and reverberations in the economic and social sector, housing problems and issues guaranteeing the right to housing were accentuated. According to some movements and organizations articulated within the framework of the "Zero Eviction Campaign" – a national action created at the beginning of the pandemic, which aimed at the suspension of evictions and removals - between March 2020 and June 2021, at least 14,000 families were evicted from their homes, and another 84,000 families were threatened to be removed at any given time (Figure 1). It is worth noting that removals often are invisible to society, and probably due to that, the data utilized by the movements are larger. These processes have not been initiated with the new coronavirus pandemic and will not even be resolved by the end of the pandemic.





**Figure 1.** Mapping the occurrences of removals and evictions in the Brazilian territory until June 2021. Source: *Despejo Zero* (2021).

Stemming from the concern with the violation of the right to housing in the pandemic scenario - in a context in which millions of people in Brazil are currently unable to have access to adequate housing - and for protection against forced evictions, national bodies of Architecture and Urbanism have joined together. The Institute of Architects of Brazil (IAB), the National Federation of Architects and Urban Planners (FNA), and the Brazilian Institute of Urban Law (IBDU) launched, on March 16, 2020, the Manifesto "*Apelo pela suspensão do cumprimento de mandados de reintegração de posse e despejos ante o avanço do vírus COVID-19 no país*" [Call for the suspension of both repossession warrants and evictions during the advance of the COVID-19 virus in the country], which proposed to prevent the aggravation of exposure to the virus, which would put at risk both families subject to evictions and the public health in Brazil (Araujo et al, 2020). Shortly thereafter, the United Nations Programme for Human Settlements launched the "UN Habitat Policy Statement on the Prevention of Evictions and Removals during COVID-19", declaring that "evictions and removals are a violation of the fundamental right to adequate housing and protection against forced evictions, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights". Furthermore, the text highlights the additional and significant risks of these processes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which to informal residents and settlement communities, would not only violate their fundamental rights but could also expose both them and the rest of the population to a higher risk of exposure to the virus (ONU-Habitat, 2020).

Despite international appeals and calls from many sectors of civil society for preserving the right to housing, the Brazilian Government was reluctant to take any steps to review the reintegration of possession and evictions during the pandemic, as illustrated by the cases cited. At the first, at the end of March 2020, the Senate was presented with the Bill 1,179/2020, which, among other things, proposed that evictions for non-payment of rent be suspended until October 30 of that same year. Although the bill became law (Law 14010/20), in early June, the President of the Republic vetoed precisely the section that would safeguard the right to housing of many families by prohibiting evictions for non-payment of rent (Article 9). Only two months after the approval of the law - that is, five months' rent since the beginning of the crisis -, with the overthrow of the presidential veto by Congress on August 21, 2020, the tenants obtained some legal protection against evictions, but only for another 70 days (Labcidade, 2020).

Another bill (or *PL*, in Portuguese) was presented to the plenary, this time the proposal was directed to the sole suspension of evictions or vacancy of real estate, it was the *PL 827/2020*, which was also filed at the end of March 2020. The proposal's content reassures the suspension of compliance with a judicial measure, extrajudicial or administrative, resulting in evictions or forced removals in private or public property, urban or rural, until the end of 2021. The proposal met the recommendation of national and international agencies, to guarantee the right to housing and coronavirus prevention in thousands of families who are subject to evictions. However, even with an emergency character, the legislative proposal filed in March 2020, at the beginning of the epidemiological crisis in Brazil, dealt in the opposite way to the urgency of implementing

the legislative measure, taking almost a year to be assessed by the Chamber of Deputies. In this period, more than 14 thousand families were evicted from their homes, a reality that could have been avoided if the bill had been voted urgently. In July 2021 the proposal was approved by Congress. However, the suspension of occupations in rural property was removed from the original text, by the pressure of the ruralist bench in power. Yet, once again, as soon as it reached the hands of the current President of the Republic, the removal suspension project was once again vetoed. A few days after the end of this text (October 2021), Congress rejected the presidential veto and reinstated suspensions on evictions and removals through further overthrow by parliamentarians. However, between these processes of public administration and the politics of death, many families have been evicted, exposed not only to the virus but also to all kinds of humiliation and social vulnerability.

It is evident that the Brazilian government has adopted, from the start, a denialist posture regarding the effects and impact of the disease, mainly when it regards people with socioeconomic vulnerability. This occurs in several stances with public statements made by President Jair Bolsonaro, who minimizes the severity of the situation and questions the effectiveness of the proposed measures to contain the virus according to international organizations. In addition, the head of State focuses on proven ineffective treatments, and the lack of government coordination and management blocks international agreements and, consequently, both the production and delivery of vaccines in Brazil (Ferrari, Januzzi, & Guerra, 2020). Thus, in order to minimize the facts and lethal effects of the pandemic, the president openly and fearlessly explains a death speech (concrete or symbolic). The death of a group historically stigmatized by society and the State itself, based on a capitalist logic in which the subject is seen as socially irrelevant, as being just another gear in the capitalist system and, therefore, easily replaced (Sousa, 2021).

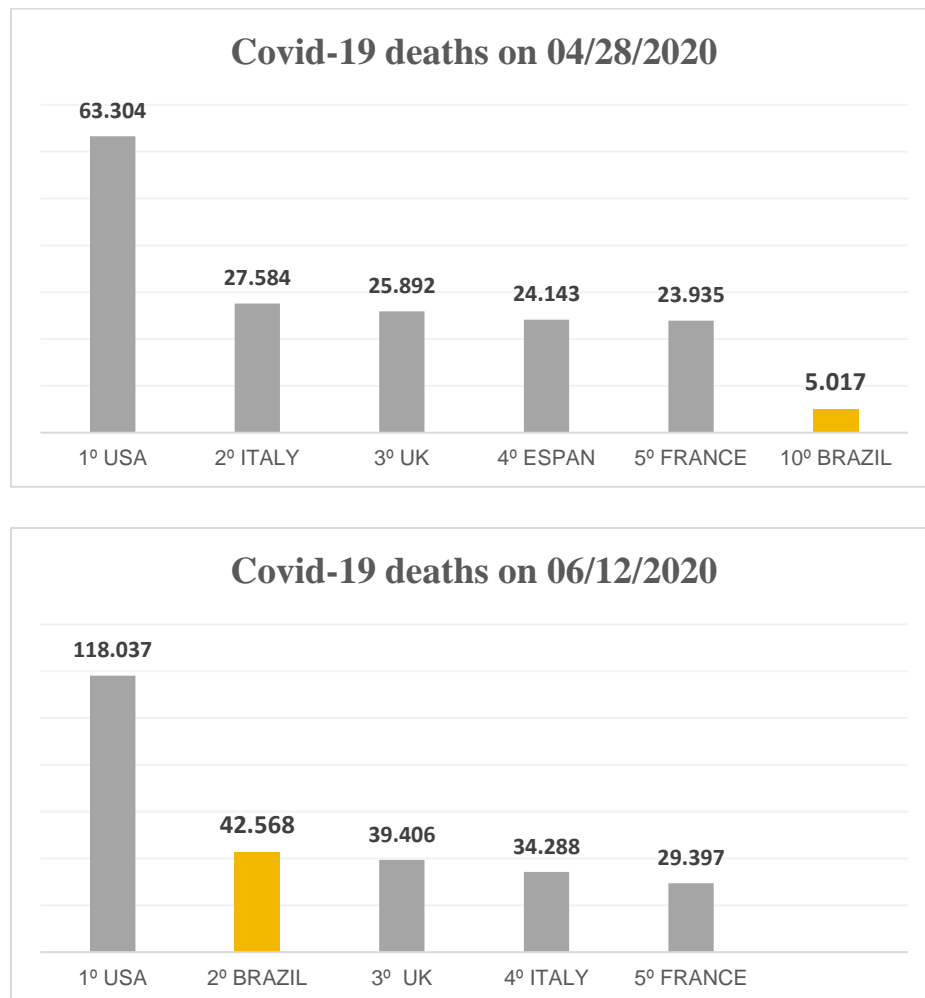
Achille Mbembe, a Cameroonian philosopher, proposes the term necropolitics to characterize these new contemporary forms of sovereignty and social control; synthetically, the control over human life. Necropolitics is in the power and ability to dictate who can live and who should die (Mbembe, 2018). In a sovereign way, it exercises control over mortality and defines life as the implantation and manifestation of power. Although Mbembe has not grounded his concept on the Brazilian reality, the similarities with what we live in the country are massive, and it is even more evident with the current Covid-19 pandemic. The impacts of the Federal Government's negligent stance and the precariousness of public policies, such as basic sanitation, are evident in the numbers that reveal the occurrence of true genocide. In terms of deaths by Covid-19, vulnerable people, mainly black and without schooling, die four times more from the new coronavirus than whites with higher education, according to recent research by Lemgruber and Lerer (2021) in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

The research, which had as object analysis residents of three of the largest *favela* complexes in Rio de Janeiro (Complex of Alemão, Maré, and Cidade de Deus), also reveals details of how the routine of people marginalized by public policies has been during the pandemic. Hunger, unemployment, violence, abandonment by the state, and little access to policies to combat the virus are some of the pillars of how the necropolitics of the municipal, state, and federal governments have operated in these regions, summarize the researchers (Lemgruber & Lerer, 2021). Coordinated by young residents of the mentioned *favelas*, and with the support of the *Centro de Estudos de Segurança e Cidadania* (CESeC), the study sought to quantify the reality already felt in practice by the researchers. To reach the conclusions that detailed the functioning of necropolitics in the *favelas*, about one thousand interviews were conducted, divided proportionally among the residents of the three complexes. Some of the results are expressed in Figure 2. With the pandemic, more than half of the surveyed *favelas* residents (54%) lost their jobs, and the lack of water was part of the routine of 63% of the people interviewed, who claimed to have been without water at some point during the pandemic.

Other data that corroborate the idea of Necropolitics, is the inability of the Federal Government to deal with the current health crisis in comparison to other countries, going in the counter-direction of most interactional rulers; this was reflected in a significant number of deaths by Covid-19 (Figure 3). On April 28, 2020, when Brazil had more than five thousand victims of the disease, surpassing, at the time, the total number of deaths in China - the epicenter of the pandemic - the president, during an interview, said in an unfortunate phrase that shows his irrational way of dealing with the pandemic: "So what? I am sorry. What do you want me to do? I am the Messiah, but I do not perform miracles". Less than two months later, Brazil ranked second in the world's number of deaths, according to the chart below. Currently, until the writing of this text, Brazil still ranks second in the number of deaths from the new coronavirus, with more than 600,000, representing 12.4% of all Covid-19 victims worldwide (Our World Data, 2021).

<b>54%</b>	They were unable to make social isolation during the pandemic;
<b>53,9%</b>	Lost their jobs during the pandemic;
<b>63%</b>	Said to have run out of water at some point during the pandemic;
<b>37,9%</b>	Of those who needed medical attention were unable to.

**Figure 2.** Some quantitative data from the research. Source: Lemgruber and Lerer (2021).



**Figure 3.** Worldwide evolution of the number of deaths by covid-19. Source: Our World Data, 2021.

As demonstrated, the federal government's stance towards the pandemic assumes a role, clearly indicated, of controlling the mortality conditions and defining the lives of its citizens, a context in which some bodies are more exposed to death than others. Within this logic, the State, in addition to not providing an effective urban policy, represses the solutions of social movements and institutions, which aim to preserve the right to housing in order to keep people safe and secure during the pandemic, as did many other countries. However, this lack of effectiveness does not occur by chance, it is related to the minor position that housing occupies in Brazilian public policies and the historical way in which housing has been and still is dealt with in Brazil, configuring itself as a Necropolitics of removal and eviction.

Only in the metropolitan region of São Paulo, where the country's largest housing deficit is concentrated, the number of removals doubled during the pandemic. According to the removals observatory (Labciudades,

2020c), by December 2020 more than 35,000 families were removed, and 210,000 are still threatened with removal. The observatory also analyzed the issues by which the removal processes have occurred in the current conjuncture. According to the researchers,

(i) the mobilization of the justification of environmental or risk restrictions operated by the municipalities, which are usually related to administrative processes (and, therefore, without any judicial process, which makes it difficult to defend those affected); (ii) the way of conducting removals little by little, gradually in time and space, forming an environment of complete insecurity to those affected and reducing the possibilities of organization and resistance, including for those who remain in the place; and (iii) the importance of the articulation and resistance processes that have managed to stop removal processes (Labcidades, 2020b).

In the context of São Paulo (SP), it is also important to mention that there were removals in areas designated for the application of the so-called housing PPP – Public-Private Partnership Policy in the municipality and SP state. Such partnership has the contradictory discourse of building new housing units to remedy the deficit, while at the same time it proves to be a policy of removals because in order to deliver what is promised, the City Hall – which has partnered with private companies – provides territories where people have been living for more than 20 years (Ronilk, 2020). It is a project built without popular participation, aimed at market housing, once again excluding an income fraction of society in social vulnerability: the population being removed (Labcidades, 2020a). An example of this occurred in November 2020, the week before the municipal elections in São Paulo, when the region known as "Cracolândia", in the city center, was demolished. The area is located in the neighborhood of Campos Elíseos, which has been vacated by the City Hall's COHAB, even during the pandemic, to give way to the aforementioned housing policy, derived from the project São Paulo State Government house.

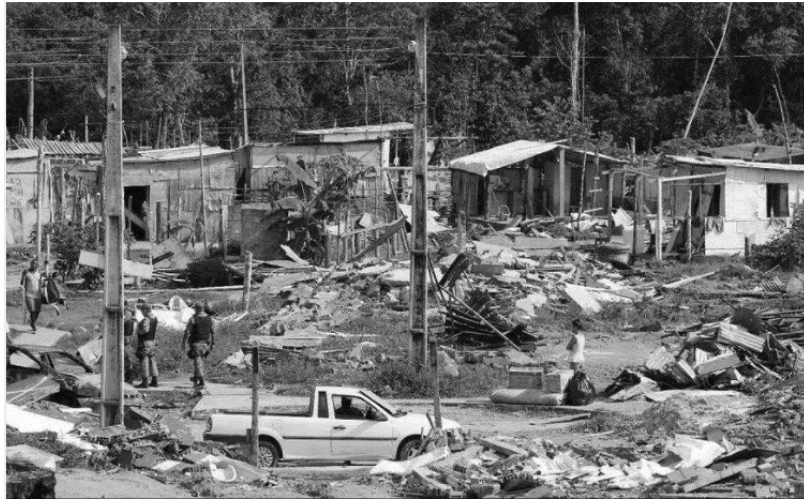
Another problem in this scenario is administrative removals, that is, those that happen by the direct execution of the public power, in a disconnected manner from due process, and that has occurred even amid the pandemic (Oliveira, 2020). *Labcidade - Laboratório Espaço Público e Direito à Cidade FAU/USP* says that administrative removal dramatically exposes the inability of local executive governments – on whom falls a significant part of the responsibility for housing policy – when facing the housing crisis. Arbitrary decisions and disproportionate use of force, which violate the right to dignity of poor and homeless families, reveals yet another cruel side of state action, which should primarily protect the population affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Also, according to the researchers of the Rede do *Observatório das Remoções do LabCidade*, during the last quarter of 2020, twenty cases were mapped: 12 threats of removal and 9 conducted removals, only in the metropolitan region of São Paulo. Among the cases of removal, at least 6 happened administratively and, therefore, without a court order to do so. They are families who lose their properties, in some cases, even their businesses, coerced and threatened by the public power through the use of police force, and end up leaving the place and being forced to search for regions far from the one where they lived and worked. Even in an end-of-year period, with pandemic cases growing in São Paulo (and in all regions of Brazil), throwing people on the street is the result of processes that, in the face of the articulations progress around rights in civil society and its resonances in the Judiciary, the City Halls simply resolve, by administrative means, to do (in)justice with their own hands (Rolnik, 2020).

Outside the context of São Paulo, the state of Amazonas, one of the most affected by Covid-19, also presented the most cases of eviction in Brazil: more than three thousand families were displaced, representing 47% of all removals from the country, according to a survey of *Despejo Zero*. An emblematic example of this action positioning in the state, was the occupation of Monte Horebe, in Manaus, where around 2.400 thousand families lived in a community with just over 2 thousand irregular properties (Figure 4). The community began to be occupied in 2014 by families with social and economic vulnerability, reaching an area of at least 450,000 m<sup>2</sup> in 2020, currently considered one of the largest irregular occupations in the capital.

In March 2020, the State of Amazonas begins the reintegration of possession in Monte Herebe, the result of a judicial imbroglio that dates from 2014, when the occupation began, a 12-day operation of eviction and demolition in full pandemic was started, in this period, more than 2,000 families were removed from their shacks. According to data from the state Department of Social Assistance (SEAS), from seven thousand families formerly residing in Monte Herebe, only two thousand were granted rent aid. To justify the removal, the Amazonas state government claims it will build a large public safety development on site. However, so far, nothing has been achieved on the grounds, which has not yet fulfilled any social function.





**Figure 4.** Picture: Euzivaldo Queiroz. Demolition and eviction in the Monte Horebe community, March 2020. Source: Acrítica site (2020).

In the context of Paraná state, in December, about 311 families of the occupation Nova Guaporé, installed in the complex of occupations in the region of Sabará, Industrial City of Curitiba (CIC), also suffered forced eviction during the Christmas period, in this case by court order (Figure 5). The location, which is on the boundaries between the cities of Curitiba and Araucária, where at least six occupations have emerged since 2015, is a region in great need of housing, according to data from João Pinheiros Foundation (2019). The aforementioned residents were removed from the Industrial City under strong police escort, which had the support of cars of the Paraná Sanitation Company (Sanepar). Machines entered the occupation and destroyed several shacks that served as a shelter for the residents, without any accompanying social or legal assistance.



**Figure 5.** Picture: Rafael Bertelli. Occupation removal action New Guaporé, December 2020. Source: Acrítica site (2020).

The coordinator of the occupation said in a report to the site Metropolis, that the families had no place to go at the time when the removal took place. The official of Justice, present on the site, gave one hour for families to collect their belongings, without prior notification of the eviction. The action left hundreds of people, including many children, without a place to live and isolate themselves from the current pandemic.

It is important to point out that these occupations should be understood as a way that social and economically vulnerable people find to live facing all the imposed structural difficulties. They also represent an alternative to the absence of effective public policies, due to the context of the State's failure to ensure decent access to housing and to the city by this population, that is, in the impossibility of those people accessing the services that the State cannot provide and whose demand the market has no interest in addressing. It is, above all, the search for compliance with the right to live as a fundamental one, guaranteed by the Brazilian Federal Constitution (1988) and by the *Estatuto da Cidade* (2001). Moreover, in the face of a pandemic, that need is even more urgent. The violations of the right to housing, linked to the insecurity of

possession and the processes of removal of the popular classes, represent a threat not only in the land usage field but also to survival and living a worthy life in the city (Canettieri, 2020).

The events mentioned here are just a few of the thousands of cases of removals and evictions that have occurred - and still do - during the new coronavirus health crisis. In just over a year since the outbreak of the pandemic. This situation highlights the ineffectiveness of the right to housing as a fundamental condition for life, an omission legitimized by a necropolitics marked on the current Brazilian federal government, and also reflects the recent democratic inflection in the country, which strongly threatens the scope of human and social rights. Therefore, the latent and urgent question that is necessary to be addressed, in this pandemic context, is how to formulate effective policies - thinking of a post-pandemic scenario - of access to housing, understanding housing not only as a roof and its four walls, merely for protection against bad weather, but as a fundamental right to life, and to stay alive.

## Conclusion

It cannot be denied that there has been a quantitative evolution in the access to decent housing by the Brazilian population, given that the country has a social housing provision program. *Minha Casa Minha Vida* Program (2009-2020), the last substantial program in the country, expanded, for the first time, the access to real estate credit for the lower-income population, building more than 4 million housing units in this period. Today, *Minha Casa Minha Vida* was replaced by the current *Casa Verde e Amarela* program, a different name for the same logic and production structure, through private financing and rental of housing in peripheral areas, with little access to infrastructure and equipment (Santos Junior, Leite, & Muller, 2020). This type of public policy has not been sufficient in attending to the vast demand for housing in Brazil and much less to lower-income strands of the population, as shown in the examples reported here, in which thousands of families found themselves forced to leave their homes and "shacks" amid a pandemic, not to mention the number of people living on the streets. The main challenge now is perhaps *how* to protect oneself from a virus, where contagion potentially demands isolation and physical distance, considering the lack of access to housing for most Brazilians. Furthermore, it is needed to take into account that the basic conditions of hygiene in the streets and shelters of the peripheries and irregular occupations are precarious. In addition, access to even more basic items for survival, such as food and clean water for basic hygiene, is not a guarantee that can be relied on in necropolitics. At this moment, therefore, this same population is questioning which lives really matter. The scenario presented above is of great urgency caused by the combination of precarious housing, the absence of effective public policies, the impact of the virus on vulnerable social layers, and, finally, the prevalence of virus mortality among the most precarious peripheral residents. In this context, there is a latent need to supply housing demands in cities through alternatives other than current policies which address the housing needs according to the possibility of payment of each family; however, these policies must rely on a transdisciplinary character and a strong relationship with the forms of appropriation of urban space. Cardoso (2019) stresses that the main objective is to construct a housing policy focused on the social dimension, to meet the population's housing needs, with priority for the sectors of lower-income and social vulnerability, moving towards the de-commercialization of housing. Finally, Raquel Rolnik, in a recent speech on the *LabCidades* channel on YouTube, says, "the lesson we draw from the COVID-19 pandemic is that it is not possible to treat urban policies only with a slogan of "stay at home" without taking into account the different situations and contexts of the people who inhabit the Brazilian urban space". In the same way, it is not possible to follow a single path in the production of public housing policies in the country, that is, through the rental production and private propriety of social housing because of the removals and evictions that occurred during the pandemic are consequences of these current adopted neoliberal policies and the housing commodification. The "owned home" slogan never guaranteed the security of ownership; therefore, rethinking this culture of housing production is necessary and urgent.

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