

## Along the twilights of care Continuities of technomoral politics in São Paulo's pro-migrant activism

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*Abstract:* This article explores central dimensions of different forms of asymmetric care that fall between the competences of overlapping civil society organizations. Based on anthropological fieldwork conducted in São Paulo, Brazil, the article follows migrants arriving and integrating across different nodes of reception, including church-based NGOs, humanitarian organizations, and activist housing projects. Overlaps between these different forms of reception, care, and control do not arise only when migrants refer to different organizational structures. Instead, numerous formal and organizational similarities complicate a clear separation of these domains of asymmetric care. By concentrating on incidents when the encounters between migrant activists and Brazilian activists are disturbed, this article traces the mutual irritation of differently positioned actors, who calibrate their moral claims and produce new understandings of “worthiness.”

*Keywords:* activism, Brazil, care, Haiti, humanitarianism, integration, solidarity, squatting

In mid-March 2016, I had an appointment with Yoceline,<sup>1</sup> a Haitian migrant who had arrived in São Paulo about a year earlier and was now living with about two hundred other inhabitants in one of the city's squats. Immediately after passing the sleepy doorman and preparing to climb the dimly lit concrete stairs, I almost fell over Yoceline, who was sitting on a landing with Teresa, one of the Brazilian activists. I heard Teresa quietly telling Yoceline that she was disappointed, that she had always supported her, and that she was there for her: “You know you can always come to me, I'll stand up for you. My sister!” With a smile, Teresa put her hand on Yoceline's shoulder and continued: “We are a family here.

I assume you too stand by my side when it really matters.” I felt uncomfortable witnessing the awkward situation and tried to indicate to Yoceline that I'd be waiting for her upstairs as I passed by. But she jumped to her feet and hastily nodded goodbye to Teresa, clearly embarrassed. Together we walked upstairs to her *compartimento* (a subdivided room), where she lived with her roommate, Charles. Yoceline addressed him as soon as we entered, saying that she found everything very tiring, that she was fed up, that she would never make it (“*je ne vais jamais y arriver*”), and more, some of which I did not understand.

The uncomfortable scene I had witnessed gave me the impression that Yoceline struggled



with living in the squat, as she seemingly felt an enormous social pressure. I later learned that Teresa's disappointment concerned an International Women's Day demonstration that Yoceline had refused to attend. The following pages elaborate on the affective collision between the two women, which relates to the interface between humanitarian care and solidarity practices, which often coalesce in pro-migrant activism. Contrary to common suggestions from the social sciences literature, these empirical facts demonstrate the complications associated with maintaining a clear separation between humanitarianism and political activism. To understand Teresa's sense of affection, her clearly articulated disappointment, and the pressure she exerts as well as Yoceline's hesitant acceptance of the interaction, the following feelings of indignation, and her later rejection of the situation, it is pertinent to expand the analysis and include those dimensions of political engagement that influence different actors' attitudes, affects, and actions at a given time.

This article traces these encounters along the twilights of asymmetric care, which are those only diffusely illuminated spheres of support, in which differently situated actors struggle to determine which political claims and requests to support are considered correct and legitimate. Unlike scholarship that links care to a specific professional field such as "care work," the notion here serves as a conceptual and heuristic lens for understanding classificatory boundary-drawing practices that are underpinned by a particular moral understanding of activities and attitudes, expressing how people attach meaning to different types of institutionalized support (Cook and Trundle 2020; Drotbohm 2022a; Lowenkron 2016; Souza Lima 2002; Ticktin 2006).

This will be realized by considering the structural similarities between different types of support-providing organizations. Following Tania Li (2019: 30) and others, I understand the state's political realm as an "arena of inquiry," that is, an unstable hegemonic project of power (Gramsci 1971) that is discursively constructed, affirmed, contested, or negated—not

only at the centers of governance and control but also within mobilization and dispute practices. This comprehension employs a definition of "the political" as the "practice of world-making that proceeds through constellations of critique, disagreement, difference and conflict" (Li 2019: 31). By means of tracing the specific and multifaceted dimensions of dependencies and social inequalities, hierarchies, and power asymmetries that shape social relations emerging in these politicized encounters, the following pages expand on how the self-positioning of humanitarians and activists can be understood as such a world-making practice when they rely on what Erica Bornstein and Aradhana Sharma (2016: 87) call "technomoral, judicialized strategies" to calibrate moral claims and influence both external actors and internal members.

Anthropologists have already explored the double-edged risks of forms of care that are intrinsic to state violence, emergent inequalities, moral discourses, and the related processes of exclusion and dispossession (Huschke 2014; Lowenkron 2016; Murphy 2015; Ticktin 2006, 2011; Vrabiescu and Kalir 2017). These approaches focus on constellations that are understood as caring while care is not given, not innocent, and questionably motivated. In a theme section on "Unsettling care," Rayna Rapp writes, "care relations dwell on an unstable horizon, forever just beyond the reach of those who design them, need them, pay for or refuse to pay for them, depend on, and imagine them" (2020: 258). In tracing Yoceline and Teresa's entangled needs, concerns, and mutual expectations emerging between political sentiments (Bens and Zenker 2019) on the one hand and intimate affects on the other, this article focuses on the "socially unmoored" (Cook and Trundle 2020: 179), that is, the unpredictable and contested dimensions of care provision within Brazil's morally ambitious pro-migrant activism.

Much anthropological and sociological research has already been conducted on both the humanitarian and the squatter scenes of Brazil. While, on the one hand, the design of humanitarian policies in Brazil can be evaluated—

in global comparison—as rather progressive (Fischel de Andrade 2015; Jubilut 2006; Pereira 2021), financial and material resources often remain precarious or, especially when linked to state-based support, unreliable. As this article will show, church-based, municipal, or humanitarian organizations collaborate for compensating these limits of state provision. At this point the squatter scene comes in, where new immigrants can also receive support and accommodation. This intersection is particularly suitable for legal or urban and legal anthropology focusing on the close linkages between social movements, activist knowledge, political parties, and (at least temporarily) progressive city governments (Caldeira 2016; Earle 2017; Kopper and Richmond 2021; Rolnik 2015). Many squats are closely associated with social movements, which act as important supporters not only at the beginning, when spaces, infrastructures, or buildings are identified and “conquered,” but also over the course of legal proceedings (Kopper 2021; Wittger 2017; Zhang 2021).

Here, James Holston’s (2007) work on “insurgent citizenship” in São Paulo was particularly far-reaching. He described the city’s social movements as highly inclusive, making social rights, institutions, and practices designed for formal membership accessible to individuals previously not considered to belong to the nation. However, he also observed a particular mode of differentiation in the early 2000s, when a new lower-middle class was created—especially on the fringes of society in the favelas and slums—via state reforms under the Lula da Silva and later Dilma Rousseff governments. This process, which Holston called “differentiated citizenship,” amplified the perception of social inequalities and introduced new struggles over distribution between groups that were beginning to distinguish themselves from one another. Although my own research builds on this work, I focus less on the relationship between civil society and the state. Instead, I am interested in how migrants, who have always been part of this activist milieu, are increasingly considered politically relevant members whose

particular(ized) positions can highlight or support legitimate claims for political attention (Drotbohm 2016, 2021). As an example, I focus here on the specific position of Haitian migrants, who in Brazilian activist contexts are often seen in stereotypical ways as representatives of a particularly sorrowful history of oppression and exploitation, but also as proud members of the first free Black nation in the Western Hemisphere.

My argument proceeds as follows: I begin with a brief exploration of the methodological and epistemological challenges of conducting ethnographic research along migrant trajectories in São Paulo, which brought me, over time, into a range of different organizations such as humanitarian NGOs, churches, city-based counseling services, and the squatting sphere. These contexts varied in terms of their social, cultural, and national composition. Although many squatters had grown up in the city, at least as many had immigrated from other parts of the country, and numerous others had come from other Latin American countries as well as Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Despite this diversity, I elaborate here on the two national frames that coalesce in the encounter between Teresa and Yoceline, which produces an intersubjective perspective that incorporates representations of aid, deservingness, and worthiness. This corresponds to a particular international and humanitarian entanglement, one that connects Brazil’s histories with Haiti’s. Subsequently, I return to my theoretical and conceptual considerations to elaborate on structural differences and similarities between humanitarian aid and practices of solidarity, making clear that humanitarian and activist perspectives cannot be clearly delineated, particularly not once we follow a migratory perspective across the long-term process of arrival, contact, and aspired integration. Next, I explore the formal, technomoral procedures employed within the squat and problematize their resemblances with techniques employed by humanitarian organizations. Finally, I return to the empirical entry to this article, to Teresa’s disappointment and the International Women’s Day demonstration that Yoceline had refused to

attend to. This will deepen this study's empirical insights and scaffold my concluding thoughts concerning how access, control, and the moral conditionalities of asymmetric care are negotiated between differently situated residents.

## **Context and methodology**

This article's empirical component refers to ethnographic research conducted in the center of São Paulo intermittently since 2013, with time spent in four-to-eight-week units. I initially went to Brazil to study how differently structured institutions of reception and care affect the perspectives of migrants who are new to the city and, in the absence of ethnic or family networks, depend on institutionalized support. I employed qualitative empirical research techniques, mainly combining participant observation with semi-structured and narrative interviews, group discussions, and ego-centered network techniques. In terms of participant observation, I used two church-based humanitarian institutions as a starting point: one for refugees and one for migrants. After volunteering for a while and following the inner logic of these institutions, I switched sides: during subsequent field stays, I accompanied migrants during their first months of reorientation, sharing their daily routines and asking them about their experiences and interpretations of their encounters with public institutions such as dormitories, church hostels, municipal counseling facilities, and NGOs. I considered it important to avoid following the logic and mandates of such organizations, which often differentiate between, for example, nationalities, mobility categories, genders, and age groups. Early on, this epistemology found that an array of types, conditionalities, and understandings of asymmetric care arise along an extended spatial and institutional continuum. For several of my interviewees, this began in their country of origin and continued across a series of border management institutions, including not only embassies and airports but also shelters, hostels, and vari-

ous of the social, legal, and psychological counseling facilities established for newcomers to the city. The squats that I visited during my research stays were in the city's old center and stood at the (preliminary) end of this spatial and temporal continuum.

Organization of access and living conditions differ significantly between various squats. Because I wanted to understand the procedures of several squats, I chose not to integrate as a resident. Instead, I regularly met individual migrant residents of different squats whom I had previously met in humanitarian settings. They mostly came from different parts of South and Central America but also Africa and Asia, and several were from Europe. I interviewed these individuals, concentrating on their experiences and interpretations of these communal housing projects. I also attended several meetings, which often revolved around the organization of everyday matters, as a guest. This article concentrates on migrant actors who were part of one particular squat for several months. By tracing their perception of the norms and rules that determined social interaction within this housing project's everyday life, I aim to capture the intersubjective perception and understand classifications of needs and areas of mutual responsibility.

## **Brazilian perceptions of Haitian displacement**

I had first met Yoceline and Charles a few months earlier when they were not yet living in the squat. Shortly after their arrival in São Paulo in 2014, they were queuing with about three hundred other migrants for a job interview at the well-known and long-established Catholic reception center for migrants where I was volunteering. Neither knew the other when they left Haiti following the severe earthquake that claimed around two hundred thousand lives in January 2010. Before the catastrophe, Yoceline had worked as an employee in a kindergarten in a smaller city in the country's south, where the

earthquake occurred, and Charles worked as a gardener and housekeeper in the capital, Port-au-Prince. Both had belonged to the lower-middle class and during the disaster lost not only their property but also several relatives, including Yoceline's partner. The two met about a year later in the Dominican Republic, where they had ended up alongside numerous other earthquake victims. Here, on the radio, they heard about Brazil's invitation, an offer to support earthquake victims by providing a special "humanitarian" visa to facilitate their entry (Drotbohm and Winters 2020; Moulin and Thomaz 2016; Thomaz 2018).

To understand how Haitian migrants and their particular migratory trajectories were perceived and received at that time, it is necessary to consider Brazil's new "humanist" self-positioning and quest for prestige in international affairs needs (Feldman-Bianco 2018; Toledo 2020). Lula da Silva's government (2003–2010) established this attitude via the implementation of new programs of humanitarian cooperation, which were framed as a form of South-South solidarity. Since 2004, Brazil had led the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH, coining the new concept "non-indifference" to justify its political leadership in the field of humanitarian aid (Aguilar 2012; de Faria and Paradis 2013). In the wake of the 2010 earthquake, Haiti's "particularity," that is, the imaginary of the country's historical and contemporary "otherness," understood as an emblematic representation of national victimhood in the wake of global capitalism, received renewed media attention. Television programs and fundraising campaigns not only reported on the apparently miserable living conditions in the country but also invoked the historical particularities of the first "proud," self-liberated Black nation in reference to Brazil's own Afrocentric orientations. In a country such as Brazil, which discusses its own dimensions of extreme social inequality from a postcolonial perspective that incorporates the enduring legacy of slavery and the persistence of white supremacy, the case of Haitian refugees sometimes functioned as a simplifying moral

template during this period, highlighting both the value of (violent) resistance against forms of colonial dominance and the legitimacy of political claims for support and protection—beyond the confines of a bureaucratic asylum procedure. The years following the earthquake represented a significant moment in Brazil, not only on a discursive and representational level but also for concrete immigration policies. In 2012, the National Immigration Council (Conselho Nacional de Imigração) adopted a new regulation that allowed Haitian migrants facilitated access to Brazilian territory based on a "humanitarian visa" (Audebert 2017; Feldman-Bianco 2018; Pacifico et al. 2015).

However, Carolina Moulin and Diana Thomaz (2016) and Thomaz (2018) analyze how a visa deemed "humanitarian" were not necessarily advantageous for new arrivals from Haiti. Against the background of proliferating temporary protection statuses (Squire 2011; Thomaz 2018), their texts make it clear that the label "humanitarian immigrant" both depoliticizes the Haitians' claim to protection and normalizes Brazil's military position in Haiti (Moulin and Thomaz 2016: 597). At the same time, in their discussions of the meaning of this special legal status, Yoceline and Charles emphasized that this implied, above all, the pluralization of contact with a large range of Brazilian organizations. Their legal status, both highlighted and represented by this humanitarian visa, generated a sense of particularity in the mode of organized reception, with Haitian migrants receiving support from municipal, church, and migrant-oriented organizations. Charles explained:

We knew that our status was somehow different from, say, *solicitantes* [asylum seekers]. For some [Haitians], this meant that their status was simply clear and that they had the regular papers. We even had *permanencia* [permanent residence status] early on. For us, this also meant that we regularly visited certain organizations when we had certain problems. We found several [organizations]. That is how we

came across Teresa and the others from [the squat].

Previous research on humanitarian and other forms of aid has already documented the social and emotional meaning of personal contact with representatives of institutions and focused primarily on the decision-making processes of front-desk bureaucrats, who often must navigate confusing and opaque organizational structures (Eule 2014). In a recent publication, Maria Volckmar-Eeg and Anders Vassenden (2022) show that bureaucrats identify and respond particularly energetically with individual cases with a high chance of success. Against this background, it is understandable that, from a migratory point of view, it is not (or not only) organizations but individuals with a concrete discretionary scope for decision-making within organizations, as well as personal commitment and emotional involvement, who are perceived as responsible for success or failure during this orientation phase.

Teresa, the Brazilian woman introduced with Yoceline at the beginning of this article, met Yoceline as an employee of a Catholic refugee counseling organization that was cooperating with the shelter where Yoceline stayed during her first months in Brazil. Teresa had been a permanent full-time employee at this organization for many years, advising asylum seekers concerning accommodation. In her private life, she participated in several initiatives for the integration of migrants and was an active member of the Frente de Luta Por Moradia (Housing Struggle Front). Because Haitian migrants were not categorized as “refugees” within the humanitarian apparatus, they were actually not part of Teresa’s professional “target group.” Although Yoceline and Charles also knew they were not considered “refugees” in a strict sense, this was also not their key concern. During the weeks after their arrival, they quickly learned to follow the linkages between the different organizations, which were religious, municipal, or associated with national or international NGOs. When they needed particular advice,

they usually tried to meet the working hours of particular individual employees who they felt considered these issues with special care. Teresa’s reputation as a particularly well-connected and committed employee brought them to her office. In an interview, Teresa told me that she was extremely happy when the couple appeared for a consultation. For months she had been following the disastrous situation in Haiti, and the burdensome trajectories of Haitian migrants who had immigrated to Brazil via Ecuador and Peru via the so-called green border, the Amazon lowlands (Drotbohm and Winters 2020). With her detailed knowledge of the city’s institutions and her contacts in the squatter scene, Teresa found herself able to take care of these “poorish victims” (*vitimos pobrecitos*) and “almost-refugees” (*quasi-refugiados*), as she called them, in an unorthodox way, using her numerous contacts to forge links between various professional and activist fields.

I consider it important to concentrate on the “socially unmoored” (Cook and Trundle 2020: 179)—that is, the unpredictable, unintended, and contested—dimensions of care inherent in the encounter between these different types of actors. Although the act of sharing time and (almost) living together in a squat was present, care provision in this case did not occur on the grounds of an egalitarian or solidaristic encounter between actors who consider themselves equal. Rather, Teresa clearly addressed the two in a mode of “helping” (*ajuda*). Through this particular kind of encounter, she enabled herself to act against political ills—in this case the disastrous situation occurring in Haiti—which potentially enabled her to consolidate her position as an important player within her activist networks. At the same time, Yoceline and Charles perceived Teresa as a key gatekeeper, a sponsor or supporter in a superior position who might be crucial for getting access to different dimensions of institutional support. Hence, they perceived one another on the essentialized grounds of categories that implied a clear distinction of their identities and social positions. In this case, the intersubjective encounter is

part of a Haitian-Brazilian entanglement that concretizes imaginings of victimhood alongside those of superiority and the ability to provide support. This entanglement between self and other occurs at micro- and macro-political levels, and the processuality of this constellation shows that activist and humanitarian perspectives cannot be clearly separated, especially not when we follow the perspective of recent arrivals. This invites us to explore central dimensions of those forms of care that, due to specific legal, political, and spatial conditions, fall between the competences of differently specialized and overlapping civil society organizations. The following section examines the social implications of this blurring of institutional boundaries.

### Care shifting between humanitarian and solidarist settings

From a scholarly perspective, humanitarian care and solidarity encounters do not have much in common. Central features of humanitarian aid are its top-down approach, its formal mandate, and its implementation via bureaucratic procedures. In terms of temporal structuring, humanitarian aid is based on the imaginaries of emergency, aiming to alleviate acute and current suffering; meanwhile, spatially, humanitarian aid takes place in clearly demarcated areas of organized otherness, such as in shelters and camps on the outskirts of cities and on national external borders (Agier 2011; Brun 2015; Fassin 2012; Redfield 2013; Ticktin 2011). This all differs from solidarity and activist engagement. Activists strive for social equality and the overcoming of political boundaries, and they operate without a political mandate and using largely informal interaction and organization modes. In terms of time, they only partially focus on solving immediate problems, instead frequently striving for a long-term, often utopian future. They are characterized spatially by their association with public and visible places, including squats, parks, and other inner-city places of protest (Ataç 2016; Bhimji 2020; Mudu and Chat-

topadhyay 2017; Rakopoulos 2016). According to Donatella Della Porta and Elias Steinhilper (2020), the two types of support differ fundamentally in terms of their political framing and types of organization and action as well as the nature of their relationship with the state and their interactions with migrants.

However, as Hansjörg Dilger and I show in the introduction to this theme section, there are numerous political contexts and forms of interaction within which this sharp conceptual and phenomenological separation cannot be maintained. Contexts of pro-migrant activism or grassroots humanitarianism, that is, initiatives in which activists advocate for the interests of migrants or in which “ordinary citizens” adopt a humanitarian assistance role, provide relevant examples of these blurred boundaries (Ataç and Steinhilper 2020; Braun 2017; Cappiali 2016, 2018; Dadusc et al. 2019; Drotbohm 2021, 2022b; Dyk et al. 2021; Facundo 2020; Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017; Rozakou 2016; Schwiertz and Steinhilper 2020). The contribution by Čarna Brkovič (this theme section) also provides additional examples on the blurring of these conceptual distinctions. According to Della Porta and Steinhilper (2020), particular trends in contemporary political crisis—captured by the financial breakdown in 2008, the broad neoliberal transformations of society, and the crisis of European migration politics during the so-called long summer of migration in 2015—have further contributed to a blurring of the dividing lines between humanitarian aid and politics of solidarity, especially within Europe.

Evidently, numerous tensions and challenges accompany this blurring of institutional boundaries. The first concerns the political aims developed in vernacular or informalized forms of humanitarian assistance. In Brazil, especially actors working in the humanitarian, quasi-religious sector often lacked clarity on whether their acts should be understood as political (Facundo 2020). This resonates with findings in other regional contexts. While humanitarian aid is defined by its neutral, apolitical stand-

point and activism is specifically defined as a political stance, many of the pro-migrant initiatives investigated by previous researchers are politically ambiguous. For instance, according to Andrea Muehlebach (2012), the volunteers she accompanied in Italy perceived their work to compensate for an absent or weak state. This is also demonstrated by Óscar García Agustín and Martin Jørgensen (2019), whose work on “civic solidarity” in Spain and Denmark sees actors working closely with municipalities, day centers, and schools. Other researchers have highlighted the identity work of citizens who understand their activities as supplementing the state on alternative levels of political guidance by offering a particularly “humane” or “empathetic” mode of reception and integration (Bhimji 2020; Cappiali 2018; Lahusen et al. 2019). This “almost-like-the state” perspective sometimes goes hand in hand with a mediating identity of helpers who consider it their duty to educate migrants about the values of their society (Stock 2019: 133). The work of Larissa Fleischmann and Elias Steinhilper (2017) and Silke van Dyk et al. (2021) observes activists who self-identify as humanitarian and, thus, by moving away from the “myth of apolitical solidarity” in the course of their commitment, ultimately developing a clearer political stance.

A second challenge that already became obvious in my initial vignette concerned the complex social relations that developed in these often only loosely institutionalized settings in which activist Brazilians and migrants coalesce (Drotbohm 2021; Facundo 2020). When access to support is not organized via the (apparent) neutrality of bureaucratic procedures, new forms of mutual expectations and dependencies can arise. In her work on pro-migrant activism in Berlin, Fazila Bhimji demonstrates the awareness of these tensions of both German and migrant activists, who would endeavor to socialize on equal grounds, for example, by identifying common interests such sport or music (2020: 90–94). Meanwhile, several scholars have recognized the constant negotiation of questions on how reliable and lasting relationships are,

who is willing or able to provide which kind of resources, and whether activists can, for instance, facilitate access to government services or the labor market (Stock 2019). In her work on volunteer and charitable associations in Berlin, Katherine Braun (2017) conceives of these asymmetric encounters as part of historically sedimented understandings of gender, class, and racial differences and argues that—at least in this context—it is the female bourgeois subject that is reconstituted by these asymmetric acts of helping (see also Agustín 2007).

### **The production of “worthiness” via technomoral politics**

Yoceline told me, “I was so glad that Teresa helped me during the difficult time when we had to leave the shelter. Without her, we would not have got access; she really stood up for us.” When I asked her to clarify, she said:

It is the case with many squats that you need a sponsor [*fiador*], someone who lives there and has a good connection with the squat’s leaders. They will hold a general assembly and, if you are lucky, you will be invited to present yourself there. I remember well; it was a special day for us: One Sunday, we were invited to tell our story, why we wanted to live in this house, and so on. What happened to us, why we don’t have much money and want to live there. Yes, basically it’s a bit like in [the humanitarian shelter she lived in previously].

The previous section illuminated structural overlaps between two different forms of migration-related support. However, political housing projects differ significantly from humanitarian shelters, especially in terms of the conditions of access and the organization of daily life. Hence, it is astonishing that Yoceline, when asked about her initial contact with the squatters, spontaneously compares the squat with the shelter

that had been housing her for several months. What is particularly revealing about Yoceline's testimony is that practical aspects of everyday life in the squat recalled how the humanitarian organization had managed and assessed her individual characteristics.

The formal and practical similarities between the two organizational cultures extend even further. For instance, many squats work with identification forms and keep records with the aim of fostering transparency and collectively verifying the validity of individual claims. Furthermore, the request to present one's biography and flight story is repeated in both settings, with both cases establishing collectives to assess whether the degree of vulnerability is "sufficient" to fulfill the necessary criteria for access (Lawlor and Paquet 2022; Shiff 2020).

Finally, before moving in, all residents are asked to accept and sign a declaration of shared values, sometimes denominated in exactly that way (*carta de principios*). In the case of another large squat included in my research, residents had to carry a membership card to prove their residence status when passing the doorman. I have also observed other examples of ID-like documents. For instance, during joint activist activities such as demonstrations and *invasões* (the takeover of an empty house), a small card is sometimes stamped to document and prove an individual's active involvement.

The importance of what Bornstein and Sharma (2016) call "technomoral politics" has also been problematized by other research concerning the interactions and hierarchies between residents of different levels of power in São Paulo's squats. In an insightful article on a neighborhood in São Paulo's East Zone, Moisés Kopper and Matthew Richmond illuminate the social consequences of the extensive bottom-up bureaucratic administration of membership, as exemplified by the rating scores derived from the accumulation of points for active participation at meetings, demonstrations, and other activities: "Through sorting systems carefully calibrated over decades, movements like MT-STL1 seek to maintain coherence, power, and

influence in relation to both external actors and internal members. . . . Attention to these competing conceptions of worthiness and their underlying power dynamics helps reveal more granular differences among actors within social movements over how morality and technicality are mobilized to pursue projects based on the distribution of scarce goods like social housing" (2021: 294).

In the social encounters that I witnessed accompanying individuals, I observed that political feelings such as hope and joy were often accompanied by irritation, ambivalence, and uncertainty, produced by these formalized procedures, especially among residents not belonging to the power centers of a squat's organization. Before demonstrations and *invasões* in particular, there was constant discussion about whose absences would be tolerated and what excuses for absences would be acceptable. Comparing different types of community activities, residents seemed to recognize and interpret the moral foundations of their membership in the squat and wondered about potential consequences of rule breaking (in contrast to me, who understood these techniques mainly as part of the squat's mobilizing endeavors). Interestingly, several migrant residents compared these technical procedures of care and control with those they had previously undergone in dealing with the humanitarian institutions, especially regarding the control of entry into the building and the regulation of everyday routines. However, when I once criticized the overly rigid, opaque, and hierarchical handling, Charles changed my perspective: "I don't want to live with vagabonds," he said, "this occupation is very much in order. Mainly families live here, [and] I feel totally safe." This led me to understand that he did not necessarily view these procedures as (only) restrictive. Referring to the high level of insecurity they had faced before reaching Brazil, Charles valued the close entanglement of care and control because it provided him with a sense of order and security and a clear understanding of the requirements of political integration.

These dimensions of what Kopper and Richmond call “worthiness” (2021: 281) rely on a construction and reproduction of moral hierarchies and distinctions that function not only within activist settings but also at the interfaces with the wider society. The bridging functions of housing projects, situated between civil society and the state, also become evident in how migrant residents perceive Brazilian activists as a kind of “sponsor,” something made explicit by Yoceline’s use of the term *fiador*. Yoceline referred to and gratefully relied on activists such as Teresa to provide organizational support, knowledge, and networking not only when she applied to join the squat but also as she navigated the city’s bureaucracies and communicated with border authorities, her son’s teachers, and medical staff at a local clinic. Comparable to an extended arm of civil society, the Brazilian activists mediate between migrants and the state’s representatives.

These insights confirm that the overlap between the activist and humanitarian fields extends beyond the instances in which individuals switch between two spheres of their social or professional engagement or in which migrants utilize different—and, at times, complementary—organizational structures. Instead, numerous formal and organizational similarities complicate a strict separation of two spheres that employ and rely on strikingly comparable techniques of access and control.

### **The gendered conditionality of care**

The fact that access to and the conditions of residence within the squat are based on a specific political commitment also becomes apparent in the perception of differentiated positions of power within the squat. These hierarchies have consequences for the social relationships that evolve between individual residents. Here, I want to return to the opening vignette, in which Teresa clearly expresses her disappointment to Yoceline. As indicated, her discontent concerned a large-scale demonstration along Avenida Pau-

lista in the city center that had taken place for International Women’s Day on 8 March. Many feminists see squats as pro-women spaces because they enable single female residents who have previously lived in favelas or on the city’s peripheries to move into the city center, closer to schools, pediatricians, and other public facilities (Drotbohm 2021: 359). At the same time, squats traditionally function as key locations for middle-class feminists working for NGOs and in academia, middle-class women in political parties and unions, and working-class and marginalized women to coalesce in their struggle against social, gendered, and racialized inequalities (Levy et al. 2017).

I already knew Teresa as someone who identified strongly with feminist perspectives. She had demonstrated her specific concern for female refugees whom she perceived as particularly exposed, especially when they were traveling with small children. In several meetings held to prepare for this demonstration, some of the Brazilian activists, including Teresa, decided to highlight the particular vulnerabilities of female refugees on their banners. To their surprise and frustration, they had to invest substantial time and energy mobilizing their migrant allies, who—for nonarticulated reasons—were apparently hesitant to participate. Hence, Teresa’s reference to their shared “sisterhood” and her appeal to understand the squat as “a family” were no coincidence. In more or less subtle ways, Teresa seemed to not only formulate her moral understanding of appropriate membership in the squat but eventually even try to clarify her understanding of the conditionality of her personal support for Yoceline.

However, Teresa’s political wording and her way of reminding Yoceline of her duties as a squat member should be considered in light of the particular historical moment at which feminist citizenship and LGBTQ+ rights came under increasing pressure in Brazil. According to Flávia Biroli and Marianna Caminotti (2020), the 2010s saw the arrival of opposition to an already (almost) achieved gender equality that had positioned rights concerning gen-

der and sexuality as central to the human rights framework. During the years of my fieldwork, advances led by feminist and LGBTQ+ movements experienced a severe backlash as far-right movements, I, and Evangelicals questioned the meaning of “gender” and its incorporation into state policies. It is only now, several years later, that we know that Jair Bolsonaro’s election in October 2018 would validate Teresa’s deeply felt anxiety and her remarkably rigid adherence to her activist values.

I am not concerned here with the question of which concrete gender roles and ideals were negotiated between Brazilian and migrant activists. The observed tension between political sentiments like anger and indignation on the one hand and interpersonal affects like irritation and shame on the other shows that, in addition to those rules formulated explicitly, squatters negotiated the grounds of their shared living according to more subtle expectations and attributions of behavior. These were articulated not by official rules and procedures but via affective dimensions that valorized previous loyalties. I consider it important to include reliability and support but also status demonstrations as well as the clearly articulated role expectations for understanding this twilight zone between humanitarian and solidarist practices: Teresa’s more or less explicitly articulated warning claimed the loyalty of her Haitian “sister,” providing Yoceline with a clear understanding of what, according to her, should be considered “normal,” appropriate, and opportune as a female resident of the squat and, thus, as a member of their social movement—but also articulating a kind of conditionality of her personal affection.

Four weeks later, I heard that Yoceline and Charles had moved to another squat. When I managed to visit them, several weeks after that, they explained that the new place was less politicized because it was not—or it was less explicitly—linked to a social movement. Looking back, Yoceline said she did miss her former roommates: several had become friends, and she had learned a lot about Brazil living there. But she also said the terms of the political proj-

ect had been too stressful for her. Neither she nor Charles wanted to continue facing what she called the *test d’aptitude* that she felt was always part of these political constellations. At this new place, the rent was also quite cheap, meetings were not constant, they did not have to go to demonstrations, and she was finally able to use her time to work more, allowing her to increase the money she would regularly send to her relatives in Haiti, where she planned to return sooner or later.

## Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that humanitarian aid and squatting have more in common than a large part of the social sciences literature suggests. The overlap between these forms of care, which are classified as structurally different, produces irritation and friction that is particularly noticeable at the level of individual relationships and social encounters. My approach adopted as its starting point not the stabilized institutions but the emerging interpretations and subjectivities of mobile populations whose cross-border and inner-city trajectories bring them into contact with different organizations and their individual representative. The network that extends between squatters, social movements, civil society organizations, and migrants can be interpreted as an institutional clearance, an undefined sphere between informality and bureaucracy, between inclusive activism and difference-affirming solidarity, between claims to equality and asymmetrical power relations. The positions and roles of the migrant actors remain only vaguely determined in this loosely illuminated space.

At the same time, migrant residents in the squats are confronted with more or less diffusely articulated norms and rules that repeatedly determine, classify, or question their positions, their worthiness, and the conditions of their participation. Some of the rules for accessing formal services have already been extensively calculated in the context of anthropologies of bureaucracy. The social consequences of this

administrative regulation can be transferred to the only slightly articulated conditionality of social relations explored by this article. Through this lens we come to understand that not only expected political feelings such as indignation, hope, and solidarity but also more subtle and intimate reactions to irritations and ruptures, such as shame, embarrassment, and guilt, are part of these social encounters. That is, the “bureaucratic lens” enables a closer look at the conditionalities of care, the telos of communication regarding the value of individual belongings, and, finally, the affective interpretation of asymmetric encounters in pro-migrant activism. Interestingly, while activists, social movement members, NGO employees, and even those being part of more informal structures of aid tend to criticize state institutions and other forms of governmentality, they often rely on or refer to these, especially in their articulations of “deservingness.” Yoceline’s interpretation of her situation, that is, when she hesitated to respond openly to Teresa’s claim, when she later openly complained about the situation, and when she and Charles moved out, reflects a skeptical attitude that can be brought together with Tania Li’s (2019) notion of “interruption,” understood as a key moment of stubbornness—or *Eigen-Sinn* (referring Lüdke 1995) that entails subaltern critique and separation.

Understandings of “culture” (here: Haitian-Brazilian entanglements) and “gender” (here: the appeal to participate in feminist activities), which appear in this constellation as key categories of in- and exclusion, do not need to be as pronounced in comparable settings. In fact, although this collision concentrated on these as an assumed shared grounds of solidarity and care, ultimately, this potentiality could also have found other occasions or themes. In other squats, for example, the extent of political commitment, the willingness to stand up for other migrants and refugees, and management of everyday conflict situations were key issues used to negotiate emerging hierarchies of power.

In the end, as I have argued elsewhere (Drotbohm 2021), squats are blurred, permeable liv-

ing arrangements in which permanence is not a key value. Hence, I do not think that Yoceline’s and Charles’s departure and reorientation in the city should be interpreted as a failure of this particular housing project. Against this background, this contribution has focused on the affective and emotional dimensions of asymmetrical encounters that are assumed to be supportive, solidary, or even friendly, recognizing that although the actors share key political values, they must painfully acknowledge the difference and perhaps the incommensurability of their positions by adapting and challenging contrasting understandings of mutuality and care.

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## Note

1. I work with self-chosen pseudonyms throughout this text.

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