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Material politics: utility documents, claims-making and construction of the 'deserving citizen' in Rio de Janeiro

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Material politics: utility documents, claims-making and construction of the ‘deserving citizen’ in Rio de Janeiro

Francesca Pilo’

Abstract

Through an ethnographic study of a document in urban Brazil - the electricity bill - this article argues for developing a relational and materialist approach to citizenship. It analyzes the uses and meaning of this document for favela residents, the state and the private electricity provider, within projects to regularize illegal connections and the so-called ‘pacification’ program, a state-security policy to re-establish state territorial control. It proposes to investigate the tensions between the market-oriented process of electricity regularization and citizenship by examining the implications of this contractual change on the way state and non-state actors and residents frame membership to urban political society. Analysis of this document reveals how citizenship framings take specific shape in line with both state reforms and urban processes of differentiation. It shows that the bill materializes both normative ideas of ‘deserving citizenship’ as a territorial, moral and material process, and the potential for political contestation. The article thus expands analysis of documents as material mediators of social and political relations, and proposes an understanding of citizenship as a negotiated process involving people, state and non-state actors and objects.

Keywords: documents, citizenship, materiality, favelas, politics, electricity.

Since 2009, residents of the favelas of Santa Marta and Cantagalo, both located in the south zone of Rio de Janeiro, have once more been paying for electricity. After years of irregular and illegal access to the electricity service, large-scale electricity provision reform has been implemented in these and many other favelas in the city. The private electricity provider, Light, started to replace grids and transformers, install new meters, and register customers in order to set up an efficient billing system, end illegal connections, and supposedly improve infrastructure provision. Rather than providing official electricity connections for the first time, Light's measures primarily seek to recover customers. In fact, favelas' residents have had official access to infrastructure since the 1980s when the public utilities implemented water and electrification programs¹. The official connection of the favelas at that time directly affected the state-citizen relationship as it reshaped the state's obligations to these citizens, providing them with the right to this basic infrastructure. The private provider's more recent interventions seem to have a different purpose: developing the grid through commercial approaches in order to create bill-paying customers.

However, the private provider and public authorities have politicized electricity regularization by equating 'regular customers' with citizens' rights and responsibilities. In 2008 and for a few years after, this discourse was part of the Pacifying Police Units (UPP) program, a permanent police occupation of a selected number of favelas linked to the organization of major international events. According to the State of Rio de Janeiro's discourse, the police presence would reduce gangs' territorial control of favelas and help improve inhabitants' living conditions through measures including the regularization and improvement of urban services². Within this security project, electricity regularization was supported by a public-private discourse that linked respecting the integrity of the infrastructure (do not illegally tap into the grid) and the responsibility of paying bills as expressing attributes of citizenship. Although the regularization of commercial services has been analyzed as a mere market process that attempts to weaken favela inhabitants' citizenship and deepen socio-economic inequalities (Ost and Fleury 2013), I argue that a purely socio-economic

¹ As in urban areas considered irregular by political authorities in other geographical contexts, in Rio, the characterization of the favelas as illegal settlements has historically legitimized the lack of official urban service provision. Despite the fact that there were tolerated forms of electricity provision in the favelas, it was only the democratization process of the 1980s that ultimately provided a favorable political environment in which to promote favela infrastructure upgrading measures. During that period, the former public electricity provider officially installed electricity infrastructure in favelas under the so-called 'social interest electrification program' (Valla 1986).

² Almost ten years after the introduction of the first UPP, the pacification project reached its limits. The State of Rio de Janeiro, the main founder of this security policy, declared a state of financial emergency just a few weeks before the Olympics in 2016, leading to uncertainty over whether this policy would continue. Moreover, the continuous presence of gangs in the favelas where a UPP has been installed, the low levels of improvement in the living conditions of these favelas' populations, and the political mobilization against police action, and more specifically against the UPPs, have led to further societal questions being raised about this militarization strategy.

perspective limits our understanding of the political processes involved in making consumer-customers.

In contrast, in this article I propose to investigate the tensions between electricity regularization and citizenship by examining the implications of this contractual change on the way the state, the private electricity provider and residents frame membership to political society. I will particularly focus on the uses and discourses around the electricity bill, a document that mediates the relationship between the residents, the private company and the state. This focus firstly draws on the role of this document in establishing this commercial relationship, but also its importance in Brazilian society. In fact, in Brazil, as in other countries such as India, France and Belgium for example, utility bills can be used as proof of residence, which can make this document particularly valuable in contexts of irregular land tenure. In this paper I will ask how this document reframes social obligations and political relations, and how residents' use and discourses around the bill conform and contest such framing.

Following recent debates on citizenship and on how to define this membership, I approach citizenship as “a relational process of making membership claims on polities, people, and institutions, claims recognized or rejected within particular normative understandings of citizenship” (Bloemraad 2017: 6). I adopt a socio-material perspective that emphasizes how the social and the material are co-constitutive dimensions of everyday life and relations, contributing to the recent “materialist turn” in anthropology. Scholars have been paying greater attention to the materiality of infrastructure, demonstrating the valuable insights of considering certain components of infrastructure provision (meters, grids, roads, etc.) to understand transformations in the citizen-state relationship (Von Schnitzler 2008; Anand 2017; Pilo' 2017). Utility documents, however, remain a relatively neglected object in the study of urban politics. Anthropological works on legal documents, however, have demonstrated that studying these objects can provide valuable insights for understanding administrative control and experiences of citizenship (Hull 2012; Lowenkron and Ferreira 2014; Koster 2014). Connecting insights from these works on political materialities, this paper argues that the study of utility documents leads to an understanding of the link between market-oriented reforms in urban services, the state, and the redefinition of the normative ideas of citizenship.

By examining citizenship ‘from above and below’ (Hoekstra 2018), I will show how policies and institutional actors frame ideas and norms of membership, and how targeted residents politically experience these material transformations. I will show how commercial, fiscal and administrative processes work together through the bill to frame meanings of a ‘deserving citizen’. By exploring

favela residents' uses and discourses around the bill, the paper also provides an insight into the way this document supports claims making. Thus, I will show how the bill materialized both normative ideas of 'deserving citizenship' as a territorial, moral and material practice, and the potential for political contestation.

This paper begins with a discussion on the insights into citizenship to be gained by focusing on documents. It then outlines how the public-private political discourse around the connection between electricity regularization and 'deserving citizen' is shaped within the specific security strategy of the UPP. It shows how this normative discourse relies on the properties of this document. Finally, residents' uses, discourses, contestations and compliance with the bill are analyzed to show how this document supports claims-making that embodies aspirations to overcome the stigmatization associated with favelas, while, at the same time, becoming the material medium used to contest electricity regularization.

This article draws on a total of ten months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted during the period 2009-2011 and 2016 on the electricity policies implemented in Santa Marta and Cantagalo, during which I conducted semi-structured interviews with electricity provider agents, community leaders, and residents in the two favelas, along with direct observation of interactions between residents and Light agents in a temporary customer office in Cantagalo.

Documents and citizenship

Recently, a body of literature has emerged that uses new materialist approaches to consider claims making, belonging and performances of citizenship. In their study of the political life of immigrants, Hugues and Forman, for example, call for attention to be paid to a 'material politics of citizenship'. They argue that much greater emphasis needs to be placed upon the way citizenship claims are developed and enacted through material and non-material things (Hughes and Forman 2017). Documents appear to be evident political objects because they materialize a formal aspect of the state. Anthropological work on documents (see Lowenkron and Ferreira 2014) has shown the importance of these papers for understanding not only how modern knowledge is constructed within different bodies (institutions, culture, etc.) (Riles 2006), but also how citizens are *made* (Peirano 2006), and for revealing state governance as a material practice (Hull 2012). In particular, identity documents have been analyzed as 'certifications of citizenship', which helps theorize "the very mutable 'hierarchies' and 'degrees of citizenship'" within the state-citizen relationship (Chhotray and McConnell 2018: 112). Through identity documents, citizenship can be explored both as a legal status with a set of rights and responsibilities, and as an analytical category to

examine how “people practice the law in everyday life” beyond the legal status of membership to the national state (Koster 2014: 2017).

At the same time, little attention has been paid to studying utility-related documents and their nature is also difficult to define. They are not identity documents per se, in the same way as passports, social security cards, etc. However, they do provide proof of address, which can often be crucial in everyday life. In marginalized urban communities where the hierarchies of citizenship exacerbate unequal recognition and access to rights, the presence or absence of documents is often approached in terms of granting or denying rights and forms of recognition. In favelas, for example, the possession of documents, utility bills included, is considered a vital part of being treated as full citizens because these documents foster “moving from invisibility to visibility” and construct “personal legitimacy” (Perlman 2010: 310). Taking a more political view of how documents mediate claims in non-recognized neighborhoods in Mumbai, Anand showed how pre-paid meters have been installed to produce bill-free consumers in order to preclude the formation of citizenship rights (Anand, 2017). In India, as well as in Brazil, utility bills provide proof of people’s continued residence in their home, making it possible to potentially negotiate when faced with forced eviction (Das 2011; Anand 2017). Similarly, for people occupying empty buildings in the center of Rio de Janeiro, the payment of (water) bills is part of the struggle for the right to the city, shaping social and political relations (Pierobon 2018). Here, bills emerge as ‘empowering’ objects enabling residents to negotiate their place in the city and recognition of their citizenship.

Literature on identity documents, however, tend to consider document as objects that have a complex, contradictory, and ambivalent role: their possession can be benign and empowering, but also restrictive and enabling control (Chhotray and McConnell 2018). As documents predominantly materialize actions of the state, ‘they are its material culture’ (Navaro-Yashin 2007), their role in producing an empowering /control dynamic has been predominantly considered within the framework of the citizen-state relationship. The electricity bill I study here helps to expand understanding of the citizen-state relationship because it allows considering transformations of the state linked to the privatization of urban services. It helps to consider the introduction of private companies and market-oriented logics, not only as a national and disembodied process but also as a local and material process that affects the citizen-state relationship. In particular, the bill can be used to consider the materiality of citizenship framings under neoliberal reforms, which can help inform recent debates on citizenship in two ways.

Firstly, by expanding political understanding of documents beyond the state-subject relationship (de Koning, Jaffe, and Koster 2015). I will explain how the state and the private provider together

produce ideas of a ‘deserving citizen’ as a territorial, material and moral process. Secondly, through an ethnographic study of this document, this paper considers the materiality of claims-making as a process in which both conformity to and contestation of specific norms are combined. In the following sections, I analyze the properties, discourses, and practices that surround the bill in order to explore the way public and private actors and residents frame membership and recognition claims within the electricity regularization process. Thus, this article sheds light on the political life of an infrastructural project and the political processes enacted through papers (Pinker 2015).

Securitization and electricity regularization: the emergence of a public-private “citizenship agenda”

Since 2008, regularization of electricity access in favelas has been part of a larger urban security policy involving police occupation of selected favelas previously controlled by drug trafficking commandos. Over the last ten years in particular, a range of public and private interventions have been implemented in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro as part of a larger project to internationalize the city. Recognizing that the high levels of urban violence were incompatible with the organization of several major global events (such as the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016), the State of Rio de Janeiro installed Pacifying Police Units (UPPs) in a number of strategically-located favelas for the duration of these events. This policing of poor urban areas has become internationally recognized as a political strategy for establishing a specific urban order (Fleury 2012; Pereira Leite 2012). This strategy is implemented through public and private actors’ interventions that combine state security measures and market regularization processes (Mendes 2014).

During the first years of UPP implementation, occupation of the favelas was perceived as creating a more ‘confident’ environment in which the public and private actors could implement different projects. This so-called ‘pacification’ promised to combine social programs with urban service improvements (and regularization) and a growing state presence through effective public policies aimed at improving residents’ lives. A consensual neoliberal political discourse supported this ‘pacification’, highlighting the need for public and private actors’ cooperation in order to “bring the state back” to the favelas and ‘integrate favela residents into the city(zenship)’ (World Bank 2012: 91). The political discourse surrounding the ‘pacification process’ offers an example of a ‘citizenship agenda’ that targets specific subjects in given areas that are expected to change norms and behaviors in order to meet ideals of ‘good citizenship’ (de Koning, Jaffe, and Koster 2015).

Whereas favela residents have historically been treated and considered as second-class citizens, this discourse promises and connects forms of state recognition to renewed responsibilities for favela residents. These responsibilities include paying taxes and paying for services, respecting housing

construction standards, and playing a pro-active role in the labor market through entrepreneurship, for example. This normative framing can be considered an attempt to define a ‘deserving citizen’, whose claims for rights are contingent on following specific rules. Although the social programs initially promised through the so-called ‘social’ UPP never materialized, ‘pacification’ essentially removed barriers to the circulation of capital, in terms of the housing market, as well as barriers to the regularization of urban services (electricity, TV cable, internet, etc.) and the formalization of local economic activities. These regularization processes can be considered an expression of neoliberal urban agendas that, as in other contexts, seek to reorganize the everyday relationships that targeted groups of citizens (marginalized residents, informal street vendors, etc.) have with the state and the market through new bureaucratic and commercial logics (Morange, Pilo, and Spire 2018).

Strategies to bypass the meter and irregular connections, the so-called “*gatos*”, are common both in and outside the favelas. However, only in the favelas is the regularization of electricity access accompanied by a public-private discourse that equates ‘regular consumer’ to a ‘deserving citizen’. Light, the private electricity provider, has played a central role in constructing this public-private discourse around citizenship through the regularization of the electricity service.

As a government partner, Light expressed its support of the UPP program from the very outset. The provider believed the permanent police presence would create a safer environment in which to implement regularization projects. The term ‘citizenship’ (*cidadania*) is a key word in Light discourse on its work in favelas: “Light considers that the guarantee of citizenship is only possible with the union of efforts of the private sector, electricity providers and government agencies” (Light 2011). In the Light activity report, the company frames its actions in favelas as ‘Citizen Light: partnership of values in UPPs’ (*Light cidadã: parceria de Valor nas UPPs*): “our actions, always in partnership with government agencies, aim to promote inclusion and guarantee citizenship for these inhabitants” (Light 2011: 23). According to the company, regularization implies that “citizens are also responsible for the service. This is a process of reestablishment not only of rights, but also responsibilities. It is a maturing cycle of the relationship between society, and the public and private sectors”³ (Light 2011: 23).

The idea of citizenship promoted by the provider is based on the re-establishment of a commercial relationship based on rights and duties that encompass consumer status, the improvement of basic infrastructure, and the issuing of the electricity bill, a document that can be used as proof of

³ Translations from Portuguese by the author.

residence (Light 2010). It promises electricity supply improvements and a form of administrative recognition in return for compliance with commercial norms. The potential use of the electricity bill as proof of residence supports a conception of citizenship that is the antithesis of ‘informality’:

“The most emblematic action that Light undertook is not materialized in the grid or in the quality of electricity – but in a piece of paper. The electricity bill that the new customer of Santa Marta receives at home brings more than information on consumption and prices. It brings citizenship to a lot of families that didn’t previously have a registered address” (Light 2010: 68).

This discourse is largely reproduced in the international media’s coverage of the benefits of electricity regularization, as highlighted in the following excerpt from the Guardian:

“With energy bills in hand, favela residents could now also open bank accounts and have access to a whole new set of economic and social opportunities, such as entrepreneurship training, microfinance lines, or NGO partnerships. They were no longer treated as “informal people” but as citizens who deserved better treatment” (Lins 2014).

As the next section shows, the heterogeneous properties of the electricity bill legitimize the company’s role in developing a connection between citizenship and regularization of electricity access.

The following sections cover residents’ practices and discourse around the electricity bill in two favelas that underwent electricity regularization in 2009 and 2010: Santa Marta and Cantagalo. Both are located on the slopes of southern Rio, the wealthiest area of the city⁴. Santa Marta is well-known for being the first favela occupied by an UPP in 2008, and was followed by Cantagalo in 2010. Electricity access prior to regularization was extremely heterogeneous: in Santa Marta, only 79 residents were registered as Light customers, a figure that rose to 1,593 after regularization. In contrast, the number of customers previously registered in Cantagalo was comparatively high: 1,045 before and 1,635 after regularization (Kelman 2012). However, before regularization, both favelas recorded high commercial losses: 90% in Santa Marta and 68% in Cantagalo (Kelman 2012). Thus, regularization has led to major changes in both favelas as this process required inhabitants to start paying for the entirety of their consumption.

The properties of the bill: materializing consumer and fiscal relationships

⁴ Rio de Janeiro is divided into four main districts: the North Zone, the West Zone, Centro and The South Zone. Favelas are located in all these areas, but most are in the Centro district (35%) and the North zone (27%), while the South only houses 17% of the total favela population, with these favelas essentially located on hillsides (IPP-Rio). Despite the lower concentration of favelas in the South zone, this area contains the wealthiest residential neighborhoods and tourist attractions, a driving factor behind several dynamics in these favelas (prioritization of UPP installation in these favelas, stronger pressure in the real estate market, etc.).

Analysis of the materiality of the bill – its properties, the information it provides and its functions - reveals the nature of the relationship between citizens and other public and private actors created through this document. The bill establishes a fiscal and administrative relationship between governments and citizens while enrolling consumers in a regulated market.

The national, state and municipal governments all use the electricity service for taxation purposes. The state government taxes included in the final tariff are listed separately on the electricity bill (image 1): the ICMS state-tax (*Imposto sobre Circulação de Mercadorias e Serviços*), which is a tax on the circulation and transportation of goods and communications services; and the PIS and ECONFINs federal taxes, which are used to finance social programs and social security respectively. The municipal body also benefits from electricity billing collection as the electricity bill also includes a fee for public street lighting. Together, these taxes amount to around 30% of the final bill, making the sale of electricity an important funding stream for the tax system.

Image 1. Light electricity bill

MIN DEFESA COMDO AERONAUTICA
R PACIFICO PEREIRA 1 BL5 SV EF.Nº114
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SEPD – Autorização n.08-2005/0006384-9

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AV. MAL. FLORIANO 168 RIO DE JANEIRO RJ CEP 20080-002
CNPJ 00.444.432/0001-46
INSC. ESTADUAL 81380.023 INSC.MUNICIPAL 00794678

ENERGIA ATIVA			ENERGIA REATIVA EXCEDENTE					
Medição Atual	Leitura	Medição Anterior	Const Medidor	Consumo kWh	Nº Dias	Medição Acumulada	Const Medidor	Consumo kWh
Data		Data				Atual		
02/01/2015	4.940	02/12/2014	4.834	1	106	31		

BLOCO 5 SV – APT 101
R PACIFICO PEREIRA 1 BL5 SV EF.Nº114
21741-160 JD SULACAP / RIO DE JANEIRO – RJ
CNPJ: 00.394.429/0117-30

Data da Emissão

05/01/2015

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08/01/2015

CÓDIGO DO CLIENTE

20003992

CÓDIGO DA INSTALAÇÃO

0420577631

Classe / Subclasse
PODER PÚBLICO / PODER PÚBLICO FEDERAL

Medidor
TRIFÁSICO Nº: **7324409**

Ref. Mês / Ano
JAN/2015

Referência Bancária
030000792003

Número da Fatura
511903410021

DATA PREVISTA DA PRÓXIMA LEITURA **02/02/2015**

TENSÃO NOMINAL EM VOLTS

Disponível: **127**

Limites mínimo: **116** Limites máximo: **133**

INDICADORES DE QUALIDADE

Mês de referência: **Novembro/2014**

Conjunto: **PADRE MIGUEL**

Indicadores	Apurado Mensal	Meta Mensal	Meta Trimestral	Meta Anual
DIC	1,55	4,71	9,43	18,86
FIC	1,00	3,11	6,22	12,45
DMIC	1,55	2,60	---	---

DIC - Duração de interrupção individual
FIC - Frequência de interrupção individual
DMIC - Duração máxima de interrupção contínua
DICRI - Duração da interrupção individual em dia crítico

VALOR DO ENCARGO DE USO DO SISTEMA DE DISTRIBUIÇÃO:
RS **17,15**

O cliente tem o direito de solicitar a qualquer tempo a apuração dos indicadores DIC, FIC, DMIC e DICRI e também receber uma compensação, caso sejam violados os metas de continuidade individuais – mensal, trimestral e anual – relativos à unidade consumidora de sua responsabilidade.

DESCRIÇÃO	CFOP	UNIDADE	QUANT.	PREÇO UNIT R\$	VALOR R\$
CONSUMO	5.258	kWh	106	0,48280	51,17
ADIC. B. VERMELHA	5.258	kWh	106	0,00241	0,24
CONTRIBUIÇÃO DE ILUMIN PÚBLICA	0000				4,00
RETENÇÃO NA FONTE – IRPJ	0000				-0,62
RETENÇÃO NA FONTE – CSSL	0000				-0,51
RETENÇÃO NA FONTE – PIS/PASEP	0000				-0,33
RETENÇÃO NA FONTE – COFINS	0000				-1,54
Subtotal Faturamento (Veja abaixo)					51,17
Subtotal Outros					1,24

Após o vencimento haverá multa de 2%, juros e atualização de IGP-M, cobrados em conta posterior (Res. ANEEL n.º 414 de 09/09/10 e Lei 10.762 de 11/11/2003)

Valor da Energia	Valor da Transmissão	Valor da Distribuição	ICMS R\$	18%	Total da Nota Fiscal R\$
24,77	1,55	11,77	51,41	18%	*****51,41

Encargos Setoriais	Tributos	Total
1,88	11,20	51,17

PIS alíquota 0,750%

R\$ 0,38

COFINS alíquota 3,480%

R\$ 1,78

VENCIMENTO

23/01/2015

TOTAL A PAGAR R\$

*******52,41**

Tarifas em R\$/kWh (sem impostos)

TUSD + TE	BANDEIRA
0,37647	Bandeira Verde
0,38002	Bandeira Amarela
0,40457	Bandeira Vermelha

VENCIMENTO	TOTAL A PAGAR	CÓDIGO DO CLIENTE
23/01/2015	*****52,41	20003992

JAN/2015

Autenticação Mecânica

83660000000.1.52410053100.2.00863540400.0.30000792003.0

01 B01 585 21 0428

Source: Light

10

Market-oriented processes are also visible in the different tariff components. Since the electricity sector reforms in the 1990s, tariff formulation is based on the user-pays principle, which means that the tariff must ensure the financial viability of the electricity utilities (by covering the costs of electricity production, transmission and distribution). The socio-economic inequalities that characterize Brazilian society are addressed in the tariff system through a discounted tariff, the so-called ‘social tariff’. The government created this tariff in 2002 (Law 10.438/2002) to provide low-income consumers with affordable access to electricity. Although the social tariff eligibility criteria have changed over time, since 2010, access to the social tariff has been determined by conditional and individualized socio-economic and consumption criteria⁵.

In line with consumer rights, the bill includes a breakdown of all costs in order to provide consumers with exhaustive information on how the final price was calculated. The bill lists consumption and the corresponding amount (the number of kWh consumed over the previous month, and the total amount of the electricity consumed, in kWh and *reais*). It also makes it easy to monitor variations in consumption levels from one month to the next through a graph that compares the number of kWh consumed over previous months. Also as part of these rights, information on the quality of the service provided is displayed on the bill. It shows two individual service interruption indexes, the DIC (duration of individual interruption per consumer unit – expressed in hours) and the FIC (frequency of individual interruption per consumer unit – expressed in number of interruptions). The thresholds of these two indexes, as defined by the national power sector regulator (ANEEL), are also provided to enable people to compare and detect discrepancies. Should these individual interruption thresholds be exceeded, the electricity provider would be required to pay compensation to consumers.

The politics of a bill in good standing: framing the ‘deserving citizen’

Beyond these consumer and fiscal relationships, the electricity bill can be used as official proof of residence as it contains personal information, an address and individual identification. The link between these three components – fiscal, consumer and administrative – makes the electricity bill a document that not only provides consumers with rights and responsibilities, but also reinforces the idea that these consumers are taxpayer citizens and urban residents identifiable within the city. Through these components, the bill mediates a top-down relationship between the state, the individuals and the market, connecting administrative identification to commercial and fiscal

⁵ Consumers have to prove that they are socio-economically disadvantaged to be eligible and registration on the Cadastro Unico, the unified national register of people considered vulnerable (defined as households earning half of the minimum wage per capita), has become mandatory. The tariff reduction only applies to the first 220 kWh consumed with decreasing discount percentiles.

responsibilities. Residents' administrative uses of the bill also show how this document can be employed to overcome the historical negative image and stigma attached to favela residents.

Its administrative function of providing an address makes the bill a very common document in everyday life in Brazilian society. In favelas, this document can be one of the few ways to prove residence, since the municipality has not officially recognized most of the streets in these areas. Thus, the electricity bill often provides residents with an address that has not yet been formally registered by the municipality.

The role of utility companies in mapping the city of Rio de Janeiro is not a recent dynamic. Light has played a major role in mapping addresses in favelas since at least the 1980s, when the provider implemented its first public electrification program. In fact, the Light customer register is often considered more complete than the address register held by the municipality. Although the provider's identification of streets does not equate to official recognition by the municipality, this operation shows the link between administrative and commercial processes in this urban context. For Light, identifying street addresses is crucial for operating an efficient billing system.

As the bill provides an official record of address in areas with precarious land tenure, this document can also acquire more hybrid legal uses that strategically combine state law with what has been defined as the "law of the favela" (Magalhães 2014). Magalhães has notably shown how the electricity bill can be considered proof of house possession (*posse*) and informally used to sell houses in favelas, with the present owner's name simply replaced with the name of the new owner at a Light commercial office (Magalhães 2014). Similarly, in my own research, I observed that the electricity bill could be associated with the idea of house ownership, which can create conflict when tenants subsequently want the electricity bill to be in their name.

These expected and unexpected meanings and uses of the bill can be considered complementary forms of regulation that "result from a permanent process of articulation between legal documents edited by the State and customary rules developed locally, resulting from the institutionalized legal practices of favelas' residents" (Magalhães 2014: 11). These re-appropriations reveal a specific link between utility documents and urban planning. What I call here the 'politics of a bill in good standing' also emerge from the administrative everyday uses of the bill, as electricity payment becomes a way of negotiating the right to be recognized as a deserving member of society.

When I asked people how long they had been receiving an electricity bill, some people looked at me strangely before replying "more than 30 years". However, others, particularly in Santa Marta, only received a bill for the first time in 2009, when the electricity regularization process was

implemented. Since the beginning of my fieldwork in 2010, it has become clear that, within the construction of this contractual relationship, payment of the electricity bill has become entangled with social norms and political expectations of *what* the payment means for residents. As Francisco, a resident who has lived in Santa Marta since the 1960s, explained to me:

“Paying the bill is a citizen duty. If you use a service, you have to pay for it. But a minimum tax, proportional to the consumption of each family, is required. Before [the regularization of electricity access] no one paid. Whoever wanted to pay [before regularization] was seen as arrogant. If you can pay an electricity bill, why do you not live outside the favela (*no asfalto*)? There was social pressure in relation to this”⁶

Thus, despite the heterogeneity of individual situations, electricity regularization has endowed the electricity bill with a ‘new’ commercial life that has reconfigured responsibilities between household members. In Cantagalo, for example, where most residents already received electricity bills before the regularization project, this process has often entailed a change to the name listed on the electricity bill, which, in practice, usually corresponds to this named person’s commitment to pay for the service provided. Being named on the bill mainly has practical importance, as highlighted by Marcia, a resident of Cantagalo:

“The (electricity) bill has always been in my husband’s name, my name is on the phone bill. Thus, each of us has our proof of residence, even if it’s me who pays the electricity bill, and my husband who pays the telephone bill. We decided to do this because we each have our own expenses and take out loans, so it’s important that we both have proof of residence with our individual name on it”⁷

During my research, however, I became aware that the person whose name is on the bill does not necessarily have individual responsibility within the commercial relationship. In fact, people living at the same address can officially use the electricity bill even if their name is not on it. Being named on the bill appears to be important for constructing individual credibility. This becomes apparent when we consider that, *de facto*, residents can also use the residence certificate issued by the residents’ association as official proof of address. However, various residents explained to me that they consider this document to be ‘depersonalized’ (it is the same for all) and see it as enabling the stigmatization associated with living in a favela, as highlighted in the following interview:

“For me there is a lot of difference [between having an association document or the electricity bill]. With the electricity bill, I can prove that I reside (*comprovo*) in my house, it is not the association [of residents] who is the intermediary, it is evidence that I live here

⁶ Francisco, Santa Marta Favela resident, 14.12.2010. Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper.

⁷ Marcia, Cantagalo, 22.10.2011

and I own my house. Anyone can ask for confirmation of residence from the association, it is the same paper for everyone. The bill is mine only, it's personal"⁸

Given that, *de facto*, the electricity bill also makes it easy to determine whether a person lives in a favela, it is not immediately evident why residents prefer the electricity bill to the residents' association document. This preference seems linked to the fact that the electricity bill is delivered by an official provider external to the favela, which is perceived as reinforcing personal credibility. In fact, there can be a suspicion that the residents' association certificate has been obtained due to the particular resident's personal relationship with the association president. In contrast, the electricity bill is considered to be a personal document resulting from an impersonal relationship, which should be (incontestable) proof that the resident's affirmation 'is true'. Thus, what the electricity bill is deemed to prove is the individual behavior of a 'trustworthy person'.

Some research has shown how paying for utilities can be a strategic act to claim citizenship and urban legitimacy in irregular neighborhoods. For example, Ranganathan has highlighted the connection between "paying for pipes, and claiming for citizenship" in urban India (Ranganathan 2014), showing how users pay for water pipes as a means of gaining legitimate land tenure and state recognition. In Brazil, Holston's study on citizenship formation in the outskirts of São Paulo considered that city dwellers' payment for infrastructure was a means of constructing legitimacy in citizenship claiming. He called them 'contributor rights' "because residents advance them as legitimate claims on the basis of their contribution to the city itself - to its construction through their building of homes and neighborhoods, to city government through their payment of taxes, and to the city economy through their consumption" (Holston 2008: 260).

Here, paying for electricity appears to reveal a different claim to the right to the city. Instead of being used to secure land tenure, it emerges as a strategy for overcoming spatial and individual stigmatization when faced with multiple forms of discrimination based on urban differentiation. As several residents pointed out, it is not only the risk of disconnection that prompts them to regularly pay their bills. It furnishes them with a document "in good standing" when they need to provide proof of residence, which can facilitate the creation of (consumer, economic and administrative) relationships. It attests that the bill-payer is a 'well-behaved citizen' who fulfills their financial obligations and has potentially overcome the potential stigma of having irregular

⁸ Andreia, Cantagalo, 17.10.2011

access. This facet becomes particularly important when looking for a job in the formal market as João, a resident of Cantagalo, explained to me:

“We have an electricity bill now. Before we did not even have a meter and in order to have proof of residence we were obliged to ask the residents’ association for a confirmation document. But this is not at all the same as having your own name on a bill. At the moment I am looking for a job, and I am always being asked for proof of residence. This is very important, especially because I live here in the southern zone, I do not live out there in the Baixada⁹. Sometimes living far away can be a reason not to hire you. With the electricity bill I can prove that I am looking for work near where I live. Beyond that, they see that I pay the electricity bill. This shows that I am an honest person and they will trust me more if I ask for credit. That’s why, even if the amount on the bill is sometimes difficult to afford, I pay as soon as the bill arrives. I do not ever pay late, especially at the moment when I am looking for a job. I always like to present the last bill paid”¹⁰

João lives with his retired mother and two nieces of school age, and the total family income provides about 1,100 reais (about 360 euros in 2012) per month for four people, which, at the time of the interview, placed them around the poverty line. Their bills range from 60 to 92 reais, which is a significant part of their budget (between 6 and 10%). The magnitude of this cost not only highlights the potential regressive effects of electricity regularization on socio-economic inequalities, but it also raises questions about how this commercial contract reshapes the claiming of membership and towards whom. In a context in which favela residents are often obliged to prove their ‘honesty’ as working citizens, the bill underpins negotiations for claiming access to spheres that do not directly concern the state. It appears to support a relational process of claiming recognition (Bloemraad 2017) as a deserving member of society with respect to other citizens, financial institutions, the labor market, and consumer society, etc. It is supported by a certain morality, expressed in the payment of this urban service, and consequently by credibility as a ‘good payer’. It thereby illustrates how the bill creates fragile spaces of membership negotiations beyond ideas of citizenship as a status and set of rights.

The materiality of claim-making: the ambivalent political affordances of the bill

The bill supports a relational understanding of citizenship that involves normative ideas and everyday practices of negotiating membership. It also provides material support for discussing and

⁹ The Baixada Fluminense is a region of the State of Rio de Janeiro. *João*’s statement also shows how the bill can acquire a different level of importance depending on the administrative area people live in and where they are looking for a job.

¹⁰ *João*, Cantagalo, 22.10.2011

contesting the politics of electricity regularization, producing opportunities for more visible political claims and for formulating demands towards the state and the private company.

At the beginning of the regularization process, ‘having the right to claim’ became an important aspect of new regular customers’ discourse on the potential positive effects of regularization. Usually when residents talk about the “opportunity to claim”, this refers to requesting the company to take action when the electricity infrastructure breaks down. Although possession of an electricity bill in good standing far from ensures that the company will respond and, thus, does not translate to fairer treatment in electricity provision, residents considered the bills to be one of the building blocks for constructing the legitimacy to claim at the beginning of regularization. In particular, I observed that personal responsibility for paying electricity bills links private practices with the idea of being able to claim consumer rights. Greater control over organization of the family budget becomes tied up with the idea of legitimately being able to claim these rights when problems occur:

“I am separated from my husband and, at the time, we bought this home between us half and half. If the electricity bill is in his name, I do not pay it. If it is in my name I pay it. Everyone must have his or her responsibilities. When Light installed the new meter, I gave my ID card and my CPF¹¹. We had always received the bill but my husband did not want to pay it, whereas I already took care of the other expenses. For me, the significant change is to have the meter in my name, to have the responsibility for paying the bills. For me this is important, having the opportunity to claim in case of problems for my children and me. Before I could not claim, the name on the bill was that of my husband, not mine.”¹²

This dimension was also one of the central initial promises of regularization. Public authorities and the provider highlighted the reestablishment of consumer rights and duties. The duty of honoring the contract, through paying for the service, would provide consumer rights, essentially linked to the right to benefit from adequate electricity provision and to receive appropriate service-related information. The bill is supposed to materialize this contract. The technical review of the bill provided above reveals that this document can potentially be used as an instrument for controlling the behaviors of the contractual parties (the consumers and the provider), and for claiming consumer rights. The emphasis on consumer rights is particularly strong in the discourse used by Light, which reflects the promise to address the historically unequal quality of electricity provision in favelas (Pilo’ 2018), a central political claim in favelas.

¹¹ The *Cadastro de Pessoas Físicas* (CPF) is a document that identifies a taxpayer within the Federal Internal Revenue Department. However, CPF is widely used in public and private organizations (banking institutions, government agencies, private companies, etc.) as a document to identify individuals.

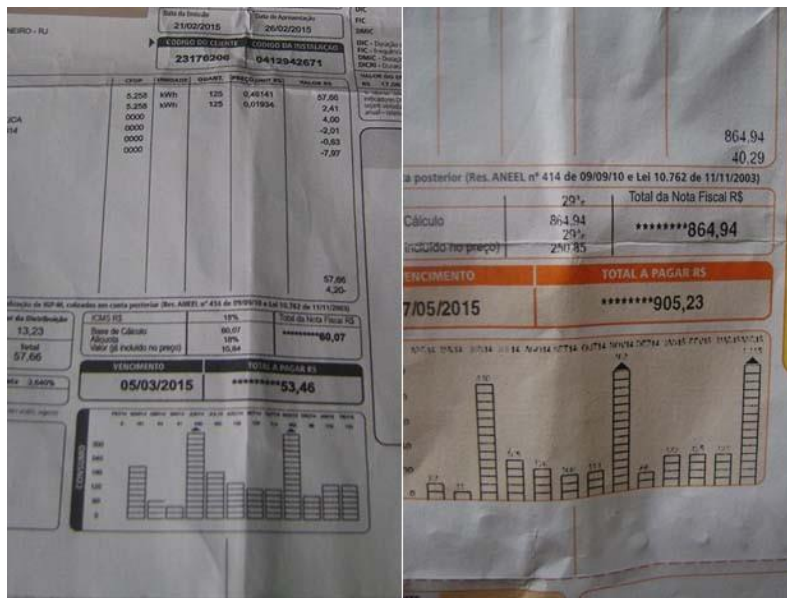
¹² Eduarda, Cantagalo, 17.10.2011

However, just a couple of years after regularization, the authorities' and company's narrative of recognizing customers as consumer-citizens able to claim consumer rights and benefit from improved electricity was punctuated by payment problems, increasing commercial losses, and complaints (see also Loretto 2016; Núcleo de Estudos Constitucionais (NEC) 2013). These tensions were particularly embedded in the bill.

The bill is not a document that residents generally analyze in detail. They consider it provides too much information and, at first glance, it appears quite difficult to understand. Billing information is, however, properly examined, by comparing a consumer's successive bills, when there are suspected discrepancies between price and consumption. As in the recently privatized electricity service in Nicaragua (Cupples 2011), consumers in several favelas began to contest the amounts displayed on their electricity bills after the regularization process. In Brazil, newspaper articles appeared, reporting and documenting discrepancies in the amounts displayed on the newly regularized consumers' electricity bills, particularly in Santa Marta (Parkin 2014; Carvalho 2016). The 'smart metering' system, which Light has used to regularize electricity access in a number of favelas, has undoubtedly contributed to these disputes around electricity readings. This system makes it possible to carry out certain tasks remotely, from the company's headquarters, such as meter reading, connections and disconnection for non-payment. Although no technical issues with this system have been proved, its reliability in measuring electricity consumption correctly is largely contested both in and outside favelas (Vilella 2012; Agência Brasil 2012).

Within these conflicts, there is a clear connection between the meters and the bills. However, although the purpose of both these objects is to 'prove' mutual compliance with the commercial contract, the electricity bill does at least provide evidence of inconsistencies in recorded electricity consumption for inhabitants who otherwise have very little control and expertise for proving potential technical malfunctions. The information provided in the bill, and particularly in the graphs showing the past and current month's consumption trends, provides a strong visual image (image 2).

Image 2. Consumption level – per month



Source: Newspaper O Globo (Machado and Rodrigues 2015)

This is powerful because it makes the information immediate and helps people compare consumption over several months. This feature of the bill often appears on social networks, generating discussions on the politics of regularization. Inhabitants post their electricity bills on Facebook in order to denounce unexpected and inexplicably high prices. A common point that frequently emerges is the idea that ‘outside’ the favelas (*lâ fora*), wealthier residents pay much less for their electricity service. This has led to people living in the favelas comparing their electricity bills to those of people outside. For example, a maid living in the favela will compare her bill against the electricity bill received at the house in which she works.

Comparing bills has become a common practice that also materially supports collective discussions among residents and community leaders. The very principle of paying the bill starts to be contested as the high prices are deemed to be weakening residents’ ability to afford the service. Residents denounce the risk of eviction (*remoção*) for those who cannot afford to pay the bills and protests have been organized to attract public attention to this issue, such as in the favela of Rio das Pedras, for example (Strobl 2018).

The fragility of this contract became particularly apparent when Santa Marta’s residents organized a protest against high electricity prices in 2014, during which the very materiality of the bill played a central role in articulating political demands. Residents demonstrated by waving their electricity bills in order to demand affordable prices and transparent information from both the state and

Light: the state (the three government levels) as the entity that collects taxes, which are considered disproportionate for an essential service; and Light as the private utility that implements and benefits from the regularization process (Parkin 2014) (image 3).

Image 3. Protests in Santa Marta for lower electricity tariffs



© Tandy Firmino (2014)

In particular, several ‘community leaders’ talked about the idea of creating a tax (independent from consumption) for favela inhabitants, which was prompted by the fact that favelas are Areas of Special Social Interest. This is a legal status that recognizes them as low-income areas and, consequently, should ensure they remain affordable places to live and are protected from speculation or aggressive commercial tactics. Thus, community leaders’ discourse indirectly criticizes the conditional and individualized socio-economic and consumption criteria used for the social tariff that do not take place of residence into account despite inequalities in Brazilian cities largely following spatial divisions. Moreover, preoccupations over the affordability of electricity merge with the perception that regularization has not helped improve the service. The statement below, posted on Facebook by a Santa Marta resident, expresses frustration that the rights afforded by their consumer status does not lead to the expected improved service:

“In Santa Marta, it is complicated. Without electricity since 8 o’clock this morning! This is because we are Light’ customers”¹³

¹³ Facebook post, written by a Santa Marta resident, 26.01.2018

These political uses of the bill do not seem to have directly affected policy. However, one of the protest organizers explained to me that, in the months following the protest, residents started to receive ‘reasonable bills’, but no reasons were given as to why these bills were lower (interview in November 2016). Despite the ambiguous effectiveness of these uses, we can say that this document worked as a “mediator of political action” (Cupples 2011). The gesture of waving bills was a specific form of claims-making: the bill was both the object of contention and proof of the consumer-citizen status of residents that pay their taxes and electricity consumption.

This political use of the bill, however, is extraordinary. It is the culmination of multiple ordinary moments in which consumers-provider conflicts were confined to individual consumer rights. The growing number of lawyers that started offering legal assistance in “pacified” favelas, particularly on consumer rights issues, during the first few years of the UPP presence provides an indication of the focus placed on protecting these specific rights. Consequently, the political meaning of the bill appears as largely contextual: it can be a political document that legitimizes collective claims but can also confine political issues within the boundaries of the individual consumer-provider relationship.

Conclusions: materializing the negotiations of membership in and beyond the state

Through an ethnographic study of the electricity bill, this article has argued for developing a relational and materialist approach to citizenship in and beyond the state. I have suggested that the political implications of creating consumers-customers in marginalized urban areas are not limited to the granting or weakening of (consumer or citizenship) rights. Instead, I have proposed considering the implications of this shift on the way social and commercial obligations, norms and practices of membership are negotiated. Analysis of the bill has revealed how electricity regularization embeds both normative framings of citizenship and people’s claims as members of society, connecting residents both to the state and the private company. By drawing attention on utility documents, the article contribution is three-fold.

First, the article expanded understandings of the political and urban role of documents. While anthropological work has highlighted how paperwork manifests the logics of the state, this analysis has showed how documents can materialize heterogeneous logics used by state and non-state actors when framing logics of membership. Within the larger ‘pacification’ project, the role of the electricity bill has contextually changed, acquiring strategic meanings for both institutional actors and residents. The state and the private company see in the bill a material way of legitimizing their discourse on rights, responsibilities and recognition, building on conformity with fiscal and commercial logics.

Second, this analysis directly contributes to emerging debates on ‘citizenship agendas in and beyond the state’ (de Koning, Jaffe, and Koster 2015). The article showed that the private company is a central actor in the implementation of such citizenship framings. It also revealed that the negotiations of membership have partially shifted from the citizen-state to the private company-subject relationship. This has direct implications for the way we think citizenship. In fact, heterogeneous and ambivalent source of claim-makings emerge: making claims as a consumer and citizen toward the state and non-state actors through both compliance and progressive practices (paying the bills or using them to protest against regularization).

Third, it expanded considerations of documents within urban infrastructures studies. Despite utility documents remain a relatively neglected component of infrastructure, these documents have generally been analyzed as materialities used to claim citizenship rights, recognition and right to the city, shedding light on the urban dimension of the citizen-state relationship. In Rio, the meanings of the bill contextually change through official and unofficial practices and discourses, state reforms and urban processes of differentiation. At the same time the bill mediates normative ideas of a deserving member of the (consumer, administrative and political) society, it also offers support for political claims for an affordable service. In conclusion, we can consider that the study of documents offers the potential to highlight the ambivalent aspects of political subject formation in contemporary urban projects of reframing citizenship, which needs critical inquiry for understanding more specifically the changing political meanings of what utilities mediate.

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