Assembling Formal and Informal Urban Governance: Political Brokerage in Recife, Brazil

Martijn Koster *Radboud University*

Abstract: This article approaches urban governance as an assemblage of formal and informal practices, comprising official procedures and personal favours, of legal frameworks and private arrangements between bureaucrats and residents. Within such assemblages, I show how community leaders of low-income neighbourhoods in the city of Recife, Brazil, operate as brokers between the state and their fellow residents. The community leaders are key actors in forging alignments between the different elements of the assemblage, using both formal (for example, participatory programs) and informal means (for example, clientelist votes-for-favours exchanges). Combining the anthropology of brokerage with recent assemblage-based work from urban studies and development studies, I conceptualise these local leaders as special "assemblers." I argue that they are a valuable starting point for analysing urban governance as a formal/informal assemblage, an analysis that provides insights that contribute to recent debates on the informal dimensions of urban governance and, more generally, the interconnections between the formal and the informal. A focus on their connective practices contributes to theorising urban governance as a piecing together of different actors, institutions and resources that is productive of power structures that become manifest in concrete formal and informal acts of assembling.

Keywords: urban governance, brokerage, Brazil, Recife, anthropology of the state, assemblage, clientelism

Résumé : Cet article aborde la gouvernance urbaine comme un agencement de pratiques formelles et informelles composé de procédures officielles et de faveurs personnelles, de cadres juridiques et d'arrangements privés entre bureaucrates et résidents urbains. Je montre comment, au sein de tels agencements, les leaders communautaires des quartiers défavorisés de la ville de Recife, au Brésil, agissent comme courtiers entre l'État et leurs co-résidents. Ces leaders sont des acteurs clés de la création d'alignements entre les différents éléments de l'agencement, et ce, par des moyens à la fois formels (tels les programmes participatifs) et informels (tels les échanges clientélistes de votes contre faveurs). En combinant l'anthropologie du courtage et les travaux récents sur ce type d'agencement issus des études urbaines et du développement, je conçois ces leaders locaux comme des « agenceurs » particuliers. Je soutiens qu'ils offrent un point de départ précieux pour l'analyse de la gouvernance urbaine comme agencement formel/informel, ouvrant de nouvelles perspectives qui contribuent aux débats en cours sur les dimensions informelles de la gouvernance urbaine et, plus généralement, sur les liens entre le formel et l'informel. L'accent mis sur les pratiques connectives de ces leaders permet de théoriser la gouvernance urbaine comme un assemblage d'acteurs, d'institutions et de ressources qui produit des structures de pouvoir se manifestant dans des actes d'agencement formels et informels concrets.

Mots-clés : gouvernance urbaine, courtage, Brésil, Recife, anthropologie de l'État, agencement, clientélisme

Introduction

This article analyses urban governance as an assemblage of formal and informal practices. It demonstrates how urban governance comprises official procedures and personal favours, of legal frameworks and private arrangements between bureaucrats and residents. It draws on ethnographic research among community leaders and other residents of low-income neighbourhoods in the city of Recife, in the Northeast Region of Brazil. These community leaders are active as political brokers, operating between the state and their fellow residents.

In this article, I show how these community leaders connect the institutional with the personal and the official with the unofficial. In so doing, I present them as connective agents in wider governance assemblages. These assemblages – amalgams of different government, citizen and corporate actors, institutions and resources – constitute temporary power structures that contain both formal and informal practices. The community leaders are key actors in forging alignments between the different elements of the assemblage by both formal (for example, participatory programs) and informal means (for example, clientelist votes-for-favours exchanges). As special "assemblers," they are a valuable starting point for analysing urban governance as a formal/informal assemblage. In so doing, this article contributes to recent debates on the informal dimensions of urban governance

and, more generally, the interconnections between the formal and the informal.

This article zooms in on two specific community leaders, Degenildo and Zezinho. First, it introduces Degenildo and demonstrates how he engages in both formal and informal practices, exchanges and connections and brings together many different actors, institutions and resources. Positioning his activities in a broader context, I give a brief overview of urban governance in Recife. I use a broad definition of urban governance, one that includes electoral politics and also informal aspects, as the latter intertwine with formal government programs and procedures. After theorising on assemblages, I conceptualise community leaders as special "assemblers." Finally, after this theoretical elaboration, I give an example of what insights such an approach generates by analysing the governance assemblage in which Zezinho operates, followed by my conclusions.

This article is based on long-term ethnographic research in Recife, the capital of the state of Pernambuco in the Northeast Region of Brazil, between 2003 and 2018. The city, with an estimated 1.6 million residents in its municipality and 3.7 million residents in its metropolitan region (IBGE, 2010), is known to be one of the less affluent cities in Brazil.

Presenting a Community Leader at Work

One morning in September 2015, Degenildo and eight of his neighbours had an appointment with a bureaucrat at Recife's Municipal Agency of Urban Planning.[1] The houses of the residents, all from the same low-income area in the north of the city, had been demolished a couple of years earlier in a large slum upgrading project. The municipality had promised new houses to the evictees. Many of them had received substitute housing. However, the ones who joined Degenildo – and many others from the same neighbourhood – had not yet received another place to live. They still lived in temporary housing, often with family members in their already cramped houses.

In the meeting, the bureaucrat suggested that she could try to get financial compensation for the people who still had not received a house. Degenildo reacted angrily, arguing that this financial compensation would never be enough to buy a new house. He emphasised that the municipality should keep its promise. Degenildo, living in one of the areas affected by the urban renewal program, is a charming man in his late forties, well known as a community leader, a *líder comunitário*. A *líder comunitário* is an informal position that does not exist on paper. Community leaders work on a wide variety of issues, ranging from slum upgrading, tenure

security and poverty alleviation to cultural expression, gender equality and crime prevention. They claim to "speak for" and "act on behalf of" their fellow residents vis-à-vis the state, both within and outside of government programs (Gay 1994; Herkenhoff 1995). Within participatory programs on land tenure and public services, for instance, the community leaders bring residents' ideas into policy design, translating local meanings into the language of bureaucratic categories and vice versa. Outside of such programs, they engage in personalised and often clientelist exchanges with bureaucrats and politicians. Especially when elections are approaching, they use their clientelist channels to negotiate the distribution of resources in return for political support (de Oliveira 2009).

Degenildo's fellow residents come to him for advice, for a listening ear, for a drink. Like other community leaders, Degenildo helps his fellow residents to find their way in a labyrinthine bureaucracy when they attempt to apply for social security, a pension, or identity documents. He takes them to the right office to talk to the right official. He files petitions. He finds a lawyer for families who need juridical assistance – for example, for imprisoned family members. Since 2000, Degenildo has been active as an elected representative of a program for the legalisation and infrastructure of low-income areas – about which I explain more below – discussing legalisation and the improvement of living conditions with the authorities. In 2014, he was elected as a coordinator of the program for the whole city of Recife, meaning that he has to spend much time at the Municipal Agency of Urban Planning. He is also employed at a department at city hall, although this position should be considered a "ghost job"; he collects a monthly pay cheque without doing any work, a favour he was granted for his campaigning for the political party currently in charge.

Degenildo has many contacts among politicians and bureaucrats. During elections, he supports particular candidates and campaigns for them. However, he has never become a party member and every now and then switches from one candidate to another. His approach toward party politics is, I would argue, of a pragmatic character. He likes to keep options open and never shuts a door to any possible collaboration. Degenildo knows how to play the political game, or, as he puts it, he has *jogo de cintura* (literally game of the waist; flexibility, resourcefulness, creativity). For instance, when the party in charge, which offered him his ghost job at city hall, was performing poorly in the polls, Degenildo told me that he was thinking of leaving this job and looking for something else. Keeping in mind that most bureaucrats lose their jobs once another political party wins the

elections, this demonstrated his strategic evaluation of the political situation.

When the demolition and construction work in the urban renewal project started in 2008, Degenildo represented the residents of his district. Together with other community leaders, he stood up for their rights and interests and managed to get substitute housing for most of the residents close to the original site, instead of far away in another neighbourhood. He also managed to provide several of his neighbours with jobs in the construction company carrying out the work, as a so-called *mão de obra local* (local workforce). Finally, Degenildo works with a group of critical urbanists at the local federal university. They organise seminars that bring together academics and activists. Degenildo brings together all these actors, such as low-income city residents, politicians, bureaucrats and corporate actors, and connects them with all kinds of different resources and possibilities.

At the meeting at the urban planning agency, the bureaucrat gave a very complex, jargon-heavy explanation about the procedures of the upgrading program. As so often happens, bureaucrats and engineers involved in these urban upgrading programs make procedures very complicated by using complex language full of technical and legal terms and abbreviations (Albert 2016). Degenildo, however, is not easily intimidated. He knows how to deal with such an unintelligible discourse, and, with a smile on his face, he told the official, "And why don't you speak a language we can all understand?" To his fellow residents he said, "Did you understand anything of what she just said?" Then a high-ranked urban planning administrator entered the room. She took her lunch from the fridge in a corner of the room. Degenildo looked at her and, smiling charmingly, said, "Hey, weren't we going to have lunch together?" She answered wittily – "Are you inviting me for lunch in a fancy restaurant, Degenildo?" – knowing that this would be an expense he could not afford. After all, Degenildo remains, in common parlance, a poor slum dweller.

Degenildo has established and maintains contacts with many different actors, combining the formal and the informal, joining official programs and personalised relationships. In this article, I argue that Degenildo can be seen as an important "assembler" in the formal-informal assemblage that produces urban interventions. Assemblages can be characterised by incoherence, inconsistency and instability. Wide "gaps" exist between state and population, between project developers, construction companies and their "beneficiaries," in terms of their interests, frames of reference and aspirations. As shown in the above example, they often speak different languages – for example, the technical and legal language of the bureaucrats that is incomprehensible for the low-income city residents. Actors like Degenildo are active in the gaps. I show how community leaders like him are vital for understanding how formal-informal urban governance assemblages are made and remade.

Urban Governance in Recife

Analysing urban governance as an assemblage provides insights into how the urban administration connects to and affects the lives of marginalised urban residents. My focus is on governance in a broad sense, including government programs and electoral, often clientelist politics. Urban governance, viewed as an assemblage, includes various actors, institutions and resources, formal and informal practices, and connections and exchanges. Consequently, it stretches beyond the domain of government and its formal partnerships, projects and procedures.

Broadly speaking, one of the characteristics of urban governance in Recife is its participatory character. Although the high times of social movements and most participatory programs have passed, Recife city governance can still be characterised by relatively short connections between people living in low-income areas and representatives of the local administration (de Vries 2016b; Leal 2003). Community leaders like Degenildo have access to public office holders and, for better or worse, express the needs of their fellow marginalised city residents.

Recife has a long history of participatory urban governance. In 1979, when the military regime started to relax its stance toward the urban poor, the municipality under then mayor Gustavo Krause constructed community planning nuclei (*núcleos de planejamento comunitário*), popularly called *barracões* (large shacks), in poor neighbourhoods. These stimulated popular participation and were accompanied by large slum upgrading and relocation programs. After the country's return to democracy in 1985, the then city government introduced new participatory instruments. In 1993, mayor Jarbas Vasconcelos introduced the *Programa Prefeitura nos Bairros* (City Hall in the Neighbourhoods Program) under the centre-right coalition of PMDB and PFL (1993–2000).[2]

In 2001, the Workers' Party (PT; Partido dos Trabalhadores) assumed power at the Recife city hall. Under their leftist coalition, the city started *Orçamento Participativo* (OP; Participatory Budgeting), a system in which the population participated in decision making regarding the distribution of public resources. This program lasted until 2012, when the PT lost the municipal elections to the Partido Socialista Brasileiro

(PSB; Brazilian Socialist Party) (de Azevedo and Fernandes 2005; Montambeault 2016). Although the Participatory Budgeting of Recife may not have been as famous as its counterpart in Porto Alegre (Baiocchi 2005), it was one of Brazil's largest programs aimed at infrastructural improvement and citizenship construction (de Vries 2016a).[3] In 2012, the PSB won the elections. Its coalition, which is still in charge in Recife, introduced a new program: *Recife Participa* (Recife Participates). It is built on a similar structure as OP. However, Recife Participa exists only on paper. As one of my key informants said: "There were two or three meetings, but after that it never 'left the paper.'"

Another participatory instrument – of which Degenildo has been a long-term elected representative, as mentioned above – developed alongside the other programs: the *Plano de Regularização das Zonas Especiais de Interesse Social* (PREZEIS; Regulatory Plan of Special Zones of Social Interest). In 1987, the city administration introduced this still-existing system of laws, which attempted to legalise the slums and provide them with infrastructure (de Souza 2001; de Vries 2016b; Leite 2007). It was co-founded by various social movements and the leftist wing of the Catholic Church (proponents of liberation theology), which had played an important role in resisting the former military rule (1964–84). An important dimension of PREZEIS is that it prioritises shelter over ownership rights and is designed, through building regulations, to combat land speculation. Through PREZEIS, several poor areas in the city were recognised as ZEIS, *Zonas Especial de Interesse Social* (Special Zones of Social Interest), special protected areas. Every ZEIS has a local consultative body (COMUL: *Comissão de Urbanização e Legalização da posse da terra*, which means "committee for urbanisation and legalisation of land ownership"), consisting of representatives of the population. These representatives have regular meetings, alternating between the neighbourhood and the office of the urban planning agency in the city centre (de la Mora 2012; FASE et al. 1997). Degenildo, but also Zezinho, another community leader whom I introduce later, have operated as local representatives within PREZEIS.

As the literature shows, formal urban governance in a city like Recife is intricately interwoven with informal social mechanisms and networks. Although in the 1990s and early 2000s, the transition from clientelism to citizenship was touted as an important part of Brazil's return to democracy (for example, Gay 2006), recent studies show how electoral politics and clientelist exchanges still play an important role in public policies in both rural and urban settings (Ansell 2014; Eiró 2018). This is not to say

that clientelism, which has so often been presented as an inexorable part of politics and governance in the country, especially in the Northeast Region (Graham 1990; Villela 2004), has not changed. Clientelism, or patronage, should not be considered as a rigid social structure, but as a relationship subject to constant challenges and renegotiations (Auyero 2001; Gay 1998). Indeed, the modernisation of state institutions transformed clientelism in terms of the ways people interpret it and regarding the actors involved and the resources exchanged (Koster 2012). Nonetheless, the history of Northeast Brazil has given rise to a particular political culture in which the informal politics of clientelism influence and co-produce forms of local governance.

Formal-Informal Assemblages of Governance

Approaching urban governance as an assemblage implies seeing it as an amalgam of different constituent actors, institutions and resources that function together (Li 2007; McFarlane 2011a). Such an approach helps to understand how governance works in a context that is constantly changing. Also, it concentrates on how human actors, non-human objects and resources (such as buildings, tools and financial flows), and institutional ordering processes co-produce, and are connected in, particular effects. More specifically, this approach sheds light on four different dimensions (compare Koster 2015). First, an urban governance assemblage is a networked collective in which agency is distributed across different components. Assembling is a process of "forging alignments" that gives shape to a provisional unity (Li 2007, 65). Assemblages consist of a "fitting" or "fixing" together of different actors, institutions and resources (Phillips 2006). Urban governance arrangements, in such an understanding, are networked wholes that consist of government, citizen and corporate actors, various institutional orders, and different sets of resources. Such arrangements are always a combination of formal procedures and institutions *and* informal contacts and transactions.

Second, an urban governance assemblage is incoherent and unsteady. Assemblages are heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, partial and situated (Collier and Ong 2005, 12). Looking at urban governance, we see the incoherence of the assemblages, as different actors have different interests and seem to come from different worlds. Indeed, as the meeting at the urban planning agency demonstrated, different actors may speak different languages. The instability of such assemblages becomes clear as the exact design, procedures and available resources change with each administration and

are affected by economic and/or political crises (as is currently the case in Brazil).

Third, an urban governance assemblage claims a territory (Wise 2005). Deleuze and Guattari (2013 [1988]) argue that territory is a (temporarily) stabilised assemblage. In the same vein, Anderson and McFarlane (2011, 124) see assemblages as "the composition of diverse elements into some form of provisional socio-spatial formation." Related to the instability described above, the assemblage is under continual pressure to deterritorialise, or break apart, yet a particular density of components and relations gives rise to its reterritorialisation (Richmond 2018). More specifically, urban governance assemblages territorialise in particular socio-spatial forms, here underprivileged urban areas in which policies are implemented and projects are carried out.

Fourth, an urban governance assemblage is productive of power structures that become manifest in particular effects (Anderson and McFarlane 2011). Deleuze and Guattari's (2013 [1988]) notion of *agencement* (translated to English as "assemblage") signifies a productive aligning or piecing together of different elements (McFarlane 2011b, 653; Wang 2017). Urban governance assemblages produce interventions in the lives of residents (Li 2007); for example, their living environment is changed, they are relocated to another place, or their neighbourhood becomes securitised. In terms of power structures, we often see how interventions are implemented according to a top-down design, even if under a participatory banner. Residents are often only provided very little influence. In the project that I described above, for instance, the residents were confronted with an upgrading program they did not ask for. Although a participatory project, they could note vote against the plans, and some were left without the promised compensation, like the people who joined Degenildo in the meeting at the urban planning agency. In such situations, the uneven power structures and urban inequality these governance assemblages produce become very clear.

Approaching urban governance as an assemblage implies seeking out what works together in relation to a territory and what it – as a whole – produces. However, doing so entails a risk of obscuring actually existing social practices, relations and institutional arrangements. To avoid this risk, my empirical question is: What about the actual *assembling*? More specifically, who does the assembling? If urban governance is a networked whole that consists of incoherently connected actors, institutions and resources, how is the assembling carried out?

Thinking about such questions, I realise that I am indebted to earlier anthropological literature on social networks and clientelism. These studies, in their attempts to understand the connections between, on the one hand, larger structures of rule and political transitions and, on the other hand, local and emergent practices, accomplished an analysis of assemblages *avant la lettre*. Here, one could think of Eric Wolf's (1956, 1066) study of the interconnections between local communities and national institutions in Mexico, to which he refers as "the web of group relationships which connect localities and national-level institutions." Within these "webs" he sees particular "individuals who are able to operate both in terms of community-oriented and nation-oriented expectations" (1072). Wolf refers to the "cultural forms or mechanisms which groups involved in the same overall web of relationships can use in their formal and informal dealings with each other" (1075). Another example is Jeremy Boissevain's (1974) classic book *Friends of Friends*. Studying social networks in Malta and Sicily, Boissevain points our attention to mediators who bring together different components of society. He uses the metaphor of the "many-bladed Japanese or Chinese hand fan" with "each blade representing an activity field, but all converging at one point, the person at the centre of this network" (Boissevain 1974, 29). Later again, Larissa Lomnitz's (1988) theoretical model, with examples from the then centrally planned economies of Chile, Mexico and the former Soviet Union, demonstrates how informal channels and mechanisms, based on notions such as reciprocity and trust, connect the different levels of society and shape the economy and its related state institutions. These studies all point at the coexistence and interconnections of formal and informal practices, exchanges and relationships. Lomnitz (1988, 43) argues that "informal modes of exchange grow in the interstices of the formal system" and that informal networks run "underneath and parallel to the formal hierarchy" (42). Although these studies display a more rigid understanding of social structure or particular forms of organisation than current assemblage theory would do, they emphasise the interconnectedness of the different layers or "components" of society. Moreover, their emphasis on the complementary character of formal and informal practices and networks paved the way for thinking about governance as a formal-informal assemblage, in which specific actors play active roles as brokers.

Zooming In on the Special Assemblers

In the context of how urban governance, in its broadest sense, becomes manifest in low-income neighbourhoods in Brazilian cities, particular individuals, such as Degenildo, operate as brokers who represent their fellow citizens vis-à-vis the state. They operate between the state and the population. They have organisational

skills and valuable networks. They establish reciprocal relationships in which they exchange material and symbolic resources. They are skilled at translating different rationalities, interests and meanings (Auyero 2001; Geertz 1960; Lewis and Mosse 2006).

Over the years, I have studied several community leaders in Recife, such as Degenildo and Zezinho, who operate as brokers. My analysis builds on the anthropology of brokerage. Brokers have long featured in the anthropological literature as figures that connect disparate social worlds. Endowed with different combinations of knowledge, particular skills and a certain authority, they bridge gaps between populations, usually disadvantaged, on the one hand and powerholders on the other. The first anthropological studies of brokers were written during the process of decolonisation and the emergence of new nation-states. These studies presented brokers who operated between their peers on the one hand and the bureaucratic or religious authorities on the other (for example, Geertz 1960).[4] In these accounts, brokers were situated within patron–client relationships and played an active role in the embedding of local communities in a changing wider society (Lindquist 2015). We see how, in these early accounts, the figure of the broker provided anthropologists with the opportunity to demonstrate the interrelations between their community-based ethnographies and the structural transformations that were taking place at national and international levels. More recently, brokers have returned to centre stage in anthropological and sociological research (James 2011; Koster 2012; Lindquist 2015; Piliavsky 2014; Stovel and Shaw 2012). In current contexts in which many novel actors and institutions have entered the public arena, as a result of governance transitions, brokers have once again found the spotlight.

Building on this anthropology of brokerage and combining it with recent assemblage-based work in urban studies and development studies, I conceptualise people like Degenildo and Zezinho as special assemblers: actors who actively connect the different elements of the assemblages of urban governance (Koster 2016).[5] People like Degenildo are the linchpins, having contacts with representatives of the urban government, their fellow citizens, corporate parties, NGOs and social movements. They assemble. They bring residents' ideas into policy design and translate local meanings into the language of bureaucratic categories and vice versa. They connect the institutional with the personal and the official with the unofficial. In my approach, I combine an anthropological perspective on actors and practices with recent assemblage-based work in urban studies and development studies that demonstrates how in governance

different actors and institutions amalgamate (Li 2007; McFarlane 2011a). Assemblage theory generally does not attend to the agency of the individual actor or to actually existing social practices and relations. It does not take into account who brings together the different elements of the assemblage and how connections are negotiated in often uneven relationships. Who engages in what kind of negotiations, for instance, about which neighbourhoods will be included in an urban upgrading project and what resources will be involved? Who tries to hold the authorities to their promises and how, even when the governance assemblage is subjected to change because of diminishing resources or changing administrations? By focusing on the acts of assembling done by individual brokers, I wish to put the actor back into the assemblage.

Analysing the Governance Assemblage around Zezinho's Office

Employing this approach, I argue, is useful for analysing how urban governance gains shape. A focus on brokerage, on special assemblers and what they bring together, serves as a point of departure for analysing the assemblages of urban governance, in both their formal and their informal dimensions. To show what this focus provides, I now concentrate on Zezinho, another community leader from the same neighbourhood. I demonstrate how formal and informal connections to different kinds of actors, institutions and resources converge toward Zezinho, who seems to operate like a spider in a web. Like Degenildo, Zezinho was also a representative of his neighbourhood in PREZEIS. He was known for working on issues of security and for organising parties. Born in 1960 in the countryside, 60 kilometres from Recife, he migrated to the city in 1978. In 1985, he moved into the neighbourhood and, soon after, started to work with a local community leader. According to Zezinho, the community leader taught him how to "do politics." In 1991, Zezinho founded the Residents' Union (*União dos Moradores*), with the purpose of, as he said, "bringing improvement to the poor people of our neighbourhood."

The Residents' Union's office is a fruitful – both tangible and visible – starting point for the analysis of local manifestations of urban governance. Most community leaders have an office, a meeting place, called a *sede* (seat, headquarters). This *sede* can be part of their own house or can be a building that was designed and built to be a communal space. In the *sede*, they receive fellow residents, organise meetings, and invite, and discuss matters with, bureaucrats or other people from outside the neighbourhood. The *sede* functions as the headquarters of a grassroots organisation, led by the community

leader. Most *sedes* have a meeting table, chairs, cupboards and cabinets. They have posters or leaflets on the wall related to programs and projects that the community leader works on. As I have shown elsewhere, the local offices are central places in the brokerage practices that the community leaders engage in (Koster 2014). Pushing this further, I argue that the offices are material and physical manifestations of "nodes" in assemblages: places where the connections between different components come together.

Zezinho's office consists of a room in his house that borders the street. A first look from the outside at his office (see Figure 1) already provides insights in how he is involved in urban governance assemblages. On the wall, there is a sign with the name of the organisation, *União dos Moradores* (Residents' Union). Also, there are two signs for programs of which Zezinho is the local coordinator, using his office to store and distribute the goods. One sign says *Leite de Todos*. It refers to a state program that distributes milk to mothers of young children. It started as a part of the federal *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger) program, an initiative of the government of then president Lula da Silva. The other sign says *Sopa Amiga*, referring to a program of a private non-profit partner of the State Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Reform. It uses surplus agricultural produce to make soup to distribute among the poorer segments of the population.

The office, still from the outside, also demonstrates Zezinho's electoral contacts. On the door of his office are various stickers of the politicians whom he has recently supported – and remainders of older stickers of those he has supported in the past. He maintains connections with politicians and their campaign workers. Also, at the time

Figure 1: Zezinho's office

I took the picture, Zezinho kept a heap of sand in front of his office, as building material, which was covered with a big banner that showed the pictures and names of political candidates whom he supported in the last elections.

Closer and long-term observation showed that Zezinho's office was indeed a central place for his assembling work. In the office, often extended to the street in front of it, he organised events such as bingos, on Mother's Day, for example, and children's parties on the Day of the Child. Zezinho also organised trips to a pool or to the beach, for which he hired a bus that would leave from his office. He also held what one could call consulting hours. Almost every day he spent time sitting in his office and people would come to talk to him. Some just passed by for a chat; others needed information about the programs he coordinated: "When will the milk come, Zezinho?" or "Can I also join the food program?" Still others informed him about particular problems, varying from a defective lamp post to a lost identity card or from an ill child to a police raid. Or they needed to make a call but did not have any credit on their phone. In some instances, Zezinho assured them that he would take care of the problems, either by helping them directly (for example, by enlisting them for free milk or lending them his phone) or by going to see the right person who could help. This was part of what he called "doing favours" for his fellow residents (*prestar favores*). In other instances (for example, the ill child), he just listened and wished people luck or strength. He referred to these consulting hours as *atender ao povo*, meaning meeting or listening to the people. In a sense, during these consulting hours, the residents' needs converged toward Zezinho, sitting in his office, and later diverged to many different persons, programs and projects that he connected to in his attempts to solve the problems.

In a cabinet in his office, Zezinho kept a photo album. It contained many pictures, often taken at cheerful events such as barbecues and bingos, showing him with bureaucrats, police commanders, political candidates or campaign workers. Although the humidity of the rainy season had damaged many of the pictures, Zezinho showed them with great pride as a demonstration of the extent of his network and the importance of his contacts. The people on these pictures – bureaucrats, politicians, fellow residents – changed over the years. Zezinho's network, both in and outside the neighbourhood, as I also found over the course of my fieldwork, was subject to change.

As the pictures showed, bureaucrats, officers and politicians visited Zezinho in his office. Especially when elections were approaching, politicians and their campaign workers came to the *sede* of the Residents' Union to publicly meet with the residents of the neighbourhood.

In the elections, Zezinho would publicly announce his support for a particular candidate. For distributing publicity material and organising a local campaign, Zezinho received a payment from the candidate. In addition, over the years, Zezinho arranged several forms of employment for his children through his political connections.

Zezinho and Degenildo Assembling Governance

Zezinho and Degenildo act as brokers who bring together the different components of an urban governance assemblage. They forge alignments between different actors, institutions and resources through both formal and informal procedures and exchanges. The case above, with a specific focus on what goes on in and around Zezinho's office, provides many insights into this formal/informal assembling work. Zezinho runs formal programs, like *Leite de Todos*, and organises informal parties, like the barbecues and the bingos, that all contribute to bringing together the different components of the assemblage. We see how the assemblage is temporary and unstable, as Zezinho has worked with different persons over the years. The photos in his book showed how his network has shifted. Similarly, Degenildo's network has shifted over time as he has worked with different fellow residents and, as I showed, been pragmatic in changing alliances with politicians. Next to this temporal dimension, the assemblage also has a spatial, territorial dimension. Zezinho's office functions as a point of convergence of the connections in the governance assemblage. In this specific place, relationships are forged between different groups of actors, institutions and resources. The socio-spatial territory of the low-income neighbourhood is connected to and shaped by government programs and electoral politics and by their respective resources. Government upgrading programs, for instance, change the neighbourhood's spatial characteristics. These changes also lead to different ways of seeing the neighbourhood in spatial terms. When I started my fieldwork in 2003, the neighbourhood was often called a *favela* (slum), a settlement with very precarious living conditions. After the recent infrastructural changes, in which Zezinho, Degenildo and other community leaders played their role, people do not use that word anymore – now they consider it a "low-income neighbourhood" (*comunidade de baixa renda*).

Furthermore, the connections that Zezinho and Degenildo have established are expressions of particular uneven power structures. Similar to Degenildo's meeting that I described above, Zezinho's example, if only briefly, also touches upon the issue of inequality. In spite of the connections between the neighbourhood and the city administration and regardless of the participatory programs and the legal representation of slum dwellers' needs, Zezinho, Degenildo and their neighbours are still marginalised urban residents, institutionally discriminated against on a daily basis.

Conclusion

This article has shown how local community leaders in low-income neighbourhoods in Recife, Brazil, are central actors in governance assemblages. Approaching them as special assemblers who forge alignments between different actors sheds a light on how urban governance is shaped through formal and informal practices, connections and exchanges. The community leaders represent their marginalised fellow city dwellers, file petitions, work with NGOs, organise community meetings and talk to bureaucrats and politicians. They combine official and formal ties to bureaucrats – for example, as elected representatives of their neighbourhood – with informal personalised connections that are often related to electoral politics. They amalgamate government programs with clientelism. Against the background of a class-stratified, segregated society with blatant forms of social inequality, these community leaders bridge important gaps between low-income neighbourhoods and the rest of society. They enable communication and connections between different worlds. These different worlds, of government programs, state institutions and electoral politics on the one hand and marginalised urban neighbourhoods on the other, come together in the practices, discourses and networks of these community leaders. These leaders bring together the formal and informal elements of the administrative procedures and clientelist transactions that co-constitute urban governance. A focus on their connective practices provides a valuable starting point for theorising urban governance as a piecing together of different actors, institutions and resources, productive of particular more or less temporary power structures that become manifest in very concrete formal and informal acts of assembling.

Martijn Koster, *Anthropology and Development Studies, Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Email: m.koster@maw.ru.nl.*

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 In Portuguese this is called an *autarquia*, an independent agency that, in this case, reports to the municipality.

2 Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party) and Partido da Frente Liberal (Liberal Front Party).

3 See also Victor Albert's (2016) book on participatory governance in the Greater São Paulo Region.

4 The sociologist Granovetter's (1973) work on "The Strength of Weak Ties" contributed importantly to my rereading of these early anthropological studies.

5 In assemblage theory, we might also see them as "personae," although that term actually refers to collective agents (Nail 2017).

References

Albert, Victor. 2016. *The Limits to Citizen Power: Participatory Democracy and the Entanglements of the State*. London: Pluto Press.

Anderson, Ben, and Colin McFarlane. 2011. "Assemblage and Geography." *Area* 43(2): 124–127. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2011.01004.x.

Ansell, Aaron. 2014. *Zero Hunger: Political Culture and Antipoverty Policy in Northeast Brazil*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Auyero, Javier. 2001. *Poor People's Politics: Peronist Survival Networks and the Legacy of Evita*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Baiocchi, Gianpaolo. 2005. *Militants and Citizens: The Politics of Participatory Democracy in Porto Alegre*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Boissevain, Jeremy. 1974. *Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Collier, Stephen J., and Aihwa Ong. 2005. "Global Assemblages, Anthropological Problems." In *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier, 3–21. Oxford: Blackwell.

de Azevedo, Sérgio, and Degenildo Barroso Fernandes. 2005. *Orçamento Participativo: Construindo a democracia*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Revan.

de la Mora, Luís. 2012. "Como seria o Recife se não existisse o PREZEIS." Commemorative seminar, URB-Recife.

de Oliveira, Nilce. 2009. "Participação de líderes comunitários nas eleições municipais." *Revista VeraCidade* 4(4): 1–16. http://www.veracidade.salvador.ba.gov.br/v4/images/pdf/artigo4.pdf.

de Souza, Flávio A.M. 2001. "Perceived Security of Land Tenure in Recife, Brazil." *Habitat International* 25(2): 175–190. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0197-3975(00)00023-0.

de Vries, Pieter. 2016a. "The Inconsistent City, Participatory Planning, and the Part of No Part in Recife, Brazil." *Antipode* 48(3): 790–808. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12223.

———. 2016b. "Participatory Slum Upgrading as a Disjunctive Process in Recife, Brazil: Urban Coproduction and the Absent Ground of the City." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 37(3): 295–309. https://doi.org/10.1111/sjtg.12156.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 2013 [1988]. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Bloomsbury.

Eiró, Flávio. 2018. "Anti-Poverty Programs and Vote-Buying Strategies." In *Corruption and Norms: Why Informal Rules Matter*, ed. Ina Kubbe and Annika Engelbert, 133–152. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

FASE (Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional), CENDHEC (Centro Dom Helder Câmara de Estudos e Ação Social), and URB (Autarquia de Urbanização do Recife). 1997. *PREZEIS: Manual para lideranças*. Recife: FASE.

Gay, Robert. 1994. *Popular Organization and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro: A Tale of Two Favelas*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

———. 1998. "Rethinking Clientelism: Demands, Discourses and Practices in Contemporary Brazil." *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 65 (December 1998): 7–24. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/25675795.

———. 2006. "The Even More Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Brazil." In *Out of the Shadows: Political Action and the Informal Economy in Latin America*, ed. Patricia Fernández-Kelly and Jon Shefner, 195–217. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Geertz, Clifford. 1960. "The Javanese Kijaji: The Changing Role of a Cultural Broker." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2(2): 228–249. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0010417500000670.

Graham, Richard. 1990. *Patronage and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Brazil*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Granovetter, Mark S. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6): 1360–1380. https://doi.org/10.1086/225469.

Herkenhoff, Beatriz Lima. 1995. *O papel do líder comunitário*. Vitória: Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo.

IBGE (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística). 2010. Census. Accessed 18 February 2018. https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/pe/recife/panorama.

James, Deborah. 2011. "The Return of the Broker: Consensus, Hierarchy, and Choice in South African Land Reform." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17(2): 318–338. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2011.01682.x.

Koster, M. 2012. "Mediating and Getting 'Burnt' in the Gap: Politics and Brokerage in a Recife Slum, Brazil." *Critique of Anthropology* 32(4): 479–497. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275x12456643.

———. 2014. "Brazilian Brokers, Boundaries and Buildings: A Material Culture of Politics." *Journal of Material Culture* 19(2): 125–144. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183514521924.

———. 2015. "Citizenship Agendas, Urban Governance and Social Housing in the Netherlands: An Assemblage Approach." *Citizenship Studies* 19(2): 214–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2015.1005951.

———. 2016. "Brokers in Participatory Urban Governance: Assembling Formal and Informal Politics." *L'Espace Politique* 29. https://doi.org/10.4000/espacepolitique.3930.

Leal, Suely. 2003. *Fetiche da participação popular: Novas práticas de planejamento, gestão e governança democrática no Recife, Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora CEPE.

Leite, Socorro de Paula Barbosa Rodrigues. 2007. *Participação Popular e Acesso à Moradia: As escolhas possíveis para a população removida por intervenções de melhoria urbana do PREZEIS*. Recife: Editora Universitária UFPE.

Lewis, David, and David Mosse, eds. 2006. *Development Brokers and Translators: The Ethnography of Aid and Agencies* ed. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.

Li, Tania Murray. 2007. "Practices of Assemblage and Community Forest Management." *Economy and Society* 36(2): 263–293. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140701254308.

Lindquist, Johan. 2015. "Brokers and Brokerage, Anthropology of." In *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Science*, vol. 2, ed. James D. Wright, 870–874. 2nd edition. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Lomnitz, Larissa Adler. 1988. "Informal Exchange Networks in Formal Systems: A Theoretical Model." *American Anthropologist* 90(1): 42–55. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1988.90.1.02a00030.

McFarlane, Colin. 2011a. "Assemblage and Critical Urbanism." *City* 15(2): 204–224. https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2011.568715.

———. 2011b. "The City as Assemblage: Dwelling and Urban Space." *Environment and Planning D-Society & Space* 29(4): 649–671. https://doi.org/10.1068/d4710.

Montambeault, Françoise. 2016. *The Politics of Local Participatory Democracy in Latin America: Institutions, Actors, and Interactions*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Nail, Thomas. 2017. "What Is an Assemblage?" *SubStance* 46(1): 21–37. https://doi.org/10.3368/ss.46.1.21.

Phillips, John. 2006. "Agencement/Assemblage." *Theory Culture & Society* 23(2–3): 108–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/026327640602300219.

Piliavsky, Anastasia, ed. 2014. *Patronage as Politics in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richmond, Matthew Aaron. 2018. "Rio de Janeiro's Favela Assemblage: Accounting for the Durability of an Unstable Object." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 36(6): 1045–1062. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775817753155.

Stovel, Katherine, and Lynette Shaw. 2012. "Brokerage." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38(1): 139–158. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150054.

Villela, Jorge Luiz Mattar. 2004. *O povo em armas: Violência e política no sertão de Pernambuco*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará.

Wang, J. 2017. "Assemblage Urbanism." In *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Urban and Regional Studies*, ed. by Anthony M. Orum. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Wise, J. MacGregor. 2005. "Assemblage." In *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts*, ed. Charles J. Stivale, 77–87. Chesham: Acumen.

Wolf, Eric R. 1956. "Aspects of Group Relations in a Complex Society: Mexico." *American Anthropologist* 58(6): 1065–1078. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1956.58.6.02a00070.