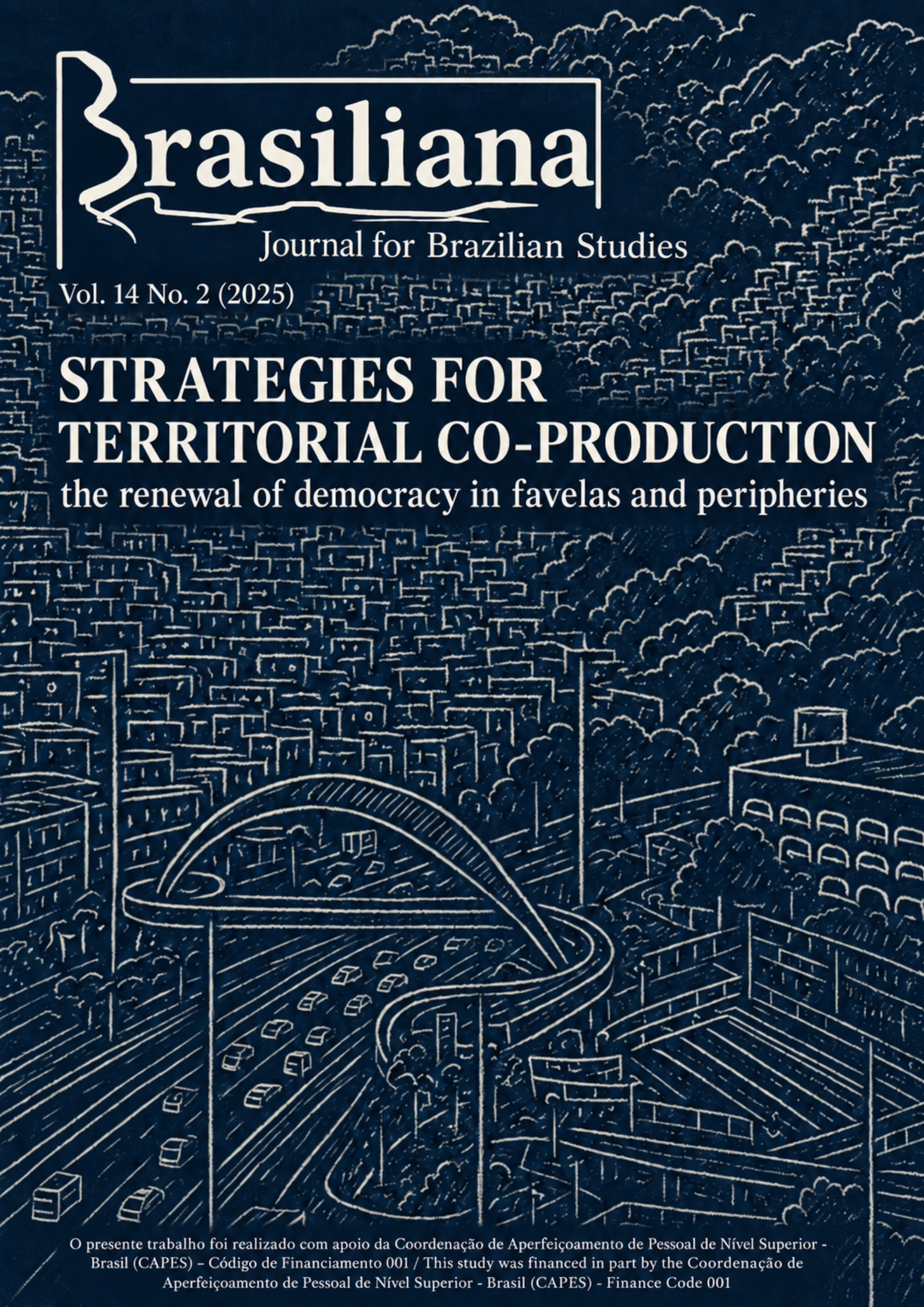




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STRATEGIES FOR TERRITORIAL CO-PRODUCTION

the renewal of democracy in favelas and peripheries

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The Favela, The City, Rocinha, and University

Abstract

How can we explain the pattern of urban segregation characteristic of Rio de Janeiro's favelas, located in the richest areas of the city? And what does it reveal about the urban dynamics of Brazilian cities? I will attempt to answer this question through a historical-sociological approach, taking into account the lasting impact of slavery and multiethnic relations on Brazilian urban development and territorial logic, the importance of the favela as an urban form shaped by the modernization process of the country's cities, the relationship between economy, politics, and territory, and, finally, the transformative potential of the ongoing symbiosis between science and the favela. In order to deepen this discussion, I present in a special way the case of Rocinha, with their ostentatious presence on the public scene as a highly dense popular housing cluster.

The favelas of Rio de Janeiro, especially the large ones located in central areas like Rocinha, stand out as an expression of a complex pattern of urban segregation affecting the poor and working-class population. This pattern is quite different from that found in the industrial cities at the core of capitalism, as well as in São Paulo, where poverty was initially hidden behind factory warehouses in gloomy neighborhoods and later pushed en masse to distant peripheries.

In the case of Rocinha and other favelas in similar situations, their presence is ostentatious, imposing itself on the public scene as a highly dense popular housing cluster. It is strategically located along the axis connecting the two most valuable real estate markets in Rio de Janeiro: the South Zone and Barra da Tijuca. How can this pattern of segregation be explained, and what does it reveal about the urban dynamics of Brazilian cities?

I will attempt to answer this question through a historical-sociological approach, taking into account the lasting impact of slavery and multiethnic relations on Brazilian urban development and territorial logic, the importance of the favela as an urban form shaped by the modernization process of the country's cities, the relationship between economy, politics,

and territory, and, finally, the transformative potential of the ongoing symbiosis between science and the favela.

The Interplay Between Favela and City

To better frame our reflection, we must begin by considering the specific characteristics of Brazilian cities with a colonial past. By the early 20th century, as the country transitioned from monarchy to republic, these cities were still profoundly marked by the burden of slavery, which remained officially in place until 1888. In a country still dominated by large rural estates scattered across its vast territory, the few more populous urban centers—besides Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, only Salvador and Recife had more than 100,000 inhabitants in 1900—had a massive Black presence (both Black and mixed-race individuals) but were controlled by white elites.

Although these elites did not refrain from using techniques of what Gilroy (2012) calls "ethnic terror," commonly employed in post-slavery American societies, they did not entirely prevent the emergence of circuits of exchange and cooperation within these cities. These circuits involved small services, as well as cultural and immaterial goods produced by the Black population. In cities like Salvador and Rio de Janeiro, these circuits were far more than a secondary flow; in many cases, they played a decisive role in shaping urban dynamics. The fact is that these cities, shaped by their colonial past, entered the republican era as arenas of conflict, barely concealing their ethnic dimension. More than processes of mixing or syncretism, they were marked by disputes.

For this reason, the interpretative framework proposed by Gilberto Freyre and later updated, with slight modifications, by Antonio Risério (2012) appears inadequate. Risério argues that Brazilian cities were primarily shaped by mixture and proximity, in contrast to Hispanic colonial cities, which were supposedly characterized by clear segregation between classes and between whites and non-whites. According to his argument, the "hierarchical and informal, violent and playful, unequal and gregarious" nature of Brazilian cities reflects the mestizo character of Brazilian society, reinforced by the "survival and affirmation of African cultural forms within our built environment" (ibid.).

In a different direction, we suggest that it would be more pertinent to consider that the strong Black presence in Brazilian urban life forged a logic of *porosity* rather than mere "permissiveness." It was only through this insidious presence in the interstices of neighborhoods that a situation was avoided in which whites would have been confined to racial citadels. In Rio de Janeiro, the capital of both the Empire and the Republic (until 1960), this logic is particularly relevant. Luis Costa Pinto, in *O Negro no Rio de Janeiro*, observed—based on the results of the first census conducted by IBGE in 1940—that without the presence of favelas, there would be no Black people in Rio de Janeiro's South Zone (Costa Pinto, 1998 [1953]).

As an urban form shaped by a specific pattern of relations between whites and Blacks, the favela undeniably predates the official end of slavery—or at the very least, its logic was already embedded in the configuration of Brazilian cities. However, it is equally true that only with abolition (1888) and the establishment of the republic (1889) did the favela as a spatial form gain momentum, becoming an institutionalized logic of urban segregation. From that point onward, the porous ways in which spaces and circuits connecting Blacks and whites intersected began to require more intense negotiations. This is evident, for example, in the relationships established between white landlords renting properties and Black tenants seeking to live in central areas that would later be classified as favelas—a process well documented by Maria Laís Pereira da Silva (2005).

This very porosity is also reflected in the fact that these working-class dwellings in central areas were, from the outset, under constant threat of removal—sometimes carried out, sometimes not—depending on the complex web of political and economic mediations at play. The occupation of Rocinha in the 1920s itself followed this logic, combining the use of both public and private lands, failed attempts at formal subdivision, and the informal settlement of the slopes of Morro Dois Irmãos.

Alongside housing, Black families descended from enslaved people asserted their presence in urban commercial circuits by participating in various forms of small-scale services offered to the white population. These included highly significant cultural and religious services, which earned them some degree of social prestige while simultaneously subjecting them to constant persecution by the police, often encouraged by journalistic chronicles.

Hasbaert's proposition is particularly useful in helping us understand that the occupation of hillsides, riverbanks, and lagoons in urban areas is more than a mere "conquest" of shelter — it is an act of *territory construction*. This territory is simultaneously symbolic, affective, and spiritual. This is why, in a city like Rio de Janeiro, each favela from the first generation of occupations (broadly speaking, those established between the late 19th century and the late 1920s) marked the creation of a distinct popular space with its own characteristics.

"Rio	de	ladeiras
Civilização		encruzilhada
Cada ribanceira é uma nação (...)"		

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These multiple ways of asserting presence in the city make it clear that, when reduced to mere market calculations or a purely rational concern with shelter, the true significance of these territories for their inhabitants becomes incomprehensible.

It is from this process that specific spatial and cultural forms emerge, such as the favelas—expressions of a territoriality that, more than just spaces of habitation, serve as sources of identity and collective struggle. It makes sense, therefore, to think of the favela as a kind of *synthesis* that combines the concrete conditions of Brazilian urban experience with elements of a *cosmogony* rooted in African (and Indigenous) traditions that predate slavery. On a comparative scale, one can understand the favela as a *diasporic construct*, shaped by hybrid forms of articulating the past with the present. As Gilroy (2012) argues, in this context, “tradition is not now being used either to identify a lost past or to name a compensatory culture that would reestablish access to it” (p. 370). This is a *heritagized* past, as proposed by Muniz Sodré (2019), one that is revived through the “group transmission of knowledge, techniques, and competencies” (p. 75); a heritage understood as a collective repository of inheritances, mobilized to navigate a present marked by exclusion. In the case of Brazil, this present is defined by a city that, in its attempt to conform to a European civilizational ideal, sought to render the newly emancipated Black population invisible.

From its inception, then, the favela has existed under a dual sign—both as a space of exclusion, reinforcing the erasure of Black presence in the city, and as a space of resistance: a *symbolically charged space-time* of habitation, a site for the cultivation of a Black cosmogony, and, through that, a form of *urban insertion*. For this reason, the favela should not be interpreted as a mere Black enclave within a predominantly white city. Instead, it is a *territory* shaped by its foundational contradictions: **exclusion/inclusion in the city; invisibility/visibility; submission/resistance/insurgence**. As a territory, it is a space of social, ethnic, and class relations, forged as an integral part of the city’s dynamics.

Anchoring our analysis in this perspective helps us better understand how the favela evolved with the mass arrival of migrants from rural areas and the Brazilian interior to urban centers like Rio de Janeiro. Upon arrival, these migrants encountered pre-existing favelas or simply identified available land for new occupations—often on riverbanks or steep hillsides,

which were soon perceived as *favelas*, mimicking the already established urban form in the city's imagination.

In this regard, it is particularly revealing how Rocinha—an occupation on the slopes of Morro Dois Irmãos—began to be recognized as a favela precisely during the peak period of migration, mostly from the Brazilian Northeast. As Mariana Costa (2022) highlights, this identification primarily emerged in journalistic narratives, which warned of the supposedly harmful process of Rocinha's *favelization*.

By this time, the word *favela* had already been firmly established as a noun; *favelizar* had entered the lexicon as a verb, and *favelado* had come to define a particular social type within the city. Despite the pejorative connotations attached to these terms by dominant actors in urban life—including economic and media elites—the concept of *favela* remains an ambiguous one: simultaneously a marker of stigma and a symbol of resistance.

In reality, the *fluid nature* of the term *favela* reflects the fact that, as a *sign*, it embodies a collective and deeply contradictory construct. This is because the favela, as both territory and collective representation, has been forged by multiple hands: by the city's wealthier white classes, who have sought to crystallize the favela as a fixed pattern of segregation—one that, while clearly demarcating the boundaries of an exclusionary city, still keeps a labor force of poor workers nearby, willing to perform low-paid and precarious jobs. But the favela has also been shaped by the urban poor themselves, who—now far more multiethnic due to migration—have gradually *redefined* its meaning, asserting it as a legitimate *territory*. Because it is shaped by so many hands, the favela contains this *ambiguity*, which often makes it seem enigmatic: both an expression of a *continuous logic of exclusion*, crafted and reproduced by the city's elite and middle classes, and a *source of belonging and collective struggle* for the poor.

The territorial strength of favelas assumes fundamental importance in defining situations of encounters and conflicts that arise between Black people established in urban life and poor white people, who often came directly from an extremely impoverished rural life in the large estates of the Northeast, with no urban culture whatsoever. From this process, beyond mutual prejudices, also emerge marriages, friendships, and new collective organizations, in dynamics that could only fully develop under the comfort produced by the shared territorial identity provided by the favela. The history of Rocinha is a strong expression of this process.

This aspect is fundamental to understanding how, in the end, favelas survived the countless attempts to “extinguish” them, to use a term dear to the vocabulary of *remocionismo*. In fact, as we have already observed, they have always been more than just shelter, which is why housing policies that combine removal with the construction of housing projects in the peripheries have always been outright rejected by their supposed beneficiaries.

This is why the notion of a “divided city” is so misleading when trying to grasp the urban dynamics of Rio de Janeiro, a notion that gained enormous prominence following Zuenir Ventura’s book of the same name (*Cidade Partida*, 1994). While on the surface it aims to denounce the existence of borders and segregation, in reality, this notion empties what, especially in Rio, may be its main peculiarity and, as we will see, its greatest strength. Because, in truth, there have never been walls—not even symbolic ones—separating the favela from the neighborhoods adjacent to it; despite this, the image of the divided city reifies this premise in order to offer, as an alternative, forms of “integration” marked by social functionalism.

What needs to be illuminated is precisely the network that interconnects the favelas and the city, not the wall; it is in the network that favela territoriality is realized; it is the scale of the network that can help us understand the most perverse processes, especially the attempt—never completely achieved—to criminalize favelas to better justify police operations that, when closely examined, do not follow the logic of the wall but rather that of the network involving the trade of drugs, weapons, and other goods. A focus on the network can help us better perceive these marks of the past and the opportunities they bring for imagining other models of the city and other paths for its democratization.

Territory, politics, and market

The best way to think from the perspective of the network is through the articulation between territory, politics, and market. Our hypothesis is that in favelas and peripheries, the outcome of the clash between the logic of territory and the logic of the market tends to animate the struggle for territorial power, creating a scenario that allows for both the formation of violent local strongmen, powerful enough to impose exploitative practices unthinkable outside these territories, and the emergence of new forms of struggle for rights and the valuation of other forms of capital—social, cultural, and symbolic, to evoke Bourdieu’s well-known conceptual typology (1992). In any case, a good understanding of this dynamic, which

involves economic, political, and territorial dimensions and constitutes a kind of dialectic between the commodification of territory and the territorialization of the market, allows us to shed light on the worst expressions of urban neoliberalism, thereby contributing to valuing territorial forms of resistance aimed at the struggle for rights.

The debate on the relationship between favela and market was redefined from the 1990s onward. From disputes around the theory of marginality, which viewed the favela population as being on the margins of the urban economy (Perlman, 1977), we have arrived at its almost complete opposite, which speaks of the economic and political strength of favela and peripheral territories. Feltran's (2014) studies on the monetization of social relations in favelas and peripheries highlight a new configuration, facilitated by the greater availability of credit for low-income families as well as by the increase in their purchasing power. Here, Feltran's analysis converges with that of Vera Silva Telles (2010), who proposes paying close attention to the networks that permeate both the formal and informal economy, which ultimately render the use of these categories invalid for guiding urban economic policies.

After all, in the monetized world of favelas and peripheries, with access to popular consumption, a market emerges that crosses the boundaries of formal and informal, as well as legal and illegal, without ceremony. Individuals themselves make these transitions, operating on both ends of the economy, buying and selling products and services of various origins. Meanwhile, the small and medium-sized business market gains new density, from pharmacies to construction supply stores, from the construction industry to brokerage services, entertainment, education, dentistry, and small clinics, as well as the clandestine sale of access to digital cable TV networks (*gatonets*), among others.

To make this inventory of key concepts more complete in our analysis of the dynamics of these territories of "new poverty" —to use once again the category adopted by Feltran—it is important to situate these transformations of the urban poor within a broader political framework. For this, the notion of *insurgent citizenship*, on one hand, and that of *violent sociability*, on the other, can be quite useful in articulating the logics of territory as both a structure of power and a site of political struggle for the right to the city.

Formulated by the American anthropologist James Holston (2013), largely based on his study of São Paulo's peripheries, the notion of *insurgent citizenship* seeks to highlight the fact that the

fight for citizenship is also a fight against the privileges of those who maintain what he calls *entrenched citizenship*. According to Holston, self-construction and the entire collective process of building and appropriating territory function as an assertion of citizenship that, in a way, creates a new city for new citizens. Without delving deeper into this fertile concept, it is important for now simply to point out that the notion of *insurgent citizenship* describes a form of political resistance that is inseparable from territory. It represents, so to speak, a kind of *territorialization of politics*, following a trajectory that includes challenging pre-existing urban regulatory frameworks deemed inadequate to local realities, fostering new articulations between public and private spheres, and—most notably—activating economic participation through new circuits of commerce and services. It is also a struggle against a legal and state structure designed to serve the interests of the *entrenched*.

However, while the notion of *insurgent citizenship* has the great merit of emphasizing conflicts with actors external to the territory—especially with the state itself, which predominantly represents *entrenched* citizens—it needs to be reconsidered to account for forms of control and power that are inherent to these territories, particularly as they become increasingly shaped by economic activity. To this end, the concept of *violent sociability*, formulated by Luis Antonio Machado da Silva (2008), proves highly useful.

Drawing from a framework influenced by Anthony Giddens, particularly the notions of routinization of everyday life and reciprocal expectations, Machado da Silva highlights that *violent sociability* is one in which regulation is ultimately dictated by the *law of the strongest*. However, this characteristic is far from being exclusive to favelas and peripheries; rather, it is present in various places and situations that citizens navigate in their daily lives, wherever conduct is regulated by power dynamics that favor the stronger party.

In this sense, Machado argues, the major specificity of favelas and peripheries lies in the fact that, due to the presence of armed groups and even the *de facto* authorization granted to police forces to operate within them, residents are exposed to *violent sociability* at an absurdly high level. This exposure translates into extreme vulnerability to risks and violence, while simultaneously demanding relentless efforts by residents to maintain some level of normalcy in their routines.

With the conversion of favelas and peripheries into sites of multiple markets—of drugs and weapons, commerce and services, housing and construction, leisure activities, and more—the new context allows violent sociability to permeate economic relations. In this regard, the *militia model* of exploiting all popular consumer goods and controlling all economic activities in the favelas and peripheries where they operate represents the most extreme form of domination. Historically, in areas where drug trafficking groups still prevail, control over the economy tends to be less extensive. However, as is well known, the trend is for these groups to increasingly operate according to militia logic—and vice versa. This scenario is evident, for instance, in Rocinha, which is dominated by a drug trafficking faction but has increasingly adopted militia-like strategies, exerting growing influence over various economic activities in the favela, including construction and control over the stock of rental properties.

However, the economic enclosure that turns violent sociability into a kind of language for the local market does not occur without resistance and opposition. On the contrary, this is precisely where the struggle *from* the territory has gained renewed strength as a form of *insurgent citizenship*. The valorization of territory reinforces its communal character, where the market sees only consumers; kinship ties give meaning to land use, where the market sees only new real estate developments; the sense of belonging asserts itself as collective identity, where the market sees only individuals and their desires; the immense efforts by families and community organizations to protect the physical and mental well-being of children and young people emerge, where the market sees only potential consumers of illicit drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and other goods.

It is this dialectic between *territorialization and market* that ultimately allows us to speak of the *territorialization of the market* rather than merely the *commodification of territory*. Or better yet, it is this dialectic between territory and market that enables us to conceive them as poles in which, in some cases, the market dominates, while in others, territory asserts itself as the primary force. Ultimately, it is only a matter of degree, allowing us to compare different urban configurations.

Rocinha's initial occupation occurred before the market had firmly embedded itself in favela life. For a long time, its development could be described within the framework of the debate between *marginality theory* and its critiques—that is, a precarious population, almost entirely

dependent on external economic and political agents, yet gradually building a strong sense of belonging through community efforts, from mutual aid projects to collective struggles for daycare centers, health clinics, schools, and other public facilities. Even the arrival of drug trafficking groups happened progressively, eventually giving way to a fierce struggle for paramilitary control of the territory. This transition became particularly visible during Rocinha's *first great war* in the late 1980s, marking a shift in which the armed group began subjugating local associative life. Other major conflicts would follow.

Despite this, Rocinha is distinguished by its remarkable multiplicity of non-governmental organizations and community associations, maintaining a degree of autonomy from the trafficking factions. In Rocinha, *territorialization*, best expressed in the motto "*nós por nós*" ("us for us"), operates as a guiding principle rooted in the strength of the territory itself. This can manifest in a positive key—as a form of struggle, of reinforcing belonging, and of recognition. Such a structure demands that market actors—including drug traffickers—constantly seek legitimacy to operate within the territory.

At the same time, the *asymmetric relationship* with the broader city and public authorities, along with the continuous struggle against *entrenched citizenship*, means that Rocinha's residents inevitably experience, directly or indirectly, the logic of *violent sociability*. A clear example of this can be found in the rental market: to whom does a landlord turn in case of delayed rent payments? Who acts as the guarantor of a lease agreement? Small and medium-sized property owners in the favela often find themselves relying on the local strongman for such matters. To a certain extent, this applies to most economic activities.

Thus, although less overt and totalitarian than in areas dominated by militias, Rocinha's economy is increasingly subjected to paramilitary control. This influence may even extend to the functioning of public services, such as transportation and waste management. This reality underscores the fact that any public security policy that fails to consider the authority exercised by drug factions within Rocinha's territorial economy is likely to fail, as it risks undermining the intricate system in which formal and informal, legal and illicit economic activities are structurally embedded.

Rocinha, however, is characterized by a relative openness that allows for a richer and more complex exchange with the city. In the network it maintains with the city, gaps emerge that

enable the adoption of territory as a source of struggle and resistance to find some success, allowing for greater articulation with public spheres that favor the grammar of rights. It is within these gaps that we can envision a space for an innovative and transformative articulation between science and the favela.

Science and Favela

In Rio de Janeiro, favela and science—or rather, the actors and processes involved in each of these configurations—have developed a closer relationship in recent decades, particularly following the institutional structuring established by the 1988 Constitution. Today, therefore, the effects of this relationship should not be sought only in the favela, as consistent changes are also occurring within science, and not just within social sciences.

Following the lineage of authors such as Michel Callon (1995) and Bruno Latour (1987), one could argue that we are witnessing the consolidation and expansion of *sociotechnical networks*, characterized by the “negotiated translation” of perspectives and knowledge into facts and artifacts. These negotiations are increasingly complex as they must simultaneously incorporate different collective actors from both the scientific world and the urban peripheries. To this conception of sociotechnical networks, we can add another, which concerns the *construction of public problems*, as proposed by Cefai (2013). While Callon and Latour approach the concept of networks from a socio-anthropology of science—inevitably dealing with social groups, identities, and social movements—Cefai takes an inverse path, starting from the tradition of social movement research to also arrive, in a different manner, at the notion of a network. For Cefai, constructing a public problem requires a process of articulation between different actors, generally including civil society as a whole, the media, various segments of the public sector, and specialized academic knowledge.

Thus, the constitution of a public problem depends on maximizing its exposure and forming an informed public capable of organizing its opinion. This elaboration relies on associational life, cooperation, and communication among different actors who recognize themselves in the identification of a shared concern. The greater the diversity of actors involved in a common issue, the more *public* the problem becomes. Here, the participation of universities producing specialized knowledge, the media amplifying opinions and debates,

and reflexively engaged activists all contribute to the formation of public problems within arenas populated by actors with different experiences of the issue at hand. Only when diverse representations condense into a common representation can we say that a public problem has been established.

The idea of a *network* thus gains meaning as a deliberate form of articulation between different actors, including social movements, research groups, individuals, and media outlets. Constructing public problems, therefore, becomes the horizon for groups vying for space in the public arena to assert their agenda. From this perspective, one can say that the public agenda is established according to criteria of importance defined by the greater or lesser strength of the network of actors mobilized in each case.

Cefai's perspective compels us to reconsider Latour's analysis. While Latour's approach is based on the premise of *translation*, it does not emphasize the role of social actors to the same extent that it highlights the protagonism of science and its institutions. In this sense, the *Latourian laboratory*, which played a central role in his *Laboratory Life* (Latour & Woolgar, 1997), loses its privileged position, as science becomes both more important and more ordinary. This shift is driven by two complementary processes: (a) the democratization of access to universities, which has diversified undergraduate and graduate programs as well as research centers, making science itself more contested; and (b) the breakdown of institutional boundaries due to new forms of communication.

It is not the purpose here to fully explore this fascinating research agenda concerning the transformations reshaping the relationship between science and society. However, mentioning these shifts allows us to more clearly outline the hypothesis that the articulation between universities and social movements, combined with the intensified use of virtual meeting platforms in the post-pandemic context, strengthens and deepens connections within sociotechnical networks that previously communicated little. This process has also created new nodes of engagement, expanding public imagination and enabling new methods of knowledge production. The mass entry of poor, largely Black youth—many from or still residing in favelas—into universities crowns this process of updating the role of science.

Acknowledging this does not mean ignoring the emergence of renewed forms of exclusion, possibly stemming from differences in how popular areas and groups are embedded within

sociotechnical networks. In the case of Rio de Janeiro, moreover, one can assume that due to its *political ecology*—and the way drug traffickers and militia groups control territories and populations—the experimentation with this new scientific framework will inevitably face clear limits to its generalization.

However, the most recent development in this nexus between science and the favela—where science is no longer represented merely by a university research group associating with local actors to construct an object of social interest, but rather becomes the *medium* of communication between diverse actors—unveils new possibilities that have yet to be fully explored. In other words, what we have been witnessing is not merely a quantitative change, a “greater volume of work” on the objects that have shaped the field of urban research, but a *qualitative transformation* in the relationship between science and the favelas, in which the former becomes an *agent of inclusion* and a *synonym for public policy*. It is in this context that UNIR was conceived.

The formation of this new university space assumes, therefore, that today the greatest defenders of the city are found in the favelas and peripheries—more specifically, within their collectives and organizations, which have been fighting for decades for the right to life, education, health, sanitation, and culture. They have been struggling for urban rights, against racism, and in defense of opportunities for children and young people, engaging in multiple and heroic forms of resistance against the fatalism that seems to have overtaken much of our cities. It is within this daily struggle and mobilization—led by those who refuse to accept the myriad injustices to which they are subjected—that we find the spark of change, the essence of *insurgent citizenship*.

Strengthened and supported by networks with universities, these collectives and organizations can help break the pattern of urban segregation rooted in the stigma of the favela and its deeply racialized connotations. In fact, the exchange of knowledge, expertise, experiences, and social technologies that these networks can foster revitalizes the commitment to the *universalization of the right to the city's resources*. For this reason, they also have the potential to serve as *symbolic and political barriers* against the expansion of the *narcomilícia*—which, after all, is not merely a criminal enterprise but also a *mafia-like logic* of profit extraction and concentration of a type of power that directly undermines the very essence of the city.

For this task, universities and research institutions are a *fundamental asset*—both in the training of young researchers from the favelas, as is already happening, and in the construction of research and outreach projects with this objective. It is significant that FAPERJ and FIOCRUZ have been launching calls for proposals specifically targeting organizations from favelas and peripheries. Added to this are the already well-established initiatives of institutions such as *Casa Fluminense*, *Redes da Maré*, *Instituto Maria e João Aleixo*, and a diverse range of projects such as the *Dicionário de Favelas Marielle Franco*, *Plano de Ação Popular do CPX*, and *Expo Favela*. It is within this context that we situate the creation of the Center for Research and Knowledge Articulation at PUC-Rio – Rocinha (UNIR).

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Panorama da Favela da Rocinha no século XXI na perspectiva da construção colaborativa de Política de Dados de Conhecimento.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta um panorama da Rocinha, maior favela do Brasil segundo o Censo de 2022 (72.021 habitantes e 30.371 domicílios), localizada em área estratégica da Zona Sul do Rio de Janeiro, entre bairros de alto poder aquisitivo. Analisa sua trajetória histórica e os desafios contemporâneos, como o adensamento excessivo e a precariedade do saneamento. Após os investimentos do Programa PAC (2008–2011), vinculados à preparação para os Jogos Olímpicos (2010–2016), houve retração da presença estatal e abandono dos programas de urbanização, resultando em especulação imobiliária, exploração ilegal de serviços, privatização de espaços públicos por grupos criminosos e agravamento das condições de saneamento e saúde.

Em resposta, organizações locais, universidades e instituições de pesquisa têm buscado alternativas para reposicionar a Rocinha no debate público, promovendo maior engajamento territorial e participação democrática. Destaca-se a criação do UNIR – Centro de Pesquisas e Articulação de Conhecimentos PUC-Rio/Rocinha, que organiza um portal e uma plataforma pública de dados georreferenciados, permitindo analisar a Rocinha como componente estrutural da cidade, evidenciando seu histórico de lutas e conquistas, explorando desigualdades existentes e as consequências do adensamento da favela para o saneamento, o meio ambiente e a saúde pública — temas centrais do artigo.

Palavras-chave: Política de Dados de Conhecimento; Cidadania Urbana; Urbanização de Favelas; Rocinha (Brasil).

1. Introdução

A distribuição assimétrica de serviços e direitos de cidadania nos territórios populares em comparação ao restante da cidade é agravada pela criminalização dos pobres, controle e exploração por grupos criminosos e pela escalada do crime violento e do abuso policial nas grandes metrópoles brasileiras. Essa realidade traduz a disjunção fundamental em relação à democracia apontada por Caldeira & Holston (1999), apesar do horizonte de igualdade e justiça garantido pela Constituição Brasileira de 1988. O desequilíbrio vem sendo intensificado pelo abandono do poder público e pelo descrédito nas instituições de direito e justiça, dentro de uma visão ultraliberal em que o Estado — único capaz de produzir justiça social — é tido como corrupto e ineficiente.

Apesar de as favelas terem resistido a constantes expulsões e alcançado níveis significativos de permanência, aceitação e reconhecimento institucional e simbólico (Machado da Silva, 2002), seus moradores continuam submetidos a formas de cidadania hierarquizada que os colocam em posição inferior em relação às camadas mais abastadas. Esse cenário alimenta a cultura de medo e desconfiança na urbe e contribui para a crescente fortificação dos espaços — fenômeno amplamente discutido por Caldeira (2000), ao caracterizar a cidade de muros.

Na contramão dessa corrente, grupos periféricos historicamente excluídos e marginalizados conseguiram construir formas diferenciadas de organização coletiva em torno das questões do território e da luta pelo direito à cidade. Essas iniciativas buscaram condições menos desiguais de moradia denunciando a criminalização dos pobres e a escalada da violência, fenômeno que Holston (2008; 2009) conceituou como cidadania insurgente.

Muitas vezes submetidos a remoções, esses grupos historicamente desenraizados e privados de recursos construíram seus espaços na cidade por meio de comunidades erguidas de forma autônoma. Para isso, recorreram a adaptações criativas do ambiente e à mobilização coletiva em torno de uma agenda de cidadania da qual haviam sido excluídos. Nas brechas de uma estrutura social complexa — marcada não pela ausência, mas pela presença seletiva e negligente do Estado — os territórios populares brasileiros adentraram o século XXI operando com elevado grau de autonomia, especialmente nas grandes metrópoles.

As práticas neoliberais que hoje ditam o desenvolvimento das cidades, imprimem dinâmicas de privatização e especulação que se aplicam aos territórios populares de forma ainda mais acentuada, em função da informalidade e da concorrência entre agentes locais de domínio. Esse processo aprofunda desigualdades e contribui para a carestia e a precarização das condições de vida nas periferias.

Ainda assim, a despeito das carências e do ambiente de disputa, florescem formas criativas de resistência a partir de dinâmicas de solidariedade e apoio. São práticas que vêm se reconfigurando com o surgimento de coletivos jovens que trazem narrativas identitárias, e com o reengajamento de organizações associativas clássicas. São atores que ganharam capacidade de mobilização com a transformação digital de nossa sociedade e com a aproximação às universidades, instituições de pesquisa e organizações locais. Esse movimento reflete, em larga medida, transformações estruturais na política educacional brasileira das últimas décadas, como a ampliação do acesso de jovens das periferias ao ensino superior e a valorização da extensão universitária no ensino público. A partir de estratégias que priorizam campanhas e ações pragmáticas e focais, em detrimento de uma mobilização político-ideológica mais ampla, essas organizações encontraram meios de manter um engajamento significativo da população delineando novas formas de práticas cidadãs contestatórias.

Nas últimas décadas, observa-se um crescimento progressivo da aproximação entre universidades e movimentos sociais. Esse processo foi impulsionado tanto pela curricularização da extensão universitária — que passou a compor ao menos 10% da carga horária dos cursos de graduação, conforme diretrizes do MEC — quanto por outras políticas institucionais de fomento à participação social. Essa aproximação tende a se fortalecer ainda mais à medida que se articula a uma pedagogia inspirada em Paulo Freire (1970), centrada no desenvolvimento da consciência crítica e na capacidade de ação transformadora. Supera-

se, assim, práticas predominantemente assistencialistas em favor de abordagens decoloniais mais expressivas.

Essa inflexão epistemológica encontra ressonância no modelo de conhecimento pluriversitário e solidário proposto por Santos (2004), que defende uma ciência engajada com os problemas concretos da sociedade, ancorada em práticas transdisciplinares e participativas que ultrapassam os limites da academia. Nesse contexto, experiências de extensão universitária têm contribuído para ampliar o compromisso das instituições de ensino superior brasileiras com as demandas reais dos territórios. Promovem, assim, a formação de redes sociotécnicas e a construção de vínculos de confiança entre técnicos, acadêmicos e grupos socioespaciais. Esses vínculos favorecem o reconhecimento de novos atores sociais, o engajamento da população nos processos decisórios, a ampliação do debate público, a visibilização de conflitos e a mediação qualificada por meio da atuação acadêmica (Kapp, 2018).

Apesar dos avanços, persistem lacunas que limitam a atuação mais assertiva dos movimentos sociais e grupos sociotécnicos na construção de agendas que sejam coerentes com a realidade complexa de favelas e periferias. Entre os principais obstáculos, destaca-se a escassez — ou, paradoxalmente, o excesso desarticulado e pouco acessível ao público em geral — de dados, estudos técnicos e pesquisas sobre assentamentos informais ou periféricos. Essa situação frequentemente dificulta a compreensão aprofundada das realidades locais por parte dos moradores, colocando-os em posição subalterna no debate público. Há falta de transparência sobre a aplicação dos investimentos públicos nas localidades e, diante da rotatividade institucional, levantamentos e estudos desenvolvidos muitas vezes se perdem em diferentes repartições ou secretarias. Os dados censitários, por exemplo, costumam ser divulgados de forma agregada, inviabilizando análises mais detalhadas por subsetores internos, o que reflete desigualdades e diversidades socioespaciais. No campo acadêmico, as pesquisas são frequentemente fragmentadas entre departamentos e marcadas por linguagem especializada, o que compromete seu acesso e apropriação pelas comunidades e grupos sociais.

Essa insuficiência de conhecimento público sobre localidades favorece a reprodução de estigmas, preconceitos e visões homogeneizantes. A falta de acesso a informações qualificadas restringe a ação política, dificultando a identificação de situações complexas que deveriam ser vistas de forma integrada entre diferentes campos disciplinares. Isso compromete a formulação de agendas voltadas ao desenvolvimento sustentável, políticas públicas integradas e a proposição de novos modelos de governança.

2. A articulação de conhecimentos PUC-Rio/Rocinha

A Rocinha possui uma história centenária. Situada em um vale entre os bairros de alta renda da Gávea e de São Conrado, destaca-se por sua resistência histórica, importância demográfica e cultural, além do déficit significativo de saneamento.

Apesar dos estigmas de ilegalidade e violência frequentemente reforçados pela mídia, a Rocinha ocupa posição de destaque no circuito turístico e no cenário acadêmico brasileiro, sendo uma das favelas mais estudadas do país. No entanto, os moradores frequentemente questionam a validade das pesquisas e dos dados oficiais, como os do IBGE, com

argumentos do tipo: “*nunca minha casa foi visitada por um recenseador*” ou contestações em relação ao número de habitantes e domicílios divulgados, considerados “bem abaixo do número real”. A desconfiança sobre os dados colabora para uma espécie de mito megalomaniaco que afirma a identidade da Rocinha como “a maior favela do Brasil”, mas pouco contribui para o reconhecimento da heterogeneidade interna e debate sobre questões cotidianas que permanecem pouco problematizadas.

Para enfrentar essas lacunas, foi criado o UNIR – Centro de Pesquisas e Articulação de Conhecimentos PUC-Rio/Rocinha, uma iniciativa da Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro que se apoia na histórica relação da instituição com os moradores da Rocinha. Essa conexão se fundamenta não apenas na proximidade geográfica entre o campus universitário e a favela, ambos situados no mesmo bairro, mas também na significativa presença de funcionários e estudantes da universidade que residem na Rocinha. Além disso, a PUC-Rio mantém diversas pesquisas, projetos de extensão e serviços direcionados à comunidade e às áreas adjacentes, consolidando um vínculo institucional contínuo.

Inspirado em abordagens que utilizam a ciência de dados como ferramenta de ação política (Green, 2021), como o Observatório de Favelas (2001) e a ONG Redes da Maré (2007), o UNIR aposta na política de dados e no compartilhamento de saberes para aprofundar o conhecimento sobre a Rocinha, responder às demandas da população e enfrentar estereótipos e estigmas. Reconhece-se que o acúmulo de conhecimentos científicos produzidos dentro da universidade deve ser acessível às organizações locais e população de toda cidade favorecendo a formulação de políticas públicas mais eficazes. Por outro lado, há um grande potencial dentro das universidade para o desenvolvimentos de pesquisas voltadas à inovação e para o desenvolvimento de tecnologias aplicáveis à resolução de problemas cotidianos nos territórios populares. Nesse sentido, o UNIR se constitui como um espaço interdisciplinar que aproxima alunos e pesquisadores de diferentes departamentos aos grupos organizados da Rocinha, promovendo a integração entre saberes acadêmicos e locais e favorecendo análises críticas sensíveis à história e à diversidade interna da comunidade.

Em sua primeira fase o UNIR contou com o apoio do Edital FAPERJ Favela Inteligente na Rocinha orientado para a criação de um portal e de uma plataforma georreferenciada de dados sobre a Rocinha, com a expectativa de construir uma base pública de dados confiáveis, acessíveis a diversos públicos. Parte do conteúdo desse portal é apresentada em texto a seguir, discutindo a história da favela da Rocinha como um componente estrutural da cidade que também reflete dinâmicas do capital na produção do espaço (Lefebvre, 1999) de forma mais ampla. O texto examina como o crescimento econômico e demográfico da Rocinha tem acentuado desigualdades internas e agravado problemas de saneamento que geram impactos negativos sobre o meio ambiente e saúde dos moradores.

As reflexões foram fundamentadas na análise de relatórios técnicos, pesquisas acadêmicas e informações provenientes de quatro bases de dados distintas: Censo PAC 2009, Censo IBGE 2010, Territórios Sociais PCRJ-IPP 2019 e Censo IBGE 2022. Disponíveis no portal UNIR, os dados podem ser visualizados em tabelas e mapas temáticos georreferenciados que ilustram a heterogeneidade socioespacial da Rocinha em contraste com os bairros circunvizinhos, complementando o conteúdo deste artigo. vf

3. Cronologia de Conquistas

Ao nos afastarmos da perspectiva tradicional — influenciada por teorias sociológicas que contrapõem modernização e marginalidade social (Perlman, 1977; Valladares, 2005) — torna-se possível compreender a Rocinha não como uma área marginal ou dependente, mas como parte essencial e integrada ao tecido urbano e econômico da cidade desde sua origem. A comunidade responde tanto às dinâmicas do capital na produção do espaço (Lefebvre, 1999) quanto às alternâncias de políticas públicas.

No final do século XIX, a área onde hoje se localiza a favela da Rocinha era parte da gleba da Fazenda Quebra Cangalha [...] que foi vendida à Companhia Castro Guidon, que, entre 1925 e 1927, realizou um loteamento proletário destinado a atender à demanda por moradia dos trabalhadores das indústrias da Gávea e do Jardim Botânico (Costa, 2022, p. 41). Desde a implantação do serviço de bondes em 1871, chácaras e fazendas da região começaram a ser loteadas, atraindo indústrias para os atuais bairros do Jardim Botânico e da Gávea, em função dos recursos hídricos locais. A instalação das indústrias na região atraiu uma população operária incluindo imigrantes europeus e brasileiros provenientes de diferentes regiões da cidade, evidenciando as primeiras tensões de divisão socioespacial. Como destaca Abreu (1985), o serviço de bondes e a proximidade com a orla oceânica tornou a terra mais valorizada para fins imobiliários trazendo comodidades que atraíam classes mais abastadas, o que conflitava com o uso industrial que acabou sendo proibido na Zona Sul a partir de 1937.

O loteamento original da Rocinha, situado no vale entre o Morro Dois Irmãos e Laboriax tinha acesso pela Estrada da Gávea, via pioneira de acesso à praia da Gávea, depois denominado bairro de São Conrado, uma área rural da cidade na década de 1920. Entre 1925 e 1927 foram abertas ruas 1, 2, 3, 4 e 5 (posteriormente denominada Rua Dionéia) do loteamento partindo da Estrada da Gávea, permitindo o acesso a lotes pequenos, com área média de 125 m². A venda dos lotes teve início em 1933, mesmo ano em que a Estrada da Gávea foi pavimentada, pois integrava o Circuito da Gávea de provas automobilísticas, evento anual conhecido como “corrida das baratinhas” que também incluía vias dos bairros da Gávea, Leblon e a Av Niemeyer. Apesar da atratividade turística do evento, a área loteada não possuía infraestrutura de transporte, iluminação ou saneamento. O nome “Rocinha”, associado à identidade rural da região, permaneceu inalterado.

Apesar de o loteamento conferir características mais urbanas à área, a ocupação inicial não se assemelhava à uma favela, pois as casas apresentavam padrão construtivo superior aos barracos precários. Em 1937, mesmo ano em que uso industrial passou a ser proibido na cidade, o loteamento da Rocinha foi embargado pela prefeitura por não atender à legislação urbanística vigente. Com a falência da Companhia Castro Guidon alguns anos depois, os lotes não vendidos passaram a ser ocupados por novas famílias, enquanto os lotes comercializados legalmente permaneceram sem suas escrituras definitivas.

Quando o loteamento se tornou irregular, escapando ao controle da empresa proprietária e da prefeitura, passou a ser ocupado de forma mais intensa por famílias oriundas de outras regiões dando origem a um processo de ocupação que décadas mais tarde se consolidaria como uma ocupação típica de favela. As provas automobilísticas do Circuito da Gávea, no

entanto, continuaram a ser realizadas até o início da década de 1950, com pausa apenas durante a Segunda Guerra Mundial. A ocupação proletária próxima ao local do evento justificou um decreto municipal de 1944 que pretendia urbanizar a região de acordo com interesses turísticos (Costa, 2022, p. 156) a partir da desapropriação de casas da Rocinha adjacentes à Estrada da Gávea, o que não chegou a ser implementado.

A expansão imobiliária da Zona Sul a partir de 1950 gerou empregos na construção civil e no setor de serviços, tornando a Rocinha um destino preferencial para novas levas de trabalhadores migrantes nordestinos conferindo a identidade nordestina que prevalece até hoje. Internamente, a comunidade desenvolveu-se como uma favela típica, deixando para trás as denominações de “Rocinha rural” ou “loteamento operário”, e apresentando problemas de infraestrutura que se agravavam conforme crescia o adensamento populacional. Em épocas de chuva, o transbordamento do valão principal e das valas de esgoto a céu aberto, assim como a lama nos becos e escadas sem pavimentação, dificultavam o acesso às residências. Situações de risco incluíam incêndios causados por fogareiros e lampiões dentro das casas, inundações na parte baixa e desmoronamentos nas encostas. O convívio diário e a interação comunitária ocorriam em espaços de uso coletivo, como a feira do Largo do Boiadeiro e nas filas diárias em bicas e poços, onde os moradores retiravam água em latas, função muitas vezes delegada às crianças. O pouco acesso à água potável e o acúmulo de lixo nas encostas contrastavam com a opulência das residências nos bairros vizinhos.

A resistência contra a remoção e a luta por melhores condições de infraestrutura foram consolidando um capital político forjado nas associações operárias, na relação com figuras importantes da sociedade carioca e com a Igreja Católica. Esse processo ganhou força especialmente a partir de 1938, quando a Paróquia Nossa Senhora da Paz, em Ipanema, inaugurou a capela Nossa Senhora da Boa Viagem, na Rocinha. Tanto a solidariedade entre as famílias quanto os conflitos cotidianos pela disputa de espaço e de recursos essenciais, como a água, contribuíam para a consolidação de vínculos com o território. Esses vínculos se refletiam em locais centrais na vida cotidiana dos moradores, incluindo bares, espaços religiosos (católicos, espíritas ou terreiros de umbanda), grupos de samba e clubes de futebol, que se constituíam em referências espaciais e sociais fundamentais para a comunidade.

A partir da década de 1950, as políticas públicas voltadas às favelas passaram a apresentar caráter ambivalente, combinando estratégias de remoção com melhorias pontuais, como a chamada “*política da bica d’água*”, caracterizada por obras de cunho eleitoreiro realizadas às vésperas das eleições.

A Igreja Católica desempenhou papel significativo na resistência às remoções em algumas favelas da cidade e na mediação entre os moradores e o Estado, por meio da atuação de paróquias, grupos religiosos e organizações como a Fundação Leão XIII (1948) e a Cruzada São Sebastião (1955). Na Rocinha, a Pastoral de Favelas apoiou associações de moradores, como a UPMMR (1961), e entidades como a ASPA (1963), na execução de mutirões para melhoria dos acessos e implantação de infraestrutura mínima de saneamento. Na década de 1970, o movimento associativo e os mutirões foram fortalecidos pela influência da Teologia da Libertação e do Partido Comunista, apesar das restrições e repressões impostas pelo regime ditatorial (1964–1985).

Entre 1962 e 1965, o governo de Carlos Lacerda, com apoio da Aliança para o Progresso, promoveu a remoção de favelas da Zona Sul, realocando famílias para áreas periféricas como Vila Kennedy, Vila Aliança, Cidade Alta e Cidade de Deus, entre outras. Como a política mostrou-se ineficaz, muitas famílias retornaram à Zona Sul. A Rocinha, poupada da remoção devido ao apoio da Igreja Católica, acolheu parte desses deslocados e, nas décadas seguintes, vivenciou nova onda de crescimento, impulsionada pela expansão da cidade em direção à Barra da Tijuca impulsionada pela abertura do túnel Dois Irmãos e da autoestrada Lagoa-Barra (1967–1971), que facilitaram o acesso à zona oeste e valorizaram a parte baixa da favela. Em 1972, a canalização do valão no Campo Esperança na parte baixa resultou na remoção de moradias que foram realocadas para a parte alta, no Conjunto do Laboriaux, que dá nome ao sub-bairro. Apesar da elevada demanda por educação, apenas em 1971 foi inaugurada a primeira escola pública na Rocinha: a Escola Municipal Francisco de Paula Brito.

A gestão de Leonel Brizola (1983–1987) à frente do governo do Estado do Rio de Janeiro modificou radicalmente a relação entre o poder público e as favelas. Entre as medidas adotadas destacam-se o fim das operações policiais, a liberação de reformas e melhorias habitacionais — proibidas desde o Código de Obras de 1937 — e a ampliação da presença do Estado por meio da oferta de serviços públicos. Foram mudanças que trouxeram maior estabilidade urbanística às favelas, resultando na reforma das moradias com materiais mais duráveis e na ampliação das construções por meio da verticalização. Na Rocinha, diversas iniciativas foram implementadas, incluindo a construção de escolas, postos de saúde, obras de contenção de encostas e a instalação de uma passarela sobre a Autoestrada Lagoa-Barra.

A década de 1980 também foi marcada pelo agravamento da violência nas favelas da cidade, impulsionada pela expansão internacional do tráfico de drogas. Devido à sua localização estratégica, a Rocinha consolidou-se como um dos principais pontos de distribuição de entorpecentes na Zona Sul. Apesar desse cenário adverso, a vida associativa e cultural da comunidade permaneceu ativa, com marcos importantes como a unificação dos blocos carnavalescos em 1988, que deu origem à Escola de Samba Acadêmicos da Rocinha, e a criação da TV Rocinha, em 1996.

A Constituição Federal de 1988 reconheceu o direito à posse e à moradia nas favelas, reafirmando a função social da propriedade urbana. Em 1993, a Rocinha foi oficialmente reconhecida como bairro pela prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro, o que possibilitou sua inclusão nas políticas públicas, embora sem impactos imediatos significativos nas condições urbanas. Apenas no final da década de 1990, a comunidade passou a ser atendida pelo PROSANEAR, programa estadual de saneamento coordenado pela CEDAE. Sua execução, entretanto, foi limitada por falhas técnicas, como a ausência de ligações domiciliares e pela continuidade do processo de adensamento na favela localizada em uma área nobre em termos de proximidade ao emprego e equipamentos que a cidade oferece.

Frente à persistência da precariedade sanitária e seus efeitos sobre a saúde, o Programa de Agentes Comunitários de Saúde — presente desde 1991 — foi incorporado à Estratégia de Saúde da Família em 1994. Em 2001, a Rocinha foi declarada Área de Especial Interesse Social (AEIS), o que poderia ter priorizado sua urbanização. Contudo, os investimentos municipais concentraram-se principalmente na ampliação de serviços públicos, como a inauguração da Escola Municipal Abelardo Barbosa, no Laboriaux, e a transformação de um

antigo hotel em centro multifuncional de cidadania: o Centro Municipal Rinaldo de Lamare, na parte baixa da Rocinha, junto à Autoestrada Lagoa-Barra.

Em 2004, a Rocinha foi abalada pela chamada “*Guerra da Rocinha*”, um confronto entre facções criminosas que impactou severamente a vida dos moradores da favela e dos bairros vizinhos. Em resposta à violência, entendida como reflexo do abandono estatal, foi criado o Fórum Técnico de Urbanização da Rocinha, reunindo associações de moradores da favela e do entorno, instituições de ensino como a PUC-Rio, além de entidades profissionais e sociais. O fórum abordou temas como urbanização, saneamento, meio ambiente, educação, saúde, cultura e esporte, reativando a mobilização local em torno das demandas territoriais. Essa articulação impulsionou a criação de novos coletivos, como o grupo Rocinha Sem Fronteiras (2006) e o Museu Sankofa – História e Memória da Rocinha (2007).

A força dessa mobilização também sensibilizou o governo estadual que, por meio do Instituto de Arquitetos do Brasil (IAB-RJ), promoveu em 2006 um concurso público de ideias voltado à urbanização integral da comunidade. A iniciativa resultou na elaboração do Plano Diretor da Rocinha (2007–2009), coordenado pelo arquiteto Luiz Carlos Toledo, desenvolvido por meio de uma metodologia participativa que estabeleceu diretrizes técnicas e um planejamento de obras e equipamentos prioritários para a década seguinte.

O Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento (PAC) nas favelas chegou à Rocinha em 2009, como desdobramento da mobilização criada em torno da Rocinha nos anos anteriores, lembrando que a Rocinha não havia sido contemplada pelos programas de urbanização de favelas coordenados pela prefeitura que tiveram um enorme alcance na cidade, como o Favela Bairro (1994–2008). O PAC objetivava a urbanização e a melhoria da infraestrutura em áreas precárias e articulava-se ao Programa Minha Casa Minha Vida (PMCMV), voltado à ampliação do acesso à moradia para famílias de baixa renda. Ambos refletiam a estratégia do governo federal de impulsionar o desenvolvimento econômico por meio de grandes obras públicas, bastante adequado ao modelo de “*cidade-commodity*” do Rio de Janeiro, que vivia um momento ímpar de investimentos urbanos para preparar-se para sediar os Jogos Olímpicos de 2016.

Os investimentos foram direcionados para favelas que estavam na rota do circuito olímpico, entre elas a Rocinha. Com uma inédita articulação dos três níveis de governo, foi criada a política de segurança pública das Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora (UPPs), inspirada na experiência de *urbanismo social* de Medellín, Colômbia, introduzida na Rocinha em 2012. A extensão da Linha 4 do metrô até a Barra da Tijuca também beneficiou a comunidade, que passou a contar com uma estação no acesso da Estrada da Gávea, próximo à Via Ápia em 2016.

O Programa PAC da Rocinha representou um marco em termos de investimento público na comunidade, com intervenções urbanas de grande visibilidade, especialmente próximas à Autoestrada Lagoa-Barra. Entre as obras destacam-se o Complexo Esportivo da Rocinha e uma nova passarela projetada pelo arquiteto Oscar Niemeyer. Ao longo da Estrada da Gávea, por outro lado, foram erguidos importantes equipamentos, incluindo o Centro Cultural C4 – Biblioteca Parque e um complexo médico que integra uma unidade de pronto atendimento, um centro de atenção psicossocial e uma clínica da família. Também foi realizado o alargamento da Rua 4, localizado em uma das áreas mais densas da favela e com alta incidência de tuberculose, constituiu uma das obras mais complexas do programa. A intervenção exigiu a remoção de 346 habitações e a construção de um conjunto habitacional

para o reassentamento das famílias, mas as obras do PAC 1 foram interrompidas antes de sua conclusão, deixando inacabadas uma série de obras voltadas para melhorar a mobilidade (sistema de planos inclinados) e o macro saneamento.

O PAC 2 Rocinha(2012-2014)visava dar continuidade ao programa anterior com alterações relevantes em relação ao Plano Diretor da Rocinha, especialmente em relação à mobilidade. Foram propostas duas linhas de teleférico em substituição aos planos inclinados, o que gerou controvérsias e foram duramente criticadas pela comunidade. Como ponto final de uma das linhas do polêmico teleférico (que nunca chegou a ser construído), foi proposto um parque público como zona de transição entre a favela e a floresta para conter sua expansão irregular. Apesar do teleférico não ter sido construído, o Parque Ecológico da Rocinha foi viabilizado com recursos do Fundo Estadual de Conservação Ambiental e Desenvolvimento Urbano (FECAM) e inaugurado em 2012.

Ao final, as obras do PAC 2 também foram interrompidas antes de sua conclusão, sobretudo nas áreas de mobilidade e saneamento, consideradas pontos fracos do programa. Entre os fatores que contribuíram para essa paralisação destacam-se:

- a crescente insatisfação popular com a atuação da UPP, intensificada pelo assassinato do morador Amarildo de Souza em 2013;
- os protestos contra o projeto do teleférico;
- e os escândalos de corrupção envolvendo empreiteiras e o alto escalão do governo estadual durante a execução das obras.

Os investimentos em infraestrutura realizados pelo PAC e pela extensão da Linha 4 do metrô, embora significativos, produziram efeitos ambíguos: valorizaram o solo urbano, incentivando a construção de edifícios verticais e promovendo o adensamento da área, o que, paradoxalmente, agravou problemas sanitários. Além disso, a ausência da presença continuada e fiscalização do poder público municipal favoreceu a apropriação informal de espaços públicos resultantes das obras do PAC, como ocorre na Rua 4 e no Parque Ecológico da Rocinha, onde cresce a ocupação por quiosques, garagens e construções irregulares.

Em anos recentes, o governo do estado buscou retomar as intervenções na Rocinha, especialmente no que se refere ao saneamento, por meio do Programa Comunidade Cidade, iniciado em 2020. No entanto, o programa foi interrompido no mesmo ano devido a novos escândalos de corrupção e à pandemia da COVID-19.

Em 2023, a aprovação do novo Plano Diretor do Rio de Janeiro representou um avanço ao incluir, pela primeira vez, um capítulo específico dedicado às favelas. Entre suas diretrizes, destaca-se a retomada da implementação do Plano Diretor da Rocinha, agora reconhecido como *“plano-piloto para a inclusão efetiva dessas áreas no planejamento urbano da cidade”*. Apesar do peso jurídico do instrumento, ainda não houve esforços concretos por parte da prefeitura ou do governo estadual para sua implementação.

Após uma série de tentativas frustradas de urbanização por parte do governo estadual e da ausência de uma agenda pública consistente voltada às favelas por parte da administração municipal, a urbanização e o saneamento da Rocinha seguem, em grande medida restritos ao plano discursivo, com pouca credibilidade por parte da população. Desde o fim do Programa Comunidade Cidade, a iniciativa positiva foi o Programa Favela Inteligente

(editais FAPERJ 2021 e 2025) que não atua em obras de urbanização mas fomenta o desenvolvimento econômico e social no território, envolvendo organizações locais, instituições de ensino e empresas externas. Até o momento, foram financiados 24 projetos nas áreas de cultura, capacitação para o empreendedorismo e sustentabilidade na Rocinha, entre os quais se destaca o UNIR – Centro de Pesquisas e Articulação de Conhecimentos PUC-Rio/Rocinha.

Com um histórico de alternância de políticas públicas, a Rocinha completa um século de existência e, nas últimas décadas, esteve diretamente inserida no modelo neoliberal de desenvolvimento urbano. Sem a continuidade dos programas de urbanização e sem mecanismos eficazes de controle urbanístico por parte do poder público, a favela experimentou crescimento desordenado e especulação interna, sem alcançar uma solução definitiva para o saneamento — uma demanda central da comunidade há mais de cinco décadas.

4. O Paradoxo da Rocinha

O Censo do IBGE de 2022 oferece o retrato mais recente das favelas brasileiras e confirma a Rocinha como a maior do país, com 72.021 habitantes distribuídos em 30.371 domicílios.

A comparação com os censos de 2000, 2010 e 2022 indica uma desaceleração no crescimento populacional: a taxa passou de 22,7% entre 2000 e 2010 para 4% no período seguinte. O número de domicílios em contraste, teve um aumento expressivo de mais de 30% entre 2010 e 2022, o que pode ser explicado por diferentes dinâmicas:

- a redução do tamanho médio das famílias na Rocinha — que passou de 2,7 para 2,2 moradores por unidade entre 2010 e 2022;
- a subdivisão de imóveis para aluguel de quartos;
- e a expansão da produção imobiliária de apartamentos pequenos em novos prédios de quitinetes (Terry, 2021).

O fenômeno da multiplicação de prédios de apartamentos-quitinete também se observa em outras favelas da cidade que, assim como a Rocinha, têm sido valorizadas devido à proximidade com centros de trabalho, à ampla oferta de transporte público (incluindo metrô na Rocinha desde 2016), à disponibilidade de equipamentos públicos, comércio e serviços na favela e entorno. Trata-se de um reflexo da valorização da terra urbana somada à falta de fiscalização e controle nos territórios além da cultura empreendedora das famílias proprietárias. Estas investem suas economias na reforma ou ampliação de seus imóveis construindo pequenos apartamentos ou estabelecimentos comerciais para venda ou locação, complementando assim os rendimentos da família na fase produtiva ou durante a aposentadoria, quando os proventos são insuficientes ou inexistentes.

O mercado de locação nas favelas é particularmente aquecido: diante do alto custo de vida nas grandes cidades, muitas famílias optam pelo aluguel em favelas consolidadas e bem localizadas, mesmo que isso implique condições de moradia inferiores. Segundo Abramo (2007), o mercado de aluguel em favelas apresenta rentabilidade superior à do mercado

formal, com aluguéis que correspondem a cerca de 2,37% do valor dos imóveis em favelas contra 1% em “áreas formais”.

O dinamismo econômico das favelas reflete os efeitos das políticas de redistribuição de renda das primeiras décadas do século XXI que incluíram aumento do salário mínimo, programas de transferência de renda, ampliação do acesso ao microcrédito — pioneiro na Rocinha desde 1997. Também houve aumento da formalização de trabalhadores como microempreendedores individuais que impulsionou o surgimento de uma economia popular ativa na favela. O SEBRAE (Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas), por exemplo, passou a desenvolver projetos de inclusão produtiva por meio do empreendedorismo, promovendo um padrão de consumo mais próximo ao da classe média. Esse novo cenário também estimulou investimentos do empresariado popular, resultando na abertura de lojas de roupas, restaurantes, academias, casas noturnas e comércios especializados em materiais de construção, consolidando redes econômicas internas.

Esse dinamismo econômico, entretanto, apresenta profundas contradições. Um estudo comparativo sobre os resultados do PAC na Rocinha e no Complexo do Alemão (Neri, 2012) mostrou que, embora a Rocinha concentre mais oportunidades de trabalho e renda devido à sua localização estratégica, a percepção de presença do Estado entre os moradores é consideravelmente menor na Rocinha que no Complexo do Alemão.

Esse paradoxo — forte dinamismo mercantil em contraste com a precariedade dos serviços públicos e da infraestrutura — reflete a retração dos investimentos sociais nas favelas e o recuo dos programas de urbanização nas últimas décadas. Nesse período, houve também o fortalecimento de grupos criminosos que passaram a disputar e explorar os territórios de forma mais agressiva, controlando serviços, privatizando espaços e promovendo a grilagem ilegal de terras.

A ausência de políticas públicas eficazes e de regulação estatal tem, assim, agravado desigualdades e intensificado problemas estruturais. Em territórios desassistidos, opera-se uma lógica neoliberal de mercado marcada pela intensa concorrência entre empreendedores locais em contextos de precariedade urbana e insustentabilidade socioambiental. Enquanto alguns poucos prosperam, a maioria da população permanece em moradias inadequadas, sem acesso a saneamento básico e sujeita a riscos ambientais e à deterioração das condições de saúde pública. Trata-se, portanto, de um modelo de desenvolvimento urbano caracterizado por desigualdade, informalidade e exclusão.

5. Por Dentro da Rocinha

De acordo com os dados do Censo IBGE 2022, a Rocinha apresenta a maior densidade demográfica do Brasil, com 48.300 habitantes por km², em comparação com os 27.422 habitantes por km² de Copacabana, um dos bairros mais densos da cidade.

As construções conformam um aglomerado compacto caracterizado por baixa ventilação e iluminação natural. Nas áreas de maior inclinação, as edificações são praticamente justapostas, muitas vezes incorporando cômodos subterrâneos que não recebem luz solar nem ventilação adequada.

O saneamento na Rocinha constitui um problema grave e multifacetado, envolvendo falhas na macrodrenagem e no sistema de esgoto e ausência de um sistema eficiente de coleta de resíduos sólidos decorrente de limitações estruturais de um ambiente extremamente densificado .

Embora o abastecimento de água seja praticamente universal — alcançando 99,7% dos domicílios — o esgoto apresenta deficiências severas: cerca de 25,2% das residências despejam seus efluentes diretamente nas valas de drenagem, seja pelo colapso das redes existentes, seja pela inexistência delas.

A configuração física da favela agrava o quadro. Situada em um vale de encosta, a Rocinha possui 95% de suas vias internas constituídas por becos e escadarias estreitas, o que impossibilita a circulação de caminhões e pequenos tratores de coleta de lixo. O sistema de manejo de resíduos depende da ação combinada de garis comunitários e moradores, que transportam o lixo até contêineres distribuídos em pontos estratégicos. No entanto, a eficiência desse modelo é baixa porque :

- o lixo reciclável mistura-se ao orgânico;
- os pontos de coleta permanecem constantemente sobrecarregados devido ao descarte contínuo;
- e a retirada feita pelo serviço público não acompanha o ritmo de produção de resíduos.

A inadequação do sistema produz efeitos imediatos na saúde ambiental. O acúmulo de lixo nas vias atrai vetores, como ratos e mosquitos, e, durante as chuvas, os resíduos são arrastados para as áreas mais baixas da favela.

Esses materiais obstruem valas e talvegues já comprometidos pela ocupação irregular que, ao longo de décadas, avançou sobre cursos d'água e estruturas de drenagem. Como consequência, tornam-se recorrentes episódios de alagamentos e retorno de esgoto para o interior das residências, fenômenos agravados pelo aumento do volume de chuvas associado às mudanças climáticas.

Além disso, as moradias localizadas no fundo do vale — que também correspondem aos setores mais densos — enfrentam condições ambientais particularmente adversas. A umidade constante nos pavimentos térreos, agravada pela falta de insolação e de ventilação direta, favorece a proliferação de mosquitos transmissores de dengue, zika e chikungunya, bem como de agentes patogênicos como o bacilo da tuberculose, em em 2011 registrou incidência de 334 casos por 100 mil habitantes, índice doze vezes superior à média nacional e cinco vezes maior do que a média municipal no período.

A densidade excessiva e as condições de insalubridade decorrentes da precariedade do saneamento impactam diretamente a saúde dos moradores. Esses efeitos são agravados pela difícil acessibilidade em terreno de encosta e por um sistema viário interno fragmentado, composto majoritariamente por becos e escadarias. Essa configuração dificulta a circulação cotidiana e limita o acesso a equipamentos públicos de educação, saúde e lazer, incluindo o complexo esportivo construído pelo PAC próximo à Autoestrada Lagoa-Barra. Em muitos

casos, moradores com mobilidade reduzida — como idosos, pessoas obesas ou com deficiência — acabam confinados em suas residências devido às barreiras físicas. A situação torna-se ainda mais crítica em dias de chuvas intensas, quando o volume de água escoando pelas escadarias aumenta em função do transbordamento das valas de drenagem.

Paralelamente aos problemas estruturais e sanitários, a Rocinha vivencia um processo acelerado de transformação impulsionado por dinâmicas de valorização imobiliária, especialmente nos setores próximos à Estrada da Gávea. Essa via, que estrutura a circulação na favela, vem sendo progressivamente marcada por desordem urbana, agravada pela negligência do poder público, que não a trata com a mesma prioridade conferida a outras áreas da Zona Sul. O resultado é um ambiente extremamente congestionado, com tráfego intenso de motos, carros, vans e ônibus, calçadas obstruídas por comércio ambulante e acúmulo permanente de lixo, cenário que compromete de maneira significativa o direito à mobilidade dos moradores. Embora os moto-táxis sejam alternativas adaptadas à inclinação das vias, seu uso permanece restrito às áreas carroçáveis e não atende às necessidades de grupos mais vulneráveis — como idosos, crianças, pessoas com deficiência ou baixa mobilidade que enfrentam enormes dificuldades para se deslocar dentro da comunidade.

6. Conclusão

Neste artigo, buscamos elaborar um panorama da Rocinha a partir dos materiais e dados disponibilizados no portal UNIR. Exploramos a relação biunívoca entre cidade e favela, compreendida como um ambiente complexo, superadensado e de alta intensidade socioespacial, que ao longo do tempo se transformou de forma quase autônoma em um território de pertencimento.

O recorte analítico concentrou-se em dados relativos à estrutura física e às condições de infraestrutura da Rocinha, tendo como base os dados censitários e outras estatísticas de natureza objetiva. Esses dados foram articulados com informações provenientes de relatórios técnicos de programas de urbanização do governo estadual, permitindo construir uma leitura crítica sobre como o modelo urbano hegemônico — marcado por orientações neoliberais — e seus desdobramentos econômicos, sociais e políticos reverberam no território. O objetivo central foi compreender de que maneira tais processos impactam a qualidade de vida dos moradores e o meio ambiente local.

A Rocinha, favela emblemática da cidade, destaca-se pelo grande número de organizações comunitárias atuantes em projetos sociais e culturais. A imagem de vitalidade e potência que projeta — reforçada por sua presença no circuito turístico, pela forte adesão à comunicação digital e pela intensa atividade econômica — contrasta, no entanto, com um cotidiano marcado por precariedades estruturais.

Um olhar atento “por dentro” da favela, evidencia esse paradoxo: apesar de localizada em área privilegiada, próxima aos principais centros urbanos, enfrenta problemas crônicos de saneamento, com lixo e esgoto acumulados em diversas áreas. Os efeitos das mudanças climáticas são sentidos de forma crescente, tanto nos episódios de transbordamento das valas que impedem a circulação de moradores, quanto no agravamento da ilha de calor,

intensificada pela ultradensificação das construções de baixa eficiência energética e pelo uso disseminado de aparelhos de ar-condicionado.

Ao longo de sua trajetória de lutas e conquistas, a Rocinha recebeu importantes investimentos públicos, mas estes não foram suficientes para garantir regularização fundiária plena nem equiparar o acesso a serviços urbanos em relação aos bairros adjacentes.

A descontinuidade das políticas de urbanização — ora marcadas por obras de grande visibilidade e não concluídas, ora pela ausência de ações estruturantes — tem corroído a confiança dos moradores no poder público, reforçando a percepção de que o progresso depende mais do esforço individual do que da ação estatal.

Esse ambiente estimula uma intensa dinâmica empreendedora que, embora relevante economicamente, aprofunda desigualdades ao beneficiar poucos e deixar a maioria submetida à precariedade habitacional, à ausência de saneamento básico e a normas impostas por grupos armados locais. A frágil coordenação entre governo estadual e prefeitura agrava o quadro, comprometendo a efetividade e a capilaridade dos serviços públicos.

Diante desse cenário complexo — no qual as questões territoriais são frequentemente fragilizadas por disputas políticas e pela fragmentação de responsabilidades entre diferentes níveis de governo — a vida cotidiana na Rocinha segue marcada por desafios, mas também por formas de resistência.

O ativismo de base territorial permanece atuante, impulsionado pela ampliação do acesso às tecnologias de comunicação, que conferem maior agilidade e alcance às mobilizações comunitárias. É nesse contexto de tensões e oportunidades que emergem iniciativas articuladas entre organizações locais, universidades e instituições públicas de pesquisa, como o UNIR, que aposta na política de dados e no compartilhamento de saberes como estratégia para fortalecer a participação democrática em territórios periféricos onde a cidadania permanece limitada.

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Conflictive territorial co-production and the neo-apartheid city: Lessons from favela politics in Brazil

Abstract

This paper explores urbanisation and activism in Rocinha - the most populous informal settlement in Brazil - to examine how enduring inequalities intersect with newer, conflictive forms of territorial co-production. Using the concept of the [neo-]apartheid city, the paper distinguishes between 'persisting' and 'neo' apartheid processes to analyse how socio-spatial divisions are produced and challenged through infrastructure. Drawing on multi-method (qualitative-inclined) research conducted since 2017, the study focuses on water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructures as key arenas of democratic claims-making. It shows how these infrastructures symbolise both marginalisation and possibilities for collective action. The paper contributes to Southern urban scholarship by offering a temporal-spatial framework to understand urban apartheid logics, highlighting the democratic tensions of service privatisation in favelas, and calling for more intersectional and decolonial approaches to co-production. It argues that granular, longitudinal perspectives are essential to grasp the layered dynamics of inequality and change in informal settlements.

Key Words: Informal Settlement Upgrading; Favelas; Neo-Apartheid City; Territorial Co-production; Infrastructure Politics

1. Introduction

Setting the Scene: A Glimpse into Rocinha's Infrastructural Politics

Friday, 30th April 2021, the auction for the Rio de Janeiro State Water Company (CEDAE) begins. With a legal design relatively new in the country, the BRL 30 billion concession was dividing the metropolitan region of Rio into 4 'blocks' - each corresponded to a portion of the city for which the purchasing company would be entitled to provide water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services over a period of 35 years. The concession scheme had been elaborated by the Brazilian National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES), and this was part of a package of measures aimed at the fiscal recovery of the state of Rio de Janeiro, a process that began with an economic crisis in 2017. In practice, the auction meant a partial privatisation of CEDAE. Whilst the stages of water collection and treatment would continue to be the responsibility of the state of Rio de Janeiro, distribution, maintenance, and built environment-related improvements would be left for the concessionary companies.

The arrangement also entailed a legal commitment of social interest. Within their blocks, companies must carry out WASH-related investments in informal and precarious settlements – i.e., favela upgrading. The minimum value of the works was announced at approximately US\$300 million (at the time). In addition, the concession model of BNDES foresaw that part of the total amount collected from the auction should be invested in environmental actions, mainly the depollution of the

Guanabara Bay and the Guandu Basin; two important water bodies for the metropolis.

The socioeconomic and political backdrop of the CEDAE auction could not be more dramatic. At the global scale, the world was experiencing an unprecedented health crisis triggered by the COVID-19 virus. At the national scale, there was immense pressure for rapid distribution of vaccines, especially because there was no cohesive national plan, and the volume of deaths caused by the disease was still alarming. On the day of the auction, the country had vaccinated less than 15% of its population. At the local level, the impact of the pandemic in Rio stood out if compared to other cities. In 2020, Rio recorded one of the highest fatality rates in the country and in the world (FIOCRUZ, 2020).

Amid this scenario, 'staying at home' and 'washing hands' were the main advertised recommendations for individual/household protection against the new coronavirus. For millions of Brazilians, however, such measures were far from feasible. Especially in favelas – called 'subnormal clusters' by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the uncertainties generated by the pandemic were to some extent an intensification of so many others that were already part of everyday life – something consistent to other global South territories (Bhan et al., 2020).

The populous *favela* settlement of Rocinha is one of those places where, for many, life had to move on, whatever the cost. Perhaps for this reason, in that April 2021, the outside observer looking at Rocinha might not have noticed so much the changes generated by the pandemic. Motorcycle taxis continued to circulate frantically through the favela, the main commercial areas were live, and public spaces were relatively full of children and teenagers playing. Despite being aggressively attacked by the crisis, life on the streets had a certain air of normality¹.

On that same day of the CEDAE auction, in a 'virtual public space' (a Whatsapp group), a heated discussion was taking place between local favela leaders, activists, technicians, authorities, academics and other active individuals from surrounding areas which somehow had interests in Rocinha. The group entitled 'Rocinha for Sanitation' was, at that time of the pandemic, the main space for information exchanges and articulations between the members of a new alliance aimed at bringing networked WASH infrastructures into Rocinha. Despite the variety of members, all had a common objective: the return of investments from the 'City Community' (recent favela upgrading) programme, which had been announced by former governor Wilson Witzel two years earlier (in 2019). For reasons that cannot be fully expanded here, the programme was controversial but still accepted by the population - precisely because of its focus on WASH infrastructures (Comelli, 2021). In pandemic times, having access to water and sanitation at home was more important than ever.

Still in 2019, the authorities coordinating the City Community programme claimed that the funds to carry works were being claimed from a judicial 'setting of accounts' between CEDAE and the national government. After a decision by the Federal Supreme Court in 2017, CEDAE would have BRL 2 billion available, which should necessarily be reversed in works of social interest². Despite this green light, both in the first months of the pandemic and after the local governor's removal from his role due to an impeachment process, the works of City Community were repeatedly suspended. At the time, some leaderships from Rocinha claimed that interruptions could be also linked to the upcoming privatisation of CEDAE.

Fast forward again to April 2021, as the auction was broadcast live on various media outlets, the WhatsApp group 'Rocinha for Sanitation' engaged in a heated and tense discussion. This was not the first or the last clash between participants of this alliance. Because of their different ideological

¹ Descriptions related to Rocinha during the period of the pandemic are the result of digital ethnography and part of the methodology of my doctoral research (Comelli, 2021). During the pandemic I was not in Rocinha in-person, but I followed the place and its dynamics through social media account and other digital resources.

² Triangulation of archival research and interviews.

alignments and agendas, members frequently disagreed. Nevertheless, meetings were conducted periodically as there was a clear common goal and priority to be achieved. Within favelas with a stronger history of political activism like Rocinha, this conflictive mode of cooperation – where longstanding ‘rivals’ come together to plan strategies and actions – is common in the politics of territorial co-production and, to some extent, an expression of local democratic vibrancy.

The discussion that day revolved around how beneficial the new CEDAE concessions would be for Rocinha. While several favela leaders frowned upon the pseudo-privatisation of the public company, representatives from neighbouring upper-class areas argued that the concessions could mean better services, especially given the perspective of the ‘counterpart’ improvements/upgrading designed by the BNDES. At some point, one of Rocinha’s residents used a historical argument to provoke the group: “when was privatisation ever good for *the favela*?”³. The overall local majority agreed that CEDAE concessions would probably mean at least delays in the long-awaited ‘complete’ basic WASH infrastructure. And as this article is being finalised (2025), local concerns appear well-founded.

Seeing conflictive territorial co-production through the concept of the ‘neo-apartheid city’

The above vignette is a small piece of Rocinha’s long term collective struggle for infrastructure (particularly WASH-related), also commonly referred by residents and activists as one of the ‘historical struggles’ in the settlement. Engagements between different favela dwellers and state branches/sectors/levels are part of a long tradition of alliances, disputes, and grievances, in which periodic victories are achieved. As in many other territories in Rio and in Latin America, struggles for infrastructure contributed to create political subjectivities and leaderships, many of them who still identify with the ethos of insurgent citizenship (Holston, 2008).

But despite illustrating broader phenomena, Rocinha is both incredibly diverse and unique. This is an enormous favela that displays different occupation patterns, legal tenure statuses, socioeconomic profiles, racial identities, and political and ideological inclinations. Numbers are often imprecise and contested (between 150 and 200 thousand dwellers⁴), but Rocinha is commonly understood as the largest informal settlement in Rio, and most likely in Brazil (IBGE, 2022). Rocinha is also unique because of its location within the city – close to wealthy areas, the sea, and bulk infrastructure such as the underground – and its political influence, which is a consequence of a rich history of activism.

Rocinha is a paradigmatic case to explore the complexity of politics for territorial co-production and local democratic claims in contemporary times. This complexity is marked by the articulation between entrenched and novel inequalities, and processes of socio-spatial segregation, which this article will explore through the concept of ‘neo-apartheid city’ (Bradlow, 2021). The paper will use diverse environmental and built infrastructures entry points to analyse local urban apartheid through time and space, and the democratic claims for fairer spatial co-production that emerge from such segregation. For simplification purposes – although this binary is more theoretical than practical – the paper creates two categories of apartheid - ‘persisting’ and ‘neo’ – to allude to local engagements with the state (longstanding, continuous) and private actors (more recent, intermittent). The article will further show how the combination of persisting and neo apartheid operate at different scales.

Beyond the above conceptual-theoretical contribution, two others could be extracted from this piece. First, the narrative points to the importance of looking at territorial co-production in a

³ Notes on ‘digital field work diary’ (digital ethnography method)

⁴ Local favela associations typically report higher population figures than those provided by official statistical agencies. This article opts to indicate the settlement’s approximate scale.

longitudinal way – that is, through methods that reveal slow changes in time and space. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of local politics. Second, the paper alludes to the importance of drawing on (intersectional) feminist and decolonial perspectives that uncover differentiated and place-based experiences of citizenship, as well as nuanced readings (e.g., intra-settlement) of urban inequalities (Sultana, 2020; Butcher, 2021; Vasudevan and Novoa, 2022).

Methodology and Positionality

This article emerges from my engagement with diverse informal settlements over the past decade. The research which gives birth to this paper started in 2017, when I began my PhD research focused on the settlement of Rocinha. My background and experience with urban planning contributed to the goal of understanding dynamics of participatory planning and activism in contexts of informality and their consequences to tangible spatial transformation. This is infused by an interest in how the governance of urban and environmental infrastructures contribute to shaping such dynamics in unique ways. The research was mostly qualitative but encompassed diverse methods such as semi-structured interviews with key informants (30), quantitative surveys (521), consultation in hundreds of public and private archives (from 1960 to 2022), and participant observation in diverse activism and planning-related spaces (including digital ethnography during the pandemic). To this date, I still engage with Rocinha residents, activists and scholars as much as possible.

2. Infrastructural inequalities as persisting apartheid

The term ‘apartheid’ is usually associated with processes of social segregation created and reproduced through ideas of race and/or ethnicity. South Africa was an extreme manifestation of this process in the 20th century. Not only because the state institutionalised racial segregation in its legal framework, but also because deep racial divisions soon became imprinted in urban areas, leaving a legacy still observable through housing and infrastructural disparities (Smith, 2003; Lemanski, 2004; Lemon, 2021). Since its inception, the notion of ‘apartheid city’ already showed significance beyond the South African context. Several studies connect the term with more structural processes of colonial dominance (Yiftachel, 2009a) and everyday violence – for instance, the case of territorial dispossession and infrastructural (and physical) oppression experienced by Palestinian populations in the Middle East (Yacobi, 2015).

When writing about processes of ‘peripheral urbanisation’, Caldeira (2017) argues that, among other aspects, the phenomenon produces “highly unequal and heterogenous cities” (Ibid, p. 4). At the global level, southern urban studies have shown that logics of autoconstruction and the informal management of the city and its urban infrastructures are not spontaneous and chaotic forms of building and living (in which the poor are to blame), but in fact consequences of deregulated institutions and unjust urban citizenship engagements (Roy, 2009; Yifatchel, 2009b). Meanwhile, southern urban scholars have also highlighted how such fragmented cities created opportunities for more imaginative socio-material infrastructures and forms of urban governance not bounded by strict spatial jurisdictions, nor by outdated urban regulations and framings (Caldeira, 2017; Bhan, 2019).

Brazilian favelas - and Rocinha - are good examples of how peripheral urbanisation can operate as a form of *persisting apartheid* that create infrastructural gaps at the *national and global levels*. As in many postcolonial contexts, social divisions in Brazil are connected to an unequal distribution of land, which historically favoured white elites (Maricato, 2017). In Rio, the history of informal settlements comes with many silences, but by and large, favela studies have shown that the occupation of hillside areas is largely a consequence of the lack of affordable and accessible urban land equipped with housing, infrastructure, and quality services (Prado Valladares, 2016). Freed

slaves and migrants from poorer regions (seeking opportunities in industrialised zones) are among the historical occupants of such residual land (Ibid).

In pre-colonial times, the territory now called Rocinha (in Portuguese 'small farm') is said to have housed indigenous tribes called Tamoios, who occupied the region until their expulsion by French and Portuguese settlers. The oldest available archives on the region (from about 1910) show that on that hill operated a farm focused on cattle and sugar cane. Debts led the owners to sell the large plot to a Portuguese family which, between the 1920s and 30s, irregularly subdivided and sold the land. The minimum infrastructure required by law at the time was never provided⁵. Therefore, although Rocinha did emerge from processes of autoconstruction, informality in land distribution and the absence of infrastructural provision was mostly produced by white elites and tacitly sanctioned by the local government.

Uneven investments at the metropolitan level in the form of housing developments and infrastructure for affluent middle classes further exacerbated this process, and for a long time, favelas developed despite the state, that is, through processes of autonomy (Souza, 2006; Gonçalves, 2016). As these settlements grew in the mid-20th century, state-led hygienist campaigns focused on shacks removal reinforced the racial connotations that shaped *persisting apartheid*s at the national and metropolitan scale. In the media, and even in public discourse, favelas were commonly portrayed as places of marginality, occupied mainly by vagabonds and criminals (Perlman, 1979). The height of removalist policies was between the 1960s and 70s (the beginning of the military dictatorship), when entire settlements were erased from the landscape of Rio (Abreu, 1987).

Rocinha was contemplated several times in removal policies, but mass evictions never happened in substantial numbers. The size of the settlement might be pointed as a reason for this. In 1970, it was estimated that 100 thousand people already lived in the settlement. Also, the politics there has been intense from the start. During the 60's, several favela associations emerged in the city, and were connected through a municipal federation. Rocinha established its first of four associations in 1961. Even in dictatorship times, it already had enough organisation and capacity to make noise and create political instability in the face of eviction threats⁶. Furthermore, until the development of another⁷ wealthy neighbourhood on the edges of the hill - by the sea -, the area where Rocinha is located was relatively far from the centre and hence not so valuable (Image 01).



⁵ Archives of the 'Sankofa Museum' of Rocinha.

⁶ These historical reflections are based on triangulation between archival research (old newspapers and documents), interviews, and grey and academic literature.

⁷ Today, Rocinha is between Gavea and Sao Conrado, two wealthy neighbourhoods. Gavea had already been established as an industrial region in the early 20th century and it is said to have stimulated the growth of Rocinha (as industries demanded labour). Still, the area was not coveted until infrastructural works made it better connected to the central parts of Rio.

Image 01 (left hand side): Rocinha in the mid-20th century. Source: Instituto Moreira Salles and government of state of Rio de Janeiro. Image 02 (right hand side): Rocinha in the late 2000's. Source: government of the state of Rio de Janeiro (booklet of the Growth Acceleration Program).

São Conrado – Rocinha's affluent neighbour located by the sea (Image 02) – had already been officially created in the 1930's, but it was not until the 1970's that the area became densely populated and coveted. Large scale infrastructural developments partly explain this. For instance, in 1971, the government inaugurated a tunnel (below the hill where Rocinha is located) which facilitated connections between this area and the city centre. Luxury developments in the 80's - such as housing high rises and an extravagant hotel – also increased the value of land. Yet, this did not mean networked infrastructure for the whole region. While São Conrado consolidated its imprint, Rocinha was still negotiating with the government the installation of its first public water tap.

Global/national *peripheral urbanisation* and national/local *uneven infrastructural investments* also led to the exacerbation of environmental risks in the area. Even though Rocinha is not the only one exposed to hazards and environmental damages, it is one of the more vulnerable settlements at the neighbourhood-wide level. This is because several parts of Rocinha have been urbanised over steep sections of land and, during the rainy season, the risk of flooding and landslides increases significantly. In many 'sub-neighbourhoods' (internal areas organically defined due to land use) within Rocinha, space is highly anthropic and there is little green or built infrastructure to contain or slow rainwater. There are days when the streets and staircases of Rocinha become rapids that carry waste, furniture, houses and people. The local government has repeatedly failed to collect quantitative data on human and material losses caused by the rain in favelas (City Council of Rio de Janeiro, 2019). However, every year, community newspapers report damages and deaths. For example, in 2019, joint efforts from grassroots groups from Rocinha noted that 18 households had suffered catastrophic damages in Cachopa, one of Rocinha's sub-neighbourhoods. Also, in Laboriaux – a more precarious area uphill in Rocinha and closer to the border of the forest – whole houses were destroyed, and a dweller died buried by debris⁸.

When reflecting on these environmental and climate challenges, the leaderships of São Conrado claim that these are "sibling territories"⁹ - since what happens in one space affects the other. According to them, this means that the leaderships of São Conrado and Rocinha should always be thinking of solutions together. Yet, conflicts between these representations are common and the environmental apartheid is clear. Whilst the population of São Conrado suffers mostly from waste - carried by the rain towards the sea - and floods to a lesser extent, no significant housing or human losses have been reported there. Further, if one considers income gaps – and different capacities to overcome material losses, the disparity is even more significant. São Conrado has some of the most expensive land prices in Rio de Janeiro¹⁰ and it is where authorities, celebrities and businesspersons live.

Beyond the above issues, this research was able to detect *intra-settlement gaps* that have historical roots (persisting apartheids), but that were further reinforced by recent upgrading efforts. In Rocinha, despite the idiosyncrasies of each sub-neighbourhood, there is a symbolic division between the upper and lower lands, recognised both by dwellers and planning authorities¹¹. Lower areas are more consolidated, both in terms of housing and networked infrastructures. For instance, the first public water taps negotiated by activists happened in the lower parts of the favela, in Bairro Barcellos. Today, housing in the lower areas is mostly titled, relatively expensive and sought by a local middle class. Meanwhile, housing in the upper part enjoys less government recognition and more environmental

⁸ Interviews and informal conversations.

⁹ Semi-structured interviews with presidents from the local neighbourhood association.

¹⁰ Source: local real estate indexes.

¹¹ Triangulation of interviews.

risk. This is of course a simplification of the reality in the settlement, and although this research has not been able to delve too deep into these differences and nuances, they have been consistently captured in interviews and informal conversations:

“The upper part of Rocinha is still mostly inhabited by blacks and browns (...). There is a racial division, it's not so clear, you must have a critical eye [to see it]. Because they mixed, northeastern whites began to marry black women from Rocinha. (...) This research, they [academics] never did”. Informal conversation with favela leadership transcribed to field work diary, 2019.

“In the 1970's, I participated in a census in Rocinha (...) and noticed that in the lower part (flatter), people complained more [about infrastructure and services] and had fewer children. The higher I climbed, the number of children increased, and the complaints decreased. The lower part was already more expensive, especially for large families and single mothers”. Speech by local engineer at community-led discussion forum, 2021.

“In PAC 2 [upgrading program], the government wanted to install a cable car because it was working very well in [the favela of] Alemão. (...) The richest [of Rocinha], who live in the lower part and doesn't need it, was against it. Because there would be several expropriations and because it was being served - by bus, van, and in the future a subway [now consolidated]. The higher and poorer part (...) was favourable to the cable car.” Interview with planning authority, 2019.

The first two excerpts allude to internal socio-spatial divisions related to race, gender and income levels. The second one shows how material infrastructures both reveal socio-spatial tensions and exacerbate them. Whilst it will not be possible here to discuss in depth the complex web of relations and processes that created tensions between the first and second editions of the Growth Acceleration [upgrading] Programme (PAC 1 and 2), in a nutshell, it would be fair to say that this was about conflictive urban visions. PAC had a limited budget and authorities at different levels were inspired by the case of Medellín in Colombia (Matsuyuki et al., 2020) – an upgrading initiative largely focused on mobility infrastructures (the cable car being its main symbol). Yet, several activists from Rocinha believed that WASH infrastructures, not the cable car, were the key priority, especially considering that both mobility and WASH works would entail evictions and substantial investments. In the end, Rocinha never saw a cable car, nor massive investments in WASH. But the conflict, which peaked in 2013, was considered successful, because it contributed to consolidate a relatively homogenous consensus that WASH was indeed a priority in for Rocinha. The surveys conducted within the scope of this research further confirm this (see Image 03).

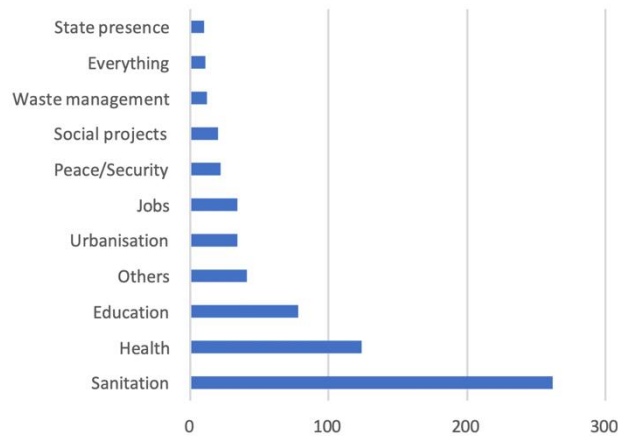


Image 03: Questionnaire with 521 dwellers applied through a randomised approach. Question: In your opinion, what does Rocinha need most? (Open answers collated by author). Note: This research found that it is common for the local population to use the term ‘sanitation’ as an umbrella term that encompasses various WASH infrastructures and goods.

The above partly explains why ‘City Community’ – the upgrading programme launched in 2019 and described in the introduction – had a political discourse and agenda mostly focused on WASH. It also explains why, in 2021, an alliance of dwellers from Rocinha and Sao Conrado (and academics, authorities, among others) was formed with the objective to claim that the promises of ‘complete’/comprehensive WASH infrastructures was fulfilled by the state government. Although not all members from the alliance could be described as progressive or insurgent, the perception that urban risks and nuisances are multidimensional contributed to the formation of these later consensuses. Some leaderships in Sao Conrado were fiercely pursuing WASH-related upgrades in Rocinha, claiming that ‘all’ were somehow affected by the issues in the favela¹². Also, at the settlement level, favela leaders that historically competed with each other (e.g., in the 2013 cable car debate) eventually agreed that there is an urgency for more comprehensive, interconnected environmental (WASH) works rather than punctual/localised investments.

3. Neo-apartheids seen from Rocinha

In this article, the term ‘persisting apartheid’ was coined as a reference to the fact that in Rocinha – but possibly broadly in other global south settlements, socio-spatial divisions have their origin in the uneven occupation of urban land and provision of infrastructures. This is all infused with racial undertones. Also, the paper draws on the premise that persisting apartheid have their roots in modernity, meaning that the (non-monolithic) state is to a large extent central to the fragmentation of space. Hence, in the context of this analysis, ‘neo’ forms of apartheid refer to the protagonist role of actors beyond the state in shaping inequality, as well as to urban governance dynamics that extrapolate the boundaries of the nation state.

The case of Rocinha helps to shed light on a few analytical threads – worth exploring in more depth in future research on the neo-apartheid city. At the global scale, it is possible to note how the urban apartheid produced through peripheral urbanisation is intensified by *international mobilities* and robust national and foreign *infrastructural investments* that lead to displacement and socio-political conflicts – i.e., hybrid or alternative forms of gentrification or ‘white expulsion’ (Lees, 2012; Lemanski, 2014; Comelli et al., 2022). In Rio, this was more clearly observed during the period that preceded mega-events (i.e., FIFA Worldcup and the Olympics). The city and Brazil were experiencing an

¹² Several statements of this sort appeared during the process of digital ethnography.

economic boom at the time, which was combined with real estate optimism. The state contributed in diverse ways to this scenario – e.g., through favela upgrading, several infrastructural works and ‘pacification policies’ (military occupations in settlements dominated by drug factions). But the presence of international capital – e.g., as tourism and foreign direct investments – also played an important role to exacerbate socio-spatial divisions (Comelli et al, 2022).

A dramatic example was the almost complete removal of the ‘Vila Autodromo’ favela, located in the Olympic Park area (Ivester, 2017). At that time (2010’s), it was no longer common to promote mass evictions in Rio – the paradigm was to upgrade on-site (Magalhaes e Conde, 2004), so the arrival of mega events was seen as a setback in urban policy which threatened many insurgent citizenship gains. In Rocinha, dwellers reported real estate prices rocketing and the come-back of more aggressive forms of poverty tourism (i.e., ‘safari-like slum tours’) led by guides that were not from the community¹³. The cable car conflict also speaks to this moment – and could be understood as a reaction to international forces. This because, from 2004 to 2007, Rocinha had been through a sequence of planning discussions of participatory nature, and never was a cable car part of possible solutions agreed with the community. So, when PAC 2 emerged with its Colombian-inspired proposal, many Rocinhans interpreted this as a foreign idea which did not make sense in the context of Rio. It is worth noting that the few cable cars were actually built at that time – in other favelas – and eventually stopped working due to lack of maintenance, among other factors.

At the settlement scale, neo-apartheids might also be produced through incremental interventions that have few interconnected infrastructural elements. That is, exacerbated or new socio-spatial gaps could be unintended negative by-products of disconnected urban policy, planning and interventions. In a large settlement such as Rocinha this becomes more clearly visible. Even though this favela has been indeed contemplated by substantial upgrading programs and initiatives, some of the comprehensive plans produced did not translate into concrete overarching responses. The justification for this is usually limited budgets, which lead to trade-offs. As a result, interventions tend to be punctual and in areas of less structural and environmental complexity. For example, a key work identified as necessary in Rocinha for many years is the treatment of large-scale *thalwegs* - natural rainwater channels imprinted in the hill over which the favela was urbanised. There have been diverse activities and proposals to deal with the issue of rainwater infrastructures in a comprehensive way. But to date, upgrading actions have been limited to dealing with some bits of the channels in a punctual manner. So, not only are environmental hazards never fully resolved, but some areas of Rocinha are more benefited than others. Residents commonly complain that high and low-land disparities are further exacerbated by these fragmented investments.

Further, as the introduction of this paper suggested, national and metropolitan practices of privatisation or pseudo-privatisation might produce neo-apartheids through state withdrawal. During my digital ethnography research, I noted that favela leaderships become frustrated with the (perceived) loss of its main interlocutor. In Rocinha, activists are well connected with authorities, state representatives and clergypersons. Yet, their social capital loses strength as the engagements with those new private actors come with uncertainties. In the concession designed by BNDES, works of social interest are mandatory and citizen participation is required, but leaderships are sceptical that is going to be monitored and evaluated in a rigorous manner.

Another interesting theme emerging from Rocinha is the instrumentalization of environmental discourses by elites. During interviews and processes of dialogue and knowledge co-production with dwellers, there have been complaints related to start-ups and projects that wish to implement projects of environmental nature in Rocinha without any connection to past planning discussions and culturally sensitive solutions. To illustrate this, one of the leaderships mentioned projects to install solar panels and green roofs in favelas. Whilst dwellers see the value of these proposals, they raise

¹³ Interviews with local activists and informal conversations from 2017 to 2020.

several points. For instance, in Brazilian favelas, it is common that rooftops are plane and made of concrete, and historically dwellers transformed these private spaces into semi-public leisure areas. So, not only do green roofs and solar panels might disrupt local culture, but they also create maintenance and citizenship challenges. Internal gaps might also occur. As one building in Rocinha might house dozens of families, not all have access to sun, and the mainstreaming of solar panels could be a way of exacerbating gaps related to electrical services.

4. Discussion

Through the case of Rocinha, it is possible to see that some forms of neo-apartheid city are exacerbations of persisting patterns, while others are indeed the fruit of new future visions. The collection of these layers is summarised in Table 01. In summary, it shows how local processes translate into wider dynamics that could be applicable – and used as explanatory factors – for other southern urban studies concerned with infrastructural inequalities and citizenship struggles.

Temporal-Spatial dimensions	Global scale	National scale	Metropolitan scale	Wider neighbourhood scale	Intra-settlement scale
Persisting apartheid	Heterogenous and unequal cities produced through 'peripheral urbanisation' (e.g., occupation of valued lands in Rio by white elites)	Uneven investments across regions (e.g., southeast of Brazil more industrialised leading to population boom in favelas)	Uneven investments across urban areas (e.g., Sao Conrado receiving bulk and networked infrastructure whilst Rocinha is struggling for public taps)	Uneven exposure to risk and political influence (e.g., Rocinha more vulnerable to flooding and landslides despite events that hit the region equally)	Uneven exposure to risk and access to goods (e.g., higher lands in Rocinha with less tenure security, infrastructure and resilience)

Neo-apartheids	Led by international mobilities, investments and visions (e.g., megaevents leading to evictions, policy setbacks and conflicts)	State withdrawal - erosion of citizenship relations (e.g., mainstreaming of privatisation strategies for fiscal recovery)	State withdrawal - erosion of citizenship relations (e.g., pseudo privatisation of water company meaning the loss of interlocutor for citizenship claims)	Environmental and technological discourses being instrumentalised by elites and authorities (e.g., 'green' and 'high-tech' visions for Rocinha leading to fears of cultural and citizenship losses)	Fragmented investments in infrastructure (e.g., the legacy of upgrading in the form of partial works which tend to benefit 'less complex' areas)
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Table 01: Forms of apartheid observed through infrastructures and favela upgrading – reflections from Rocinha. Note: Other scales (e.g., household) might be relevant to discuss the neo-apartheid city from the experience of Rocinha. Yet, these were the elements which my research was able to capture to some extent.

This analysis is not exhaustive and there might be other ways to describe persisting and neo urban apartheid. Nevertheless, this paper highlights the multidimensional ways in which these patterns operate. This calls for future studies to look at peripheral and southern territories with a wider temporal and spatial frame – instead of snapshots and geographically bounded analyses. In my research in Rocinha, I learned that only a longitudinal and multi-level investigation could reveal some of these layers and nuances, many of them which would require further exploration.

5. Concluding points

This paper explored the complex and evolving manifestations of infrastructural politics in Rocinha, the largest informal settlement in Brazil. It reflected on how different forms of conflictive territorial co-production emerge in and through informal settlements' claims for infrastructure equity. Based on a longitudinal and qualitative analysis of planning engagements, the research analysed engagements in Rocinha through concept of the *neo-apartheid city*, offering a heuristic to differentiate between longstanding and novel socio-spatial inequalities (persisting and neo-apartheids). This helps capture layered and intersectional dynamics of exclusion, which are racialised, but also shaped by gender, class, and migration trajectories.

Besides its empirical and conceptual-theoretical contributions, the article also demonstrates the importance of temporal and spatial depth when analysing infrastructural and territorial politics in informal settlements. The case of Rocinha shows how longitudinal and multi-scalar methodological approaches can uncover nuanced dynamics that are easily flattened in snapshot analyses of precarious and informal settlements.

Future research could expand these contributions in several aspects. First, a more robust and quantitative investigation is needed to trace the causal links between broader urbanisation processes and intra-settlement divisions – this is true for Rocinha but could be applied to other informal settlements where data is often scarce and contested.

Second, the instrumentalisation of climate and environmental discourses in contexts such as Rocinha

warrants further exploration - particularly the ways in which such narratives are adopted, resisted, or transformed by local actors in their struggles for infrastructural justice. This was captured in my wider research to some extent and seems to be a promising line of inquiry towards the future.

Third, comparative studies across other favelas or informal settlements - especially in smaller or secondary cities where investment and overall policy attention is even scarcer - could help test and refine the conceptual framework of persisting and neo-apartheids introduced here.

In sum, this paper argues that understanding the co-production of marginalised territories and the renewal of democratic practices in favelas requires careful attention to the material politics of infrastructure and their embeddedness in multi-layered histories of urban apartheid, which contain racial and other intersectional undertones. Rocinha shows us that while infrastructures can express and help understand processes of exclusion, they can also catalyse alliances and imaginaries for more just and inclusive urban futures.

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Situated Effectuation, Popular Economy and Territorial Identity in Rocinha: Between Necessity, Opportunity and Solidarity

Abstract

This article examines entrepreneurship in Rocinha, the largest favela in Rio de Janeiro's South Zone, as a theoretical and interpretative case for understanding productive inclusion in urban informal settlements. Rather than offering a new empirical census of contemporary entrepreneurship in Rocinha, the article identifies three analytical axes that can guide future fieldwork: the motivational continuum linking necessity- and opportunity-driven ventures; the alternation between causation and effectuation logics, here read as 'situated effectuation'; and the popular-solidarity economic infrastructure that supports entrepreneurial decision-making. The analysis draws on secondary evidence, including the PAC/EMOP business census for Rocinha, Pereira's 2014 study, census statistics, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor reports, case studies and government documents produced between 2010 and 2024. Because the most territory-specific business data for Rocinha predate both the pandemic and the subsequent expansion of platform-based and social-media commerce, national and city-level indicators are used cautiously as contextual evidence rather than as direct measurements of the favela's present economy. The article argues that ventures launched as survival strategies may integrate exploratory elements when investment-worthy niches emerge, while planning and improvisation often coexist under conditions of high uncertainty. It concludes that productive-inclusion policies must recognise institutional plurality and value reputation, reciprocity and social capital as core assets for local development.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, effectuation, solidarity economy, favela, Rocinha

1. Introduction

Rocinha is a large favela located in Rio de Janeiro's South Zone, an area that is both central and affluent within the city. Its presence in the corridor that links the two most highly valued urban areas, the South Zone and Barra da Tijuca, stems from a pattern of urban segregation characteristic of Rio, where poverty remained embedded in the metropolitan core rather than being pushed to distant suburbs as happened in industrial centres of the global North and even in São Paulo. According to the 2022 census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)ⁱ, with 72,021 residents and 30,371 households, Rocinha has a larger population than 91 per cent of Brazilian municipalities and exceeds 59 of the 92 municipalities in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

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Rocinha's economy stands as a counterpoint to the peripheral pattern typical of industrial metropolises, intertwining with daily flows that connect to high-value areas such as the South Zone and Barra da Tijuca. The main territory-specific baseline used in this article is the PAC/EMOP business census for Rocinha, conducted in December 2009 and usually cited as the 2010 business census, which listed 6,145 open establishments, ranging from tiny bars tucked into alleys to franchises of national chains (Governo do Estado do Rio de Janeiro 2010, 18). This commercial vitality can be explained, first, by a population density that grew twenty-three per cent in the previous decade, four times the rate observed in the municipality as a whole (IBGE 2011). Another factor that boosts local commerce is Rocinha's strategic position on a major traffic artery, making the hill an obligatory passage between two of the most valuable real-estate markets in Rio (Pereira 2014). Evidence on digitalisation, however, must be read at a different scale. GEM Brazil 2023 reports that 77 per cent of nascent entrepreneurs in Brazil used, began to use or improved digital technologies to sell and promote products during the pandemic, and only 24 per cent stated that their businesses could function without such resources (GEM 2024). These figures do not measure Rocinha directly; they serve here as a national background against which future research should investigate how delivery-app sales, WhatsApp commerce and social-media marketing have altered the favela's post-pandemic entrepreneurial ecology.

Vitality coexists with an ambiguous occupational profile. Although 72 per cent of employed residents already had formal labour contracts in 2014 (Pereira 2014), average income does not exceed 791 reais, which forces many families to supplement earnings through autonomous activities (Pereira 2014, 68). Nearly 12 per cent of the economically active population already runs small businesses, forming a dense network of micro-enterprises that stretches from design studios to artisanal bakeries (Gonçalves et al. 2024, 43).

Pereira notes that half of these initiatives emerged in contexts of unemployment but in the short term began to exploit niches created by tourist flows and by robust internal demand within the community itself (Pereira 2014, 102-110). She describes the decision-making process as “*efeituação situada*” (situated effectuation), in which entrepreneurs draw on immediate resources (family reputation, informal credit, favours from neighbours), and adjust their course as external opportunities arise, a strategy that dialogues with Sarasvathy's effectual logic (2008) without requiring formal business plans.

On the territorial plane, Rocinha's identity becomes an economic asset. Fagerlande's study (2022) on tours run by collectives such as Rocinha Original Tour shows that community-based tourism channels a significant share of visitor spending to resident guides, craft workshops, street-food stands and small restaurants, consolidating it as one of the favela's main sources of supplementary income. The monetisation of “authenticity” confirms Singer's observation that the popular economy is a space of work and invention in which reciprocity and market intertwine to sustain social reproduction (Singer 2002). By converting stigma into value, Rocinha demonstrates that precariousness and creativity are not mutually exclusive but rather combine in hybrid arrangements that challenge linear categories of development.

Internal and external factors may explain why, despite this vitality, formalisation remains the exception. Pereira's survey (2014) indicates that 14.8 per cent of her interviewees cite lack of capital as the main barrier to registering a business, while 9.2 per cent mention licence

requirements, sanitary standards or safety norms. More revealing, almost half see no immediate advantage in regularising, fearing costs, retroactive fines or excessive inspections. The contrast sharpens when one recalls that in the same decade official discourse sought to reposition Rio as the Latin-American “capital of entrepreneurship and innovation” (Silva, Figueira and Rocha 2025) and promoted the Individual Micro-entrepreneur regime as a universal solution to informality.

This dissonance shows that in Rocinha 'running a business' depends less on standardised business plans (Hisrich, Peters and Shepherd 2014) and more on reciprocity networks, everyday bricolage and material urgencies. The PAC/EMOP business census mapped 6,145 enterprises in Rocinha (Governo do Estado do Rio de Janeiro 2010), while Pereira's subsequent study showed that 50.4 per cent of the cases she examined had been opened by recently unemployed people seeking immediate subsistence and only 13.6 per cent resulted from a clear perception of market opportunity (Pereira 2014). International literature often frames such paths within the dichotomy of necessity versus opportunity entrepreneurship (Bosma et al. 2008). Classic ethnographies of popular neighbourhoods (Lomnitz 1977; Pereira 2014) reveal, however, an additional logic: decisions are taken on the basis of resources actually available, with calculations of acceptable loss and partnerships built on local trust, a dynamic that echoes Sarasvathy's effectual logic (2008).

Within this horizon emerges the PUC-Rio/Rocinha Knowledge Articulation and Research Centre (UNIR). The institutional presentation of UNIR describes it as a platform designed to articulate PUC-Rio's scientific community with organisations and leaders in Rocinha, integrating existing public data, administrative records and field research into a georeferenced knowledge infrastructure (PUC-Rio n.d.). My own experience at UNIR, together with recent writings on the subject, reinforces the hypothesis that global theories of entrepreneurship are adapted, displaced or even subverted by actors in the favela. Rocinha thus exhibits a hybrid economy that eludes canonical narratives of modernisation: it combines survival motives, capture of consumption niches and decisions guided by territorial reciprocity.

This article should therefore be read less as a fresh empirical diagnosis of entrepreneurship in Rocinha than as a theoretical synthesis built from uneven but suggestive secondary evidence. The most precise data on Rocinha's business fabric remain the PAC/EMOP business census and Pereira's fieldwork, both produced before the Covid-19 pandemic and before the acceleration of digital commerce in favelas. Broader data from Brazil or Rio de Janeiro are mobilised only to situate tendencies, not to replace missing territory-specific measurement. This limitation is also the article's point of departure: Rocinha offers a compelling terrain for future research precisely because existing evidence already indicates strong theoretical axes, while updated fieldwork is still needed to assess their contemporary configuration.

This distinction between territorial evidence and contextual evidence is especially important because entrepreneurship in favelas is not a stable object that can be inferred from national averages. A national rise in digital selling, for instance, does not automatically reveal how traders in Rocinha negotiate platform fees, unstable addresses, delivery routes, reputation, informality or relations with tourists and residents. Similarly, the presence of a large number of small businesses in the PAC/EMOP census does not by itself explain whether these ventures operate as

survival devices, family projects, opportunity-oriented experiments or nodes in reciprocal networks. For this reason, the article treats Rocinha as a theoretically dense case rather than as a statistically exhausted case. Its aim is to organise the available evidence into a set of questions that can be taken back to the field with greater precision.

Against this background, the article is organised into four sections. The first revisits theoretical production on the categories of “necessity” and “opportunity”, on effectual logic and on the foundations of the urban popular economy, highlighting convergences and gaps. The second develops an interpretative synthesis that relates these three fields, showing how they materialise in Rocinha. The third confronts this synthesis with secondary evidence gathered between 2010 and 2024—census statistics, Global Entrepreneurship Monitorⁱⁱ reports, case studies and government documents—to demonstrate how the identified logics coexist, overlap and sometimes collide in the territory’s everyday economy. By illuminating the dialectic between precariousness and inventiveness, the article seeks to contribute to the debate on how favelas produce singular forms of economic modernity and to offer clues for rethinking productive-inclusion strategies in cities marked by inequality.

2. Theoretical Axes of Entrepreneurship in Rocinha

Understanding Rocinha’s mercantile vitality requires a lens able to capture, at once, individual motivations, decision-making rationalities and territorial ecologies. This section sets out to provide such a lens by weaving together three analytical threads. The first revisits the necessity–opportunity dichotomy, a pillar of most global entrepreneurship statistics, yet one that demands more careful handling when explaining the specific trajectories typical of favela economies. The second thread explores the causation–effectuation dialectic, here reread as “situated effectuation” (Pereira 2014), which describes how entrepreneurs make choices under extreme uncertainty. The third thread places those choices within the broader fabric of the popular–solidarity economy, recognising that, in territories such as favelas, running a business also means stitching together reciprocity, culture and emerging forms of citizenship. By interlacing these three theoretical fields, the chapter builds the interpretative base that will guide, later on, the reading of secondary evidence gathered between 2010 and 2024.

2.1 Entrepreneurship by necessity or by opportunity? A continuum rather than a dilemma

The necessity × opportunity axis gained visibility through the annual Global Entrepreneurship Monitor reports (Reynolds et al. 2002) and solidified as a quality marker separating “entrepreneurship to survive” from “entrepreneurship to innovate” (Bosma et al. 2008). Brazilian studies have problematised that dichotomy, showing that, in practice, the boundary between “necessity” and “opportunity” is blurred and crossed by multiple motives (Oliveira 2018; Vale et al. 2014). Longitudinal data from Empreendedorismo no Brasil 2023 indicate that the share of nascent entrepreneurs driven exclusively by necessity fell to 38.6 per cent in 2023, after the expansion of micro-credit lines and formalisation programmes, suggesting motivational mobility across the

business life-cycle (GEM 2024). Still in the quantitative strand, Oliveira (2018), using GEM micro-data from 2009 to 2015, notes that necessity entrepreneurship rises in years of higher unemployment and recedes only partially when the labour market begins to recover. The defensive pattern therefore does not disappear, indicating that occupational insecurity keeps the option of starting a business alive even in moments of mild economic rebound.

Qualitative research deepens this picture. Silva (2021) interviewed Rocinha entrepreneurs and found that many ventures arose as a response to income loss—selling home-cooked meals during the pandemic, for instance—yet soon explored niches linked to tourist flows and app-based sales, illustrating a move from defensive impulse to exploratory moves. Brazão (2015) documents equally mutable paths: Pedro turned the bar inherited from his father into a pet-shop and later added grooming services, while Leandro, after opening a LAN house for young gamers, diversified by letting part of the space to backpackers attracted by the favela's strategic location. These cases reinforce Vale, Corrêa and Reis's conclusion (2014) that motives such as financial security, personal fulfilment, creativity, family pressure, market gaps and social-network support often combine in flexible ways, so the necessity × opportunity dichotomy rarely appears in a pure state.

These findings converge toward the notion of a motivational continuum. Rather than sealed compartments, one sees a spectrum in which survival pressures, desire for autonomy and perception of niches vary with economic conjuncture, gender, human capital and, above all, the availability of support networks, an issue that gains prominence when moving from the individual to the relational dimension discussed in the next subsection.

2.2 Causation, effectuation and the logic of “situated effectuation”

The choice to undertake a venture involves, beyond the motives already discussed, the way the actor handles uncertainty. Sarasvathy (2001) contrasted two reasoning modes: causation, based on predefined goals and backward planning, and effectuation, in which objectives emerge from resources currently at hand. A systematic review by Kogut, Mello and Skorupski (2023), after filtering thirty-eight empirical and theoretical studies published between 2001 and 2022, concludes that in unstable environments entrepreneurs combine causal and effectual logics to balance exploration, understood as the continuous search for new opportunities, and control, defined as the protection of invested capital and risk mitigation.

In Brazil, Faia, Rosa and Machado (2014) analysed 123 entrepreneurs and found evidence that causation and effectuation are not opposing approaches: the higher the entrepreneurial alertness, the greater the simultaneous adoption of formal planning practices and non-predictive experimentation, indicating alternation and overlap between the two logics. Finally, the review “Combining Effectuation and Causation Approaches in Entrepreneurship: a 20+ years review” (Kogut; Mello; Skorupski 2023) reinforces the idea of a dual frame in which planning and improvisation are not mutually exclusive choices but poles that alternate or overlap according to micro factors (entrepreneur profile), meso factors (firm stage) and macro factors (institutional and situational context).

Transposed to Rocinha, Pereira (2014) coins the expression “situated effectuation” to describe the local adaptation of Sarasvathy’s principles to a territory marked by high relational density and material scarcity. In Rocinha the starting point (*bird-in-hand*) includes not only financial capital or technical knowledge but family reputation, neighbourhood trust and the non-monetary exchanges that sustain daily life, for instance receiving supplies on credit or relying on voluntary labour from relatives. The calculation of affordable loss goes beyond accounting values: losing money is serious, yet more damaging would be to “burn the name” within the community, as that would block future credit and sales partnerships. The *patchwork quilt* principle, which in classic effectuation describes stitching together contingent partnerships, materialises in collective work to refurbish a shop, rotating merchandise among street vendors at the end of a market day and sharing freezers or gas cylinders when cash is tight. Under such conditions, the future is not something to be forecast by linear models but a horizon co-constructed in each informal agreement, reinforcing that, in the favela, entrepreneurship means operating simultaneously with tangible resources and with the social capital that keeps trust circulating (Pereira 2014).

Studies outside the Rio–São Paulo axis corroborate this territorial adjustment. Kuyumjian, Souza and Sant’Anna (2014), for example, analysing Banco BEMⁱⁱⁱ in the Morro do Jaburu, Vitória (ES), observe that solidarity credit replaces real guarantees with social validation, allowing low-cost yet highly relational business experiments.

Linking decision-making in Rocinha to effectual logic is not limited to favela studies. International research on entrepreneurial expertise also signals that the key skill lies in transforming constraint into resource. In her extensive manuscript *Effectuation & Entrepreneurial Expertise* Sarasvathy (2008) argues that entrepreneurial mastery consists of spotting possibilities where others see scarcity, mobilising partners to reduce uncertainty and share risk. In contexts such as Rocinha, such possibilities are catalysed by trust networks and minimal infrastructure, elements that a purely causal perspective often underestimates.

In this light, the idea of situated effectuation shifts the debate: it is not merely a matter of alternating between prediction and improvisation but of recognising ways of shaping the future grounded in reciprocity, territorial reputation and the conversion of intangible assets into productive solidarity ties.

2.3 Popular–solidarity economy: the ground where decision becomes craft

The third strand situates motivations and strategies within a circuit that the literature calls the urban popular economy, a set of labour-intensive activities sustained by proximity networks and often developed outside state protection. This formulation is strengthened by authors who problematise informality, among them Paul Singer (2002), who emphasises the centrality of the “economy of work” in social reproduction, and Milton Santos (1996), who describes the “lower circuit” that coexists with the formal market in large cities. A recent mapping by the Solidarity Economy Information System, carried out in 2019 and analysed by Gaiger and Kuyven (2019), identified 22,600 active solidarity-economy enterprises in Brazil. Of this universe, 45 per cent are located in densely populated metropolitan areas, operate with an average of ten members per unit and adopt participatory management forms in which strategic decisions and surplus distribution are deliberated in collective assemblies.

Internal diversity led Anjos and Ramos (2024) to outline four profiles of solidarity workers: traditional, social reconversion, income-oriented insertion and collective enterprise. Those authors argue that credit instruments, training programmes and marketing channels must be calibrated to such differences. These arrangements also perform a political function, converting material shortages into public issues and translating demands for infrastructure and financing into repertoires capable of dialoguing with state institutions.

Turning to sectoral initiatives, Lima, Gama and Bernardo Júnior (2024) analyse cultural micro-enterprises and find that these ventures combine income generation with symbolic affirmation, activating local artistic value chains and contributing to regional development in socially and economically sustainable ways. Silva, Figueira and Rocha (2025) show that, by repositioning Rio de Janeiro's urban image as a capital of entrepreneurship and innovation, projects such as Web Summit Rio and Porto Maravalle attract visitors, reinforce territorial identity and project the city brand to external publics, indicating that culture allied to technology operates as a regional development vector.

From a financial standpoint, Kuyumjian, Souza and Sant'Anna (2014) report that Banco Comunitário BEM, based in Morro do Jaburu, released R\$ 793,607.56 in micro-credit to residents and small local traders between 2005 and 2012. The bank records residual default sustained by community-based evaluation mechanisms, far below averages observed in conventional micro-credit programmes. The authors attribute this performance to social validation: neighbours themselves vouch for the borrower, a process that heightens social alignment and reduces monetary risk, in keeping with the effectual principle of affordable loss.

At the national scale, the dossier *Dimensions and Trends of the Solidarity Economy* (Gaiger and Kuyven 2019) shows that, between the 2009 and 2019 SIES censuses, female participation in registered solidarity enterprises rose from 53 per cent to 63 per cent, signalling that gender has become a structuring axis of the sector in Brazil.

Finally, Diniz's article *Possibilidades da economia popular e solidária no Brasil contemporâneo* (2019) argues that these arrangements should be understood through the lens of a plural economy in which market, state redistribution and community reciprocity overlap without hierarchy. This plurality helps explain why Rocinha hosts, side by side, domestic micro-lodgings listed on Airbnb, non-monetary exchange networks and recycling cooperatives that capture environmental value.

The evidence gathered in this chapter shows that Rocinha's mercantile vitality rests on three intertwined analytical layers. On the motivational plane, undertaking by necessity or by opportunity forms a malleable continuum, sensitive to the economic cycle, credit policies and family biographies. On the decision-making plane, the logic of situated effectuation shows that, in high-uncertainty environments, predicting and improvising are not exclusive choices: entrepreneurs combine available resources, acceptable-loss calculations and partnerships grounded in territorial trust. On the macro-social plane, the popular-solidarity economy supplies the infrastructure that makes those decisions viable: community credit networks, cultural cooperatives and reciprocity circuits that convert fragility into resilience. Together, these three strands set up the interpretative frame through which, in the next chapter, we examine secondary

evidence produced between 2010 and 2024, assessing how these elements manifest, converge and at times clash in Rocinha's everyday economy.

3 Motivations, decision processes and territorial ecology: an interpretative stitch

The entrepreneurial mosaic of Rocinha resists any framing locked in dichotomous typologies or linear modernisation schemes. Drawing on the three theoretical strands revisited in the previous chapter—the necessity-opportunity continuum, the causation-effectuation alternation and the popular-solidarity infrastructure—this chapter offers a continuous narrative that shows how these axes intersect in the territory.

3.1 From defensive impulse to exploratory potential

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor figures in GEM Brasil 2023 indicate that 45 per cent of new Brazilian entrepreneurs cite both financial pressure and the perception of market niches as reasons for starting a venture (GEM 2024). Analysing GEM micro-data for 2009-2015, Oliveira (2018) shows that self-declared “necessity” expands during the recession years of 2014-2015 and retreats only partially in mild recoveries, remaining a relevant motive even when GDP starts to grow. In Rocinha, the post-Olympic period coincided with the city's repositioning as a “capital of entrepreneurship and innovation”, a process that, according to Silva, Figueira and Rocha (2025), increased global visibility for popular areas. Interviews analysed by Pereira (2014) reveal strong motivational elasticity. Natália Melo, a former internet-café employee, took over the shop when the owner decided to sell and within months added photocopy and convenience services, moving from immediate subsistence to digital niches. Ana Márcia Silva, who began selling soups door to door to pay overdue rent, turned the initiative into the Centro Gastronômico Barraca das Baianas, opened a new branch and used Facebook for promotion. These trajectories show that a defensive impulse may launch a business but, as promising niches emerge, entrepreneurs reformulate products, channels and clientele, relocating along the necessity-opportunity continuum.

3.2 Decisions under uncertainty: the logic of “situated effectuation”

If motivation is ambiguous, the mode of deciding is equally so. In Sarasvathy's proposition (2001), effectual reasoning revolves around three core ideas: start with resources already in hand, limit the amount one is willing to lose and define goals in dialogue with partners and customers. Pereira (2014, 132) shows that, in Rocinha, initial resources include family reputation, reciprocal favours and informal credit; therefore, “acceptable loss” is not only monetary, since burning one's name with neighbours can block future credit. As ventures mature, however, routines typical of causation arise. Do Carmo (2005), studying the VivaCred micro-credit programme, found that each loan renewal requires the borrower to record sales, purchases and expenses in a “prompted balance sheet”, forcing a separation between personal and business finances and introducing basic controls. National data from *Empreendedorismo no Brasil 2023* indicate that 49 per cent of entrepreneurs who access micro-credit or become Individual Micro-entrepreneurs (MEI)^{iv}

already issue invoices and keep simple accounts to satisfy financiers and avoid fines (GEM 2024). The finding suggests that even in favela micro-businesses the entry of external capital introduces accounting practices aligned with causal logic, though still anchored in local trust networks. Faia, Rosa and Machado (2014), following the Alerta Empreendedor programme, observed a similar movement in university-based start-ups: rapid experimentation persists, yet formal accounting is adopted to secure later investment rounds.

Situated effectuation, therefore, does not eliminate planning; it precedes and then coexists with it in a complementary arrangement. In contexts where electricity fails, input prices fluctuate and tourist flows are seasonal, this overlap between initial improvisation and later formal management tends to provide resilience without sacrificing the flexibility that gave rise to the venture.

3.3 Popular-solidarity weave: commodity, reciprocity and territorial citizenship

The practices described rest on an ecology of multiple exchanges in which mercantile circuits, self-managed initiatives and neighbourly relations intertwine in ways scarcely captured by conventional statistics. The 2019 SIES census registered 22,600 urban solidarity enterprises in Brazil, 63 per cent led by women and 44 per cent by Black people (Gaiger and Kuyven 2019). These are national figures, not Rocinha-specific measurements. In Rocinha, the available evidence points instead to concrete but dispersed arrangements: craft associations connected to tourism circuits, recycling collectives, informal rotating credit among neighbours and local cultural institutions such as the Museu Sankofa, which convert memory, belonging and local reputation into organisational resources. These examples indicate how the popular-solidarity economy may operate less as a separate sector than as a territorial infrastructure linking product sales to social inclusion and stronger neighbourhood ties.

Paul Singer (2002, 29-35) interprets this universe as an 'economy of work', a set of cooperative networks that, rather than maximising profit for individual owners, aim to guarantee the expanded reproduction of life, that is, household income, solidarity bonds and collective investment in common goods. The *Dicionário Internacional da Outra Economia* (Cattani et al. 2009) deepens the notion of a plural economy, reminding us that market, state redistribution and community reciprocity can coexist without rigid hierarchy. In favela contexts, this plurality is visible when a resident guide sells a tour, a neighbour advances merchandise on trust, relatives lend unpaid labour to refurbish a shop and a community institution transforms local memory into cultural value. The same operation may therefore be simultaneously commercial, reciprocal and political.

This articulation offers a key to understanding Rocinha's apparent paradox: available estimates suggest a dense and partly informal business fabric, yet ethnographic studies (Pereira 2014) report high inventiveness and repeated capacity for adaptation. Resilience arises, for example, when neighbouring vendors rotate stock at the end of the day to avoid unsold losses; when small food businesses share freezers, gas cylinders or delivery contacts; when informal credit is granted because the borrower is known by family name; and when tourism-related ventures rely on local guides, craft workers and home-based food production to distribute visitor spending across several households. Such practices reduce transaction costs because they replace formal collateral

with reputation and proximity. They also absorb external shocks by spreading losses across a network rather than concentrating them in one isolated firm. In this sense, the idea of territorial citizenship, close to Holston's argument on insurgent citizenship, helps clarify why economic arrangements are not only income-generating mechanisms: they can also transform needs into public claims, expanding collective capacity to negotiate credit, infrastructure, culture and tourism policies suited to the territory.

Concrete examples clarify this mechanism. A small food vendor who lacks cash to buy stock may obtain ingredients on credit from a neighbour, repay after the weekend flow of clients and preserve access to future supplies through reputation rather than collateral. A shopkeeper may share a freezer, a gas cylinder or delivery contacts with relatives and nearby traders, lowering fixed costs that would otherwise make the business unviable. During low-demand periods, merchandise, labour and information circulate through kinship and neighbourhood ties: one person lends space, another helps with repairs, another recommends clients or alerts the group to inspection risks, tourist movement or changes in prices. These arrangements are not outside the market; they are ways of making market participation possible under conditions in which formal credit, legal security and infrastructure are uneven. Holston's argument on insurgent citizenship helps to name the political dimension of this process: everyday practices of housing, work and local organisation can generate claims to recognition, services and rights even when they begin as pragmatic solutions to scarcity. In Rocinha, therefore, reciprocity does not simply soften poverty. It can also transform economic cooperation into a language of territorial legitimacy.

3.4 Territorial identity as economic and political capital

If the motivational, decisional and solidarity axes explain why and how people undertake ventures, place identity reveals where these processes gain specific density. In market terms, community-based tourism converts that identity into an economic asset. The mapping by Mendonça et al. (2024) contacted 72 community-tourism initiatives in Rio de Janeiro state and, after screening, validated 18 consolidated experiences. Rocinha appears among the projects interviewed, through initiatives such as Rocinha Original Tour and Museu Sankofa, although it was not included in the final list of consolidated cases. This position indicates a potential still in consolidation, placing the favela alongside experiences such as Santa Marta and Vidigal in the competition for visitors seeking off-circuit urban experiences. The flow monetises curiosity for authenticity and stimulates forms of local rebranding: resident guides organise walking routes, community museums convert memory into cultural value and small food or craft businesses connect products to the favela's symbolic economy. Such strategies align with Silva, Figueira and Rocha's analysis (2025) that rebranding initiatives linking local culture to innovation narratives expand the favela brand and attract new audiences, connecting territorial experiences to global consumption circuits.

Symbolic capital is not limited to income; it also strengthens public claims. The same singularity narrative that attracts tourists is deployed in municipal hearings to demand sanitation upgrades, tailored credit lines and improved road safety, demands that Gonçalves et al. (2024) describe as "belonging policies". Thus, territorial identity operates doubly: it creates market differentials and

legitimises the transformation of shortages into negotiable collective issues. In that intersection, the motivational continuum finds expansion paths, situated effectuation incorporates new partners—tourists, NGOs, universities—and the popular-solidarity economy gains visibility and revenue, closing the analytical triangle that sustains Rocinha's mercantile vitality.

4 Concluding points

The integrated reading of motivations, decision processes and the popular-solidarity economy shows that the chief contribution of this article is theoretical rather than census-based. The evidence currently available for Rocinha is valuable but temporally uneven: the business census and Pereira's study remain central references, yet both predate the pandemic and the acceleration of digital commerce. What the article demonstrates, therefore, is not a complete empirical portrait of contemporary entrepreneurship in Rocinha, but the analytical usefulness of three axes for future research on productive inclusion in favelas.

Three effects deserve emphasis. First, the necessity versus opportunity dichotomy proves insufficient once we note that defensive pressures, the quest for autonomy and the perception of niches coexist within the same trajectories. Second, the local adaptation of effectuation enlarges the notion of acceptable loss by including family reputation and neighbourly trust, dimensions that are crucial where social capital is scarce yet valuable. Third, the interplay of market, state redistribution and reciprocity challenges the idea that informality is merely backwardness, since in Rocinha it can sustain networks that generate economic value, cultural visibility and political legitimacy.

Recognising these dynamics does not romanticise scarcity; it means accepting that any development proposal ignoring motivational elasticity, the alternation between effectual and causal logics and institutional plurality is likely to fail. The results presented here rest on secondary evidence and selected case studies; they lack longitudinal revenue series, systematic comparisons with other favelas and updated fieldwork on platform work, WhatsApp commerce and post-pandemic tourism. These limitations should be made explicit rather than hidden, because they define the next research agenda. Future studies should combine a new business census, interviews with entrepreneurs, mapping of digital sales channels and comparison with other peripheral territories. Such an agenda would allow researchers to test the theoretical axes proposed here and to move from a paradigm of correcting informality to one that negotiates institutional plurality, allowing public policies and global theories to be traversed by the reciprocity, reputation and creativity that flourish in Rocinha's peripheral modernity.

A further implication concerns policy design. Productive-inclusion programmes that focus only on formal registration, taxation or individual training risk missing the relational infrastructure through which many favela businesses actually survive. Formalisation may be desirable, but it cannot be treated as a magic threshold separating backwardness from modernity. In territories such as Rocinha, a policy capable of producing durable effects would need to connect legalisation, credit, digital infrastructure, sanitation, mobility and local cultural economies. It would also need to recognise residents not merely as beneficiaries of inclusion, but as producers of knowledge

about the risks, routes, reputations and forms of cooperation that structure the local economy. The theoretical axes proposed in this article are useful precisely because they make this policy problem visible: entrepreneurship appears not as an isolated individual act, but as a situated practice shaped by uncertainty, trust and territorial identity.

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ⁱ See more on: <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2024/11/08/rocinha-maior-favela-do-pais-segundo-censo-possui-mais-habitantes-que-municipios-do-rj.ghtml>

ⁱⁱ International research consortium created in 1999 by Babson College (USA) and London Business School (UK) that conducts annual surveys of representative samples of the adult population (18–64 years) in more than fifty countries, measuring entrepreneurial activity rates, motivations (necessity × opportunity) and ecosystem conditions, and publishing comparable global and national reports.

ⁱⁱⁱ Banco BEM Community Bank: a solidarity-finance institution created in 2005 in Morro do Jaburu, Vitória, Espírito Santo. It offers micro-credit lines at social interest rates, backed by a revolving fund supported by partnerships with Vitória City Hall, the Municipal Housing Fund and community contributions. It also issues the social currency “BEM”, circulating only within the neighbourhood to encourage purchases from small local shops.

^{iv} MEI stands for Individual Micro-entrepreneur, a simplified legal regime created in Brazil by Complementary Law No. 128/2008. It enables self-employed workers to formalise their businesses as long as their annual revenue remains below a specified limit, giving them access to social-security benefits and reduced taxation through the Simples Nacional system.

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Literary expression of Citizenship and territorial identity in favelas in contemporary Brazil.

Abstract

This essay examines literary production in Rocinha, an economically and socially challenged urban community (favela) in Rio de Janeiro, through a geo-referenced mapping of locations represented across analyzed works of various fictional and non-fictional genres. The objective is to undertake a geo-critical analysis aimed at elucidating the construction of territorial identity, which is inherently positioned between a sense of belonging and a mechanism of resistance amid the socio-political and structural challenges characterizing marginalized sectors of Brazil's urban landscape. Employing an interdisciplinary framework, this study addresses issues of civic self-recognition in relation to urban, social, and cultural phenomena in Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro. The research aims to interrogate the cultural work of literature concerning the community, while assessing the role the literary outputs play in constructing territorial and political identity. By applying a geo-referential identification system (GIS), this analytic method aspires to translate aesthetic and literary analyses into an interactive tool, thereby facilitating cooperation between academic institutions and socially marginalized populations.

Resumo

Este ensaio discute aspectos de um levantamento da produção literária na Rocinha, uma comunidade urbana vulnerável ou *favela* do Rio de Janeiro, sistematizada como um mapeamento georreferenciado dos lugares representados nos livros analisados de diferentes gêneros ficcionais e não-ficcionais. O objetivo desta abordagem é realizar uma análise geocrítica que busque compreender a constituição do sentido de *território*, sempre dividido ambigualmente entre a identificação de pertencimento e o recurso de resistência diante dos desafios sociopolíticos e estruturais das partes marginalizadas do desenvolvimento urbano brasileiro.

Como parte de uma abordagem interdisciplinar para o autorreconhecimento cívico de questões urbanas, sociais e culturais na Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro, o objetivo é investigar o trabalho cultural da literatura sobre a comunidade e como se torna parte da constituição de uma identidade territorial e política. Por meio da aplicação de um sistema de identificação georreferencial (SIG) na pesquisa de representações e expressões literárias, este método analítico ambiciona converter análises estéticas e literárias em uma ferramenta interativa de colaboração entre a academia e populações socialmente desfavorecidas.

Introduction

This essay is the result of participation in academic initiatives in the context of the collaboration between PUC-Rio and Rocinha in the Gávea Valley, Rio de Janeiro. It arose from my participation in the project *UNIR* in and about Rocinha - PUC-Rio, under the guidance of Professor Marcelo Tadeu Baumann Burgos, Funded by Faperj in 2022, UNIR is part of the joint effort of the scientific community of PUC-Rio and its partners in Rocinha to create a *Center for Research and Articulation of Knowledge*, integrated with the *Digital Humanities Laboratory* of PUC. The UNIR project represents an interdisciplinary approach to civic recognition of urban, social, and cultural issues in Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro, which involves the participation of seventeen departments of PUC-Rio and nine autonomous organizations and NGOs from Rocinha involved in a wide range of activities in the favela.

In this way, UNIR represents not only the presence of the university in the favela, more importantly, but it also expresses the effective presence of the favela in the university and has established in academia a research agenda committed to the needs of the community and the demands of political engagement for the articulation of public policies at all levels.

One of UNIR's main objectives was to develop a methodology for evaluating the results of support provided to organizations operating in Rocinha in various areas. At the same time, the ambition arose to create a geo-referenced and interactive platform with all the research carried out over the years, mainly through censuses by IBGE, IPP, and PAC, which are often not accessible to the target population of these studies. It is important to emphasize that this platform is still being built with the ambition of creating a dynamic and interactive tool for accessing all existing public and private research on the complex reality of Rocinha.

My research, presented below, was responsible for a small part of the cultural information accumulated and mapped, and for the inclusion on the UNIR platform of some maps dedicated to the visualization of literary expression. The survey and mapping of the places represented in the books and their distribution throughout the favela and the city, together, offer a cognitive and

affective topography of the territory, strongly marked by the frequency of their appearance and the values invested in them. In addition to the platform, the research aims to provide a practical complement to the development of interpretative experiences of this tool in elementary and high school classrooms, mainly in schools that house students from the community in Rocinha, Gávea and São Conrado. This part of the research project, which has only been tested a couple of times so far, aims to work with issues of urban identity and demographic and social challenges based on texts or literary fragments of representations and testimonies of these topics. Read in the classroom, the selected fragments of the books analyzed offer a shared experience of the “place” itself, referenced by topographic and spatial identification. The proposal is to seek the effect of recognition among each of the students that “this is where I live!” and in this way, the combination of the cartography of the textual fragment and the map offers a path for an unprecedented relationship between the student and the issues of his/her experience.

The importance of space

It is appropriate to begin with some precise words by the Bahian geographer Milton Santos in the book *O espaço do cidadão* [*The space of the citizen*] (1987), in which he emphasizes: “It is impossible to imagine a concrete citizenship that does without the territorial component.” (Santos, 1987, p. 80) On the eve of the new constituent assembly, Santos warned of the spatial and territorial challenges for citizenship in Brazil. In his view, the two essential components of the civic model are culture and territory, which he, in a certain way, defines as synonyms. The dimension of space imposes itself on the analysis of citizenship to the extent that the population experiences, through space, the fact of scarcity. “The citizen is the individual in a place. The Republic will only be truly democratic when it considers all citizens as equal, regardless of where they are.” (Santos, 1987, p. 203)

Santos speaks here about access to public goods and services, which is obvious, but he also speaks about “territory” as a transcendent dimension in relation to the material components of space. For Santos, territory is a field of forces that unites the past and the imminent future. Or, put more

directly, territory is the cultural component of space, an identity of resistance and belonging, which often determines the scope of agency. It is in the community place, that is, in the territory, which means, through culture, that the individual becomes a citizen. Therefore, Milton Santos can conclude his book by emphasizing that “The Republic will only be truly democratic when it considers all citizens as equal, regardless of where they are.” (p.203)

Later, Santos returns to the question of the importance of this aspect of geography for an understanding of social issues in Brazilian cities, since “geographicity imposes itself as a historical condition, to the extent that nothing considered essential today is done in the world that is not based on the knowledge of what Territory is. Territory is the place where all actions, all passions, all powers, all strengths, all weaknesses flow, that is, where the history of man is fully realized based on the manifestations of his existence. Geography becomes the discipline most capable of showing the dramas of the world, of the nation, of the place” (Santos, 2002, p. 9).

Based on these initial observation and using the privileged example of Geovani Martins' novel, *Via Ápia* (Martins, 2022), we seek in this essay to describe the cultural construction of freedom in the territorial behaviors of residents, often very young protagonists, whose actions compensate for unequal citizenship in the occupation or, as Santos would say, in the territorial use of space. According to the North American urban planner James Holston (2014), the historical trajectory of Brazilian citizenship has always been divided between formal citizenship, inclusive of the nation-state, and the substantive and often territorial inequality of its distribution. In light of this dual characteristic of Brazilian citizenship, and its deepening alongside the urban growth of the favelas and peripheries of Brazilian cities, we gain a key to understanding the growing exclusion, illegality, and violence, as the reverse of insurgent citizenship, since the democratic process initiated in 1985. The dynamic presence of excluded bodies in the city, the recovery of mobility, and the occupation of public space are expressions of the insurgency of citizenship, often with kids and adolescents as protagonists in their spontaneous but also culturally conscient behavior.

James Holston analyzes the issue of citizenship based on the history of land disputes since the first occupation of the colony. He shows how the legality of popular land occupations has always

been questioned in court and continues to serve as an instrument of exclusion, while in the vast majority of legal cases, the objective of the occupying residents has been to gain recognition of their rights of possession, if not directly of legal ownership acquired by purchasing land from third parties armed with fraudulent documents. Instead of the land issue, in this essay, we seek to understand literary expressions of the daily lives of the residents in the territory, paying attention to mobility and transportation customs, recreational habits, cultural activities such as parties, dances, and spontaneous gatherings, and behaviors that can be understood as a spatial dimension of this civic insurgency.

The role of marginal literature?

But what is the importance of literary and aesthetic expressions and representations of space and territory in deprived urban communities? Initially, it is important to highlight that the geo-critical approach in reading literary production that originates in deprived communities, that is, written by residents or from an insider's perspective, even when attempting to understand the complexity of the community in its broader context from an outsider's point of view, already involves a particular understanding of literature. This particularity became clear in the debates surrounding the so-called "marginal literature" or "peripheral literature" that emerged in the 1990s and that often questioned whether it was appropriate to analyze these narratives with the analytical parameters of literary and aesthetic studies shaped by canonical literature. Or, whether it is necessary to develop other analytical categories in dialogue with different literary experiences of historical testimonies and other traditions of documentary writing. Should "marginal literature" instead be understood as an emerging performative genre in constant transformation in the hybrid field between music, cinema, dance, theater, and writing? Was it questioned whether it was appropriate to interpret and judge marginal literary products while maintaining a presupposition of their aesthetic autonomy? In other examples, the collective and community dimension of marginal writing that in its essence is no longer intended to be the expression of an authorial subjectivity was emphasized.

In Brazil, as in the rest of the world, literature has always been written mostly by middle- or upper-class writers for a literate audience of peers situated in an equivalent social and cultural universe. When the narratives referred to another reality, such as poverty and marginality, it was usually as a phenomenon to be studied from an external, if not exotic, point of view. The exceptions to this rule – from Lima Barreto to Carolina Maria de Jesus – are well known, but in the last decades of the 20th century, more writers from the outskirts and favelas of the country began to appear, with some examples of editorial success, such as the novel *Cidade de Deus* (1997) by Paulo Lins from Rio de Janeiro, which seemed to be the opening act of a certain movement of writers that in 2005 was given the name *Literatura marginal* (*Marginal Literature*) (Ferréz , 2005), a partial title of the collection of “*talents of peripheral writing*” organized by the São Paulo writer Ferréz , author of the also pioneering *Capão Pecado* (2000). The identification of marginality with the geographical and spatial dimension is notable in the novel *City of God*. by Paulo Lins as a history of the neighborhood of the same name and in the case of Ferréz , with a nickname title that characterized the Capão Redondo favela in the south zone of São Paulo. Here the community is part of its creation by the participation of a collective of the author's neighbors of musicians, poets and other artists. In this way, the relationship with the territory and its collective was programmatically emphasized as constitutive of *Marginal Literature* as it was recognized in the historical protagonism of the Canindé favela, São Paulo, in *Quarto de Despejo* (1960) by Carolina de Jesus. In *Becos de Memória* by Conceição de Evaristo, and written in the 1970s and 1980s, the real protagonist was the “morro de Pindura Saia” in Belo Horizonte, but the book was only published twenty years later when the favela had been removed and no longer existed as a real reference.

In the programmatic preface to the anthology *Literatura marginal: talentos da escrita periférica* [*Marginal Literature: Talents of Peripheral Writing*] (2005), Ferréz immediately confirms the relationship between the Marginal and the space of the periphery, the favela, the ghetto, and the streets, articulating his advocacy in favor of spontaneous literary expressions of this reality. The preface was titled “Manifesto Literary Terrorism,” and a single quote is enough to introduce the theme of marginalized urban space from the perspective of the organizer and author:

We are on the streets, we are in the favelas, in the countryside, in bars, on overpasses, and we are marginalized, but first and foremost we are literature, and you can deny this, you can close your eyes, turn your backs, but, as I said, we will continue here, just like the invisible social wall that divides this country. Playing against the massification that dominates and increasingly alienates those they call “socially excluded” and to make sure that the people of the outskirts/favelas/ghettos have their place in history, and that they do not spend another five hundred years thrown into the cultural limbo of a country that is disgusted by its own culture, marginalized literature is present to represent the culture of a people, composed of minorities, but overall a majority.

But we are in the area, and there are already several of us. We are fighting for space so that in the future, the authors of the ghetto are also remembered and immortalized. We show the various faces of the pen that are present in the favela, and to represent the cry of the true Brazilian people, nothing more than the authentic ones. (Ferreira, 2005, p.10)

The manifesto points to a writing that rebels against its own exclusion due to the social, educational, and cultural conditions that accompany the spatial and geographic marginalization of significant parts of large Brazilian cities. The marginality of this literature expresses the stigma that accompanies those who occupy this territory in the favela or on the outskirts, but in some cases, it is described and represented with a certain pride and claiming community qualities unknown to those who do not live there. In other words, it is a writing that is characterized by a certain ambivalence in relation to the spatial identity represented with strong markers of both rejection and affection. Even though it is a writing with strong critical content that exposes the conditions of precariousness, it is a fictional creation that expresses elements of identity, memory, and belonging to the community that is simultaneously imaginary and real, strongly linked to the territory and signaled by proper names.

With this approach, we abandon a traditional hermeneutic reading, since the main objective is to understand the role of the texts in expressing and symbolically constituting the urban space itself. We also avoid questioning how these texts are received by the community by recognizing that their individually solitary and contemplative reading is not the focus of our approach. We intend to develop the work with the texts in a practical, interactive, and educational dimension in which reading becomes collective and dialogical. We want to understand how “place” gains meaning in the interaction of a body moving through a geographic and urban landscape. Literary representations can become direct or indirect expressions of the production of meanings, of the

understanding of historical recognition, and of the stability of the lived space. They can speak of belonging, territorial identification, movement, freedom, and bodily expansion, but also of violence and restricted mobility, all notions that gain a political dimension when focused on the context of urban marginality.

By mapping the places in the literary production about Rocinha, we focused on the symbolic construction of the territory. Placing the place at the center of the research means valuing a transversal dimension in the diversity of works that, in one way or another, contribute to the reality of the territory. The books analyzed were of different genres, mainly fiction, memoirs, documentaries, biographies, and even journalistic works. All of them interact in a particular way with representations that affect the perception and experience of the place. The question of their literary or aesthetic quality is only the backdrop, which allowed us to work with spatial issues that can be explored later in direct teaching situations or educational dialogue.

In this context, the textual fragments of spatial images gain new meaning in relation to the symbolic investments made by the students themselves in the names of the places connects to their real-life experience in this geography. We consider this analysis a peculiar part of what has been called a geocritical (Westphal, 2007) approach that combines the topographic and philosophical coordinates of life in a space-time scheme to better understand the confluence of spatiality in the comprehension of the social and cultural reality of its inhabitants. Geocritical analysis situates places in their temporal depth to discover or reveal multifaceted identities and the temporal variability of heterogeneous spaces.

In the books mapped, the historical dimension of Rocinha is clear, in *Uma Esperança* (1986) by Francisca de Oliveira, which was written in the early 1980s, but which speaks more about the arrival in the favela in the 60s, we only find the mention of two central streets, “Rua 2” and “Rua 4”, among the total of twenty places mentioned. In *Um Bandido e outras histórias da Rocinha* (Alves, 1997) the short-stories speak of the 1970s, and we find 10 names of places specific to the community, such as Valão, Dioneia, Roupa Suja, and Cachopa, and some streets among a total of 27 names specific to the city of Rio de Janeiro, most of them from adjacent neighborhoods and transport routes that connect the favela to the city. In the novel *Via Ápia* (Martins, 2022), this

number increases to 84 places and 38 within Rocinha, some with a high frequency of mention (Valão, Larginho, Vila Verde, Via Ápia, and Cachopa) and many references to the roads that connect Rocinha to the city and the country and to the means of transport that make this connectivity possible, such as bus and motorcycle taxi lines. And, finally, not to forget the living presence of a network of favelas in which the protagonists move with greater freedom, although with some dangers in territories under the control of competing drug trafficking factions (Vidigal, Cruzada, Mangueira, Jacarezinha, Alemão, among others).

Understanding the territory

Our understanding of cultural space is due to the importance of the classic study *La production de l'espace* (1974), by the french philosopher Henri Lefebvre, which moved away from a dual understanding of the relationship between "space" and "place" in which, according to Heidegger's hermeneutics, space was merely the empty container of the temporal flow and place an ontologically given occurrence of positive qualities specific to the human sense of space. Lefebvre's analysis historicized the concept of "place" from the triangulation between "la pratique spatiale" (spatial practice), "les représentations de l'espace" (representations of space) and "l'espace de représentation" (representational space or space of representation). In the urban context, "spatial practices" reflected, according to Lefebvre, the spaces of everyday life in routines, perceptions and actions; "representations of space" referred to the space of knowledge, expressed by language and the framework of ideology; and "representational space" or "space of representation", the true innovation of the philosopher, indicated the space already formed or projected by cultural representations and images and expressed their historical interactions. In short, "spatial practices" are the spaces of everyday life, of routines, perceptions and actions, called by Lefebvre the "perceived" space; "representations of space" refer to the space of knowledge, that is, maps, cartographies and various descriptions of space or "conceived" space; and "representational space" is the space that is formed by cultural and historical representations and images, including imaginary and fictional interaction, and which Lefebvre calls "lived space". With the concept "lived space", Lefebvre qualifies the discussion of "place" in a way that

seeks to move away from a narrow dialectic between space and place, in which abstract space gains its meaning as a place through human habitation. With the central insertion of “representational space”, Lefebvre opens a questioning of the understanding of meaning in relation to the sign dimension and the representational power of the spatial dimension as formative of the living and dynamic meaning. It is from this perspective that one can analyze and understand how agrarian or urban space is configured and gains meaning through visual images, representations in all their modalities, and social, cultural, and affective investments. Decades later, geographer Edward W. Soja (1996) launched his interpretation of this third dimension, which he would call “Thirdspace”, a space considered neither real nor imaginary, but rather a social space, at the same time real and imaginary, composed simultaneously of physical elements, images, and representations.

From the point of view of Lefebvre's analysis, lived space is not a separate space; what it indicates is a path to better understand the role of representations in their interaction with perceived and conceived space. Frederic Jameson (1984) argued in the seminal essay that architecture and urbanism were the most direct expressions of post-war corporate capitalism. Without going into the centrality of this argument for his analysis of the postmodern, which he described as “this peculiar ‘great transformation’ – the displacement of time, the spatialization of the temporal” (Jameson, 1984, p. 186), we must remember that this is not only evident in the mirrored facades of skyscraper towers, but even more evident in the epidermal and global proliferation of peripheries and slums in large cities lacking basic urban services.

From our current perspective, it is important to keep real, imaginary, and “real-imaginary” spaces together in the same procedure, because we work with literary texts in which recognizable geographic references and projections of spaces created by fiction force us to work on this same relationship dynamically. The perceived space is reflected in practice and concrete mobility in urban space, in the path of coming and going from home on the routes to the destinations in the city that are routinely dominated. The conceived space is, itself, a representation of space: it corresponds to the space of urban planners, cartographers, and others whose guidance the resident has at hand, if needed, in a simple consultation on Google Maps. When we speak of lived

space, we refer to all this enveloped by spaces of representation. In other words, lived spaces are traversed, interacted with, and experienced through images, signs, and singular projections of those who position themselves and choose their individual itinerary among all the infinite options without necessarily following the map. In the lived space, we find the complex intertwining that, for Soja, identified Thirdspace:

Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and the never-ending story. (Soja, 1996, p.56-57)

Consequently, it is a lived space that captures analytical attention when we attempt to discuss the constitution of “place” as the significant dimension of spatial complexity. It is in the analysis of lived space that we attempt to understand the identification that is established between the occupants, inhabitants, and users of social space, even when it is in deficient conditions from the point of view of the needs of urban planning, architectural design, and social, educational, and cultural services and apparatus. The space of representation can encompass the other two spatial concepts, “perceived space” and “conceived space”, although it does not always do so, and Lefebvre emphasizes that this “lived space” is permeated by what he considers to be the clandestine or subterranean side of social life. When it comes to literary or artistic expressions and representations, the philosopher understands them as specifically linked to spaces of representation and not necessarily to the codification of space in general. In this way, he emphasizes the production of contradictory meanings in the space of representation and suggests understanding this type of ambiguity in relation to partial unknowability, mystery and secrecy, and the nonverbal subliminality of resistance. It is in the space of representation that the potential insights of literature and the arts lie to the detriment of the sciences. This is the space of “inhabitants” and “users,” a space lived directly with all its intractability intact, a space that extends through the images and symbols that accompany it. It is space as a used space that the imagination (verbal, but mainly nonverbal) seeks to change and appropriate. The space of

representation overlaps the physical space, making symbolic use of its objects and establishing more or less coherent systems of symbols and nonverbal signs.

Milton Santos defines territory as “used space” (Santos, 1999, p.7), and when we work with urban territories, this occupation happens by the “event of solidarity” and is expressed in spatial representations of power, and in the imposing power of more or less operational representations. The lived spaces of representation are, therefore, the terrain for the generation of “counterspaces”, spaces of resistance to the dominant order that arise precisely from their subordinate, peripheral, or marginalized positioning. These spaces are also vitally filled with politics and ideology, with the real and the imaginary intertwined, and opposing the material spatial practices (capitalism, racism, patriarchy, etc.) that concretize the social relations of production, reproduction, exploitation, domination, and subjection. The spaces of representation of territories become the “used spaces”, the spaces of the peripheries, of the margins and of the marginalized that can be found at all scales, in the corporeal reality of the body and mind, in sexuality and subjectivity, in individual and collective identities, from the most local to the most global. These are living spaces destined for resistance and emancipatory practices, but always around a vital and affective core that combines places of action and passion. For Milton Santos, we have evolved from the Territorial State to the notion of the transnationalization of territory, but in the face of the transnationalization trend, the “inhabited territory creates new synergies and ends up imposing revenge on the world” (p.15). It is the use of territory through objects and actions that constitutes human space or inhabited space and that allows Santos to introduce another distinction between a territory formed by horizontally contiguous places and another vertically by places in a network that, thanks to science, creates “new solidarities: the possibility of a solidary event, despite all forms of difference, between people and places.” (p.16) In this way, we can understand how the territory, on the one hand, is constituted by the places of the contiguous space, for example, the neighborhood, and on the other by places of the network that define the community, and simultaneously in the solidarity gesture of identification of several neighborhoods, favelas, or specific territories with the territory as a vertical solidarity identification.

In his phenomenological discussion of Heidegger, Yi -Fu Tuan (2015) sees “place” as emerging from the almost incipient and chaotic proliferation of human relations associated with space. Place identifies a powerful spatiotemporal dynamic through which it becomes distinct and therefore knowable, and it is this dynamic that creates meaning and shapes the entire human experience of the world. A place should thus be understood as the result of a surprisingly dense set of crystallized social relations. These relations may be revealed in the everyday experiences, attitudes, or memories of the individuals or groups who inhabit, visit, or simply know these places, which in turn may represent a complicated web of historical events, narratives, traumas, and so on. Place identifies a certain sense of localities in space defined by their uses—work, encounter, rest, gathering, confinement, etc.—but from a phenomenological and existential point of view, place qualifies the subjective relation constructed in space by an affective geography or topography. For Heidegger, the human being depends on the way he inhabits and works space, an activity that qualifies man existentially, and space thus gains its meaning as a place through habitation. This understanding is based on a phenomenological and ego-centric perspective and is behind Tuan's concept of “topophilia”, an aesthetic, affective, and existential affinity of the subject with certain places in which the individual finds rest and belonging. Tuan identifies a powerful spatio-temporal dynamic in which a place becomes distinct and, therefore, knowable, and this dynamic creates meaning and gives shape to the entire human experience of the world. We agree with the reservations formulated by Robert T. Tally (2019) when he observes that the affective encounter is not necessarily one of landing and adaptation, but must observe the same duplicity analyzed by Sigmund Freud in the essay on “Das Unheimliche ” (Freud, 1919) in which the subjective adaptation and identification with home (Heimlich) can be accompanied by a hidden estrangement about to be revealed in what for Heidegger was observed as anguish (Angst) and for Freud himself as the malaise (Unbehagen) linked to the conflict between individual drives and the societal and civilizing aspect of modern culture. In Robert Tally's critique of Tuan, “topophilia” becomes “topophrenia” when emphasizing the double aspect of the affective and emotional relationship with the place, at the same time that Tally recognizes the other fold between individual and society at the heart of geocriticism itself. The approach to the analysis of the spatial dimension in literature has focused attention on the narrative as a kind of

cognitive mapping and almost always privileges the subject (author, narrator, character) in his/her ego-centric relationship with the spatial dimension. In Bertrand Westphal's proposal (2007), geocritical analysis is carried out through multi-focalization and multi-sensory records in the search for the production of collective meanings linked to space as a place, landscape, community, and geography. Geocriticism, according to Westphal, privileges the perspective of the symbolic construction of space and its multiple public and private meanings.

A favela or a peripheral community may offer precarious housing conditions and housing without resources and services. sufficient and at the same time establish strong bonds of identification and belonging. The analysis of the lived space encompasses this contradiction, which in turn paves the way for identifying its potential for resistance and transformation in the face of the challenges posed by deficiencies and marginalization. In descriptive terminology, the use of terms such as "territory", "favela", and "community" includes this contradiction with connotations that sometimes express marginalization and sometimes belonging and identification. As expected, such ambiguity is reproduced in the play of representations and expressions typical of residents of these socially challenged housing conglomerates in large cities.

The example of the novel *Via Ápia* by Geovani Martins

The example we will discuss below is the novel *Via Ápia* (2022) by Geovani Martins, which constructs a narrative involving a group of young people, most of whom live in Rocinha, a well-known neighborhood in the south zone of Rio de Janeiro. In this novel, the name *Via Ápia* is also a place, the nickname of a street that runs through the central part of Rocinha. It is a synecdoche of the community and a direct indicator of the centrality of place in the story, which in this novel is much more than the backdrop for the events narrated and will be understood here in its leading role in the lives of the characters. The name of the novel is the namesake of the most famous street that gives access to Rocinha for those who go up from the Lagoa-Barra road and pass through the most intense urban center of the neighborhood. Thus, Geovani Martins' narrative unfolds tied to the geographic and urban dimension of the neighborhood, always inserted in the larger space of

the city and the country, and at the same time with temporal and historical references that are easily recognized by those who live in Rio de Janeiro and the country, as they are landmarks in the political history of the first decades of the 21st century. The temporal landmarks are set by the occupation of Rocinha, part of a state pacification plan that began in Rocinha on the night of November 13, 2011, by the Riot Squad and the Special Operations Battalion of the Military Police (BOPE) and involved the favelas of Vidigal and Chácara do Céu. The story of Washington and his friends begins before this date and ends after the disappearance and death of the bricklayer's assistant Amarildo de Souza, on July 14, 2013, which shook public confidence in the pacification project and began its subsequent closure. This historical context is important to the young protagonists, although it is rarely the direct subject of their conversations and reflections, except for the most tangible consequences, that is, the changes produced in their mobility and circulation in and out of Rocinha, their coming and going always under the influence of the controls of the army troops when entering and leaving the neighborhood and caused by the impact of the new presence of the UPP police. For the young people, the most worrying consequence of the occupation is the difficulty of maintaining the habit of smoking marijuana, since the main target of the community's operation is the drug trafficking controlled by organized crime and its maintenance of the places of sale, "as bocas de fumo", which all the characters frequent in some way and to some extent. At the same time, the brothers Washington and Wesley, who live with their friend Biel on Travessa Kátia, need to find and rent a new house due to conflicts with the owner, and this challenge provokes a series of other considerations about the issues of the territory that permeate the search options. Douglas is their friend and is trying to learn the trade of a tattoo artist. Gleyce Kelly is the female protagonist and the only one who studies and wants to continue studying journalism at college. She moves freely in the neighboring neighborhoods and, even though she feels at home in Rocinha, she seeks ways to guarantee this freedom of movement. Another character is Murilo, a childhood friend of the two brothers who is doing military service in the São Cristovam barracks and feels the conflict of entering other communities in the city as an armed soldier, even though he lives in Rocinha. Biel was born in the Cruzada São Sebastião housing complex between Leblon and Ipanema and only arrived in Rocinha when grown up. He has whiter skin, which is why he can make friends with the upper-middle-class

boys from the beaches in the south zone, with whom he earns money by selling drugs. Among the characters, he is the one who has the most ambiguous relationship with his own social situation and invests, even through illegality, in social advancement and leaving the favela. For everyone, the main issue of urban space that affects their lives is undoubtedly the relationship between the “asphalt” – the well-known city of the neighborhoods in the South Zone, where almost everyone works – and the “morro”, the favela or community on the hill, where they live. Commuting between home and work is an unpredictable, slow, and bumpy journey that shapes and delimits citizenship to the extent that it steals time from everyday life and restricts free mobility. Young people from the favela do not travel freely on public transportation, as they are targeted by the police, but also by organized crime that does not allow young people from other areas to enter. On the other hand, they find work as drugstore and pizza delivery men, motorcycle taxi drivers, and eventually “aviões” – small scale drug traffickers bringing back the cheapest marijuana from the suburban neighborhoods of the North Zone.

Internally, in Rocinha, there are other tensions between sub-neighborhoods that are well-known and where people feel like they are “grown-ups” of the place, and other regions dominated by the militia (milícia), for example, or simply further away from the places they frequent daily, and where they feel more insecure and even threatened. The immediate effect of the occupation was the military siege that controlled all entrances and exits to the community, and with the installation of the UPPs, even within the siege, a police presence control emerged that hindered the fixed drug sales points, making it difficult to access marijuana, which is the most widely used recreational drug for young people. For Washington, the central character who begins and ends the story, the path between work on the asphalt and home on the hill is, in a way, the spatial path that tragically determines his life.

Another effect of the occupation was the tendency to facilitate the acquisition of cocaine, pushing many young people to use this drug, which is easier for drug dealers to carry and sell, and more dangerous to use from both a health and physical safety point of view. One of the narrative threads is precisely this problem for Wesley, which creates a dependence on cocaine and ultimately forces the young man to leave his home and the city.

The novel's characteristic feature is that it is constructed on two parallel levels, where a historical and documentary foundational level embraces the specific period of the Rocinha community as a kind of diary of the daily lives of the group of protagonists, from July 27, 2011 to October 26, 2013, marked by a public security operation in Rio de Janeiro, coinciding with a period of formation of these young people. The overlapping level is woven by the parallel narratives of the protagonists' adventures, intertwining fictional events that probably dialogue with the experiences of the author, who wrote the novel based on a period in which he lived in the community. Even so, the auto-fictional aspect is not significant, since the narrative web as a whole does not adhere to the particular biography of someone who left the community to pursue a career as a writer, but rather brings together elements that are representative of the stories of many young people who experience the ambiguity of the divided city and, above all, their identification with the community and the struggle for better options for growth and individual life. Thus, the novel identifies a particular realistic commitment that, on the one hand, reproduces a significant historical moment for Brazilian society, especially for public safety in Rio de Janeiro, and, on the other hand, sensitively portrays the daily lives of young people from peripheral communities whose lives are intertwined with urban conditions. All the narratives are prominent insofar as they portray conflicting conditions of insertion into society, determined largely by topographical conditions.

The community itself is the main “character” and, in this sense, invites a geocritical analysis that can enrich our understanding of this particular heterotopia formed by the favela. Between the two levels of fictional realism, the documentary level that provides a historically accurate backdrop and offers the reader a clear reference to the many events that occurred in the dramatic months portrayed will never be developed except indirectly. An example appears in the comments to the character of the “master” who the reader from Rio will easily identify as the drug dealer “Nem da Rocinha”, or Antônio Francisco Bonfim Lopes, the most wanted criminal of the time, and who was arrested on November 9, 2011, as a result of a spectacular manhunt by the Civil Police and the BOPE. However, these picturesque facts are not mentioned in the novel, just as the reality of organized crime in the sale of drugs is never described except in the brief moments when the characters go to the points of sale, the “bocas”, and the quick contact to make

the purchase with other young people, known or unknown to the protagonists. At the narrative level, the documentary facts are indirectly behind and inscribe the fiction in the chronicle of the community and the city of Rio de Janeiro. We can observe this overlapping of the narrative with the documentary anchored in the geography of the community, which, as previously observed, offers a cognitive cartography for the events of the narratives, always situated on the map of the community by proper names, which are all referential. The actions of the characters develop in dialogue with the description of the places that are anchored by proper names such as *Via Ápia*, *Travessa Kátia*, *Cachopa*, *Dioneia*, *Rua 2*, *Curva do S*, *Travessa Roma*, *Valão*, and so on. In the novel, we find 89 proper names of places that involve a few geographic locations in the country and several in the city and its outskirts, but most of all points to community locations, whether recognized or not. In this way, it is possible to construct a referential map from which the narrative actions draw a complex cartography of movements without giving the plot a single route from beginning to end. According to the definition of analytical philosopher Saul Kripke (1980), proper names are "rigid designators", that is, once the name is given, it is the name of the same individual or place in all "possible worlds" in which this individual (place) participates. In this way, the name becomes a strong reference that can be used in various descriptions with fictional variability from the point of view of those who experience the situation of the place, even so the proper name does not stop designating the same location. Thus, we perceive that urban proper names are real both as references of knowledge for urban planners and cartographers and at the same time constitute an extra-linguistic spatial deixis that ties fiction to the referential map of the city and ensures that the documentary and narrative levels are tied together by the indexical reference (semiosis) that not only attributes historical veracity to narrative fiction, but also functions performatively in the sign construction of the perceptive, cognitive and affective senses of the community space.

Returning to Edward Soja's concept, it is possible to argue that this novel's narrative takes place in the "thirdspace", at the same time real and imaginary, "real-imaginary", or with Henri Lefebvre's concepts, that the story unfolds in the "lived space" in which the harsh physical reality of perception (the "perceived space") and the representations of knowledge (the "recognized space") are hybridly mixed in the representational space in which elements of perception, knowledge

and imagination gain symbolic reality in the "experience". In this sense, it is a sort of realism different from the positivist ideology of transparent and neutral representation, a realism that proposes to articulate the lifeworld (Lebenswelt) of the protagonists in an exemplary and representative way to other young residents of the community interacting at the same time with the real space-time.

The most important thing in this observation is to emphasize the active role that the author's own writing, his own literary project, plays in the construction of reality, in its broadest sense, of the place called Rocinha and its living geography and identity in the imagination of its residents, not only those who have the opportunity to read the novel, but all those for whom this small aesthetic and literary contribution becomes yet another piece of a complex and dynamic mosaic. Lefebvre's triad emphasizes the importance of the "representational space," which in his exposition is the "lived" space, insofar as the subject's interaction with space does not only occur by following the perception of its hard materiality of walls, corners, squares, and streets, nor even by the practical knowledge of following the map and choosing the right bus line to get to the destination, but is constructed in the real and imaginary experience in which its interpretation, memory, symbolization, and representation interact in the conception of place. It describes what culture actually does in the constitution of place, pointing to an understanding of how literature and other artistic and cultural products can function in relation to the implicit cartography of their realization. Commentators such as Soja understand Lefebvre's contribution as a spatialization of Marxist dialectics, broadening the vision to what the French philosopher himself called a "trialectic" analysis composed by "perceived, known, and lived" spaces that expand into the relationship of spatiality, sociability, and historicity. The importance of this contribution by Lefebvre is not only to overcome the duality in the relationship between space and place, but mainly to open a field of research into the contribution made by spatial representations and expressions in the interdisciplinary perspective that involves geography, urbanism, and cultural studies, among others.

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**“Parem de nos matar”: uma análise comparativa das
representações literárias e cinematográficas da violência
policial nas favelas do Rio de Janeiro e nas banlieues
francesas**

Resumo

Este artigo investiga como escritores e cineastas oriundos das periferias urbanas, especificamente das banlieues francesas e das favelas brasileiras, abordam a questão da violência policial. Em primeiro lugar, analisa de que forma essas produções artísticas tratam das ações do Estado punitivo e dão voz às experiências vividas por moradores de bairros urbanos marginalizados. Em segundo lugar, examina as representações dos conflitos sociais desenvolvidas por artistas e intelectuais que escrevem e criam a partir de uma perspectiva interna, desafiando as interpretações dominantes disseminadas pelos discursos político e midiático. Ao fazê-lo, o artigo busca compreender em que medida essas obras contribuem para um entendimento mais profundo das realidades vividas pelos moradores de espaços urbanos periféricos. Por fim, explora se, além das diferenças ligadas a contextos socioculturais distintos, também existem divergências nas escolhas estéticas e nas estratégias narrativas adotadas por artistas franceses e brasileiros. Ao articular essas dimensões, o artigo propõe um diálogo comparativo sobre arte, violência e marginalidade urbana no Sul e no Norte globais.

**“Stop Killing Us”: A Comparative Analysis of Literary and Cinematic
Representations of Police Violence in Rio de Janeiro’s Favelas and the
French Banlieues**

Abstract

This article investigates how writers and filmmakers from urban peripheries, specifically the French banlieues and Brazilian favelas, address the issue of police violence. First, it analyses how these artistic productions engage with the actions of the punitive state and give voice to the lived experiences of residents of marginalised urban neighbourhoods. Second, it examines the representations of social conflict developed by artists and intellectuals who write and create from an internal perspective, challenging the dominant interpretations disseminated by political and media discourse. In doing so, the article seeks to understand the extent to

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which these works contribute to a deeper understanding of the realities experienced by residents of peripheral urban spaces. Finally, it explores whether, beyond the differences linked to distinct sociocultural contexts, there are also divergences in the aesthetic choices and narrative strategies adopted by French and Brazilian artists. By bringing these dimensions together, the article proposes a comparative dialogue on art, violence and urban marginality in the Global South and the Global North.

1 INTRODUÇÃO

As periferias urbanas, tanto na França quanto no Brasil, têm sido historicamente marcadas por processos de exclusão socioespacial, racialização e repressão policial (Wacquant, 2008; Oberti & Préteceille, 2016). Embora apresentem dinâmicas políticas e trajetórias históricas distintas, as *banlieues* francesas e as favelas brasileiras compartilham formas semelhantes de marginalização estrutural: ambas foram produzidas como zonas de exceção dentro das metrópoles, onde o acesso a direitos básicos — como moradia digna, educação, saúde e segurança — é frequentemente precarizado ou até mesmo violado. Nessas áreas, a presença do Estado manifesta-se, muitas vezes, de forma seletiva e violenta, por meio de práticas policiais militarizadas que reforçam estigmas e aprofundam desigualdades (Anistia Internacional, 2009, 2017; Oliveira e Jackson, 2025).

O artigo resulta da parceria entre Christina Horvath e Paulo Roberto Tonani do Patrocínio, cuja colaboração começou no *Festival Littérature en Marges* em Paris, em 2023, marcado pela morte de Nahel Marzouk e os subsequentes protestos contra a violência policial nas *banlieues*. A experiência foi ampliada no Rio de Janeiro, onde organizaram uma intervenção artística na Ladeira dos Tabajaras, com mural coletivo e minidocumentário sobre a violência policial. A partir dessas experiências, os autores propõem uma abordagem comparativa que analisa como narrativas periféricas na França e no Brasil funcionam como resistência simbólica e produção de conhecimento sobre a violência de Estado. Para a consecução desse objetivo, propõe-se, como recurso metodológico, a adoção de um comparatismo intercultural. Tal abordagem possibilita não apenas a comparação entre obras literárias e outros produtos discursivos, mas, sobretudo, a análise das interações entre sistemas culturais complexos, bem como de seus diálogos com manifestações culturais situadas em contextos históricos e sociais específicos.

A adoção desta perspectiva permite analisar o papel das produções literárias, cinematográficas e artísticas na formulação de contranarrativas que desafiam versões oficiais e midiáticas dos conflitos urbanos. Em vez de reproduzirem estigmas relacionados a diferentes formas de exclusão — como pobreza, criminalidade, “segregação endocolonial” e consolidação de um “sócio-apartheid”, conforme pontuado por Rigouste (2012) —, essas narrativas constroem perspectivas críticas sobre as periferias. Tais leituras estão enraizadas na experiência vivida de exclusão, violência e, sobretudo, resistência. O estudo da violência policial, portanto, não se limita à denúncia das práticas repressivas, mas também à valorização das estéticas e estratégias criadas por escritores e cineastas periféricos. Comparar França e Brasil permite iluminar tanto as semelhanças estruturais quanto às especificidades contextuais, destacando as múltiplas formas pelas quais a arte se torna veículo de memória, denúncia e transformação social.

2 CONTEXTO

As *banlieues* surgiram como grandes conjuntos habitacionais construídos entre as décadas de 1950 e 1970, destinados inicialmente à classe trabalhadora francesa e, progressivamente, ocupados por populações imigrantes oriundas sobretudo das ex-colônias africanas (Hargreaves, 2007). Desde os anos 1980, essas áreas se tornaram o espaço de concentração da maioria das populações minoritárias pós-coloniais, apresentando maior diversidade étnica e religiosa em comparação com outras regiões do país. Os indicadores socioeconômicos reforçam a desigualdade: as taxas de pobreza, desemprego e criminalidade nas *banlieues* são duas vezes superiores às da média nacional (Lapeyronnie, 2008).

Apesar da estigmatização, as *banlieues* tornaram-se polos de inovação cultural. O rap, o hip-hop e a arte de rua emergiram como formas de expressão fundamentais para os jovens periféricos, transformando-se em uma das indústrias mais lucrativas do país. Essa produção cultural não apenas questiona os estereótipos ligados às *banlieues*, mas também constrói contranarrativas sobre identidade, cidadania e pertença (Cello, 2019).

Entretanto, o policiamento nas *banlieues* é marcado pela repressão sistemática e pela prática do perfil racial (Rigouste, 2012; Kokoreff, 2021; Jobard & de Maillard, 2020). Jovens negros e

árabes são alvo desproporcional de revistas, detenções arbitrárias e violência policial. Termos como “erro policial” ou “acidente policial” são utilizados pelo discurso oficial francês como eufemismos para assassinatos cometidos por agentes do Estado, em sua maioria contra jovens racializados (Body-Gendrot, 2010). Casos emblemáticos, como a morte de Zyed Benna e Bouna Traoré em 2005 ou a de Adama Traoré em 2016, simbolizam a continuidade da violência e da impunidade policial. O assassinato de Nahel Marzouk, em 2023, aos 17 anos, reatualizou essas tensões, desencadeando protestos nacionais rapidamente classificados pela mídia como “motins” ou “distúrbios” .

A revolta de 2005 ilustra a profundidade do conflito: após a morte de Zyed e Bouna, protestos se espalharam por todo o país, afetando 274 municípios e resultando em milhares de detenções e confrontos com a polícia (Mucchielli & Le Goaziou, 2006; Dikeç, 2017). Para a socióloga Sophie Body-Gendrot (2010), esses episódios expressam a marginalização de uma juventude que, desprovida de canais institucionais de participação política, encontra na revolta coletiva uma forma de visibilidade. O geógrafo Mustafa Dikeç (2017) complementa esse diagnóstico, observando que esses fenômenos não são exclusivos da França, mas parte de uma lógica global de marginalização urbana, comparável às revoltas em Londres (2011) ou Los Angeles (1992).

A violência policial nas *banlieues* tem sido denunciada há anos por organizações como a Anistia Internacional (2009; 2017; 2020a; 2020b), que aponta o uso recorrente de técnicas de contenção perigosas, discriminação racial e intimidação às famílias das vítimas. O estado de emergência decretado após os atentados de 2015 aprofundou essas práticas, restringindo liberdades civis e restringindo o direito de protesto. Assim, as *banlieues* tornaram-se laboratórios de políticas securitárias que consolidam a marginalização de populações racializadas (Kokoreff 2021; Fassin, 2017).

No Brasil, o debate sobre as favelas, especialmente no Rio de Janeiro, foi por muito tempo estruturado pela oposição simbólica entre “morro” e “asfalto”, consagrada pela expressão “cidade partida” do jornalista Zuenir Ventura (1994). Essa leitura binária sublinha contrastes socioespaciais, econômicos e raciais que atravessam a cidade, mas também simplifica a complexidade das interações entre territórios formais e informais. Mais do que espaços de

ausência ou carência, as favelas devem ser entendidas como territórios dinâmicos, dotados de formas próprias de sociabilidade, resistência e produção cultural (Perlman, 2010).

A presença do Estado nas favelas é marcada pela violência policial e por políticas de segurança ineficazes. O projeto das Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora (UPPs), implantado a partir de 2008, com a promessa de retomar o controle territorial e aproximar polícia e comunidade, rapidamente se revelou limitado e violento (Costa 2005; Cano, 2012; Patel, Richter & Wolfe, 2025). A militarização das favelas não apenas intensificou o conflito, como também expôs moradores à violência cotidiana. O caso de Amarildo Dias de Souza, pedreiro negro da Rocinha desaparecido em 2013 após ser detido por policiais da UPP, tornou-se um marco simbólico. O grito “Cadê o Amarildo?” mobilizou protestos nacionais e internacionais, denunciando a tortura, o racismo institucional e a impunidade policial (Machado da Silva, 2014).

Além da violência estatal, as favelas enfrentam a disputa entre tráfico de drogas e milícias. Estas últimas, formadas por agentes ou ex-agentes do Estado, consolidaram-se como poder paralelo desde os anos 1980 e, hoje, controlam extensas áreas do Rio de Janeiro, explorando economicamente moradores por meio de taxas de “proteção” e monopólios sobre serviços essenciais (Zaluar & Conceição, 2007). A sobreposição entre agentes do Estado e práticas criminosas revela a ambiguidade da atuação estatal, que oscila entre omissão, corrupção e repressão (Arias, 2006).

Assim como nas *banlieues*, a juventude periférica no Brasil tem sido protagonista de protestos contra a violência policial. As Jornadas de Junho de 2013 revelaram a potência dessas vozes, quando o desaparecimento de Amarildo tornou-se catalisador de manifestações massivas contra o governo e as políticas de segurança pública (Gledhill, 2015). Tais episódios mostram que a violência estatal não apenas vitimiza indivíduos, mas também gera processos coletivos de resistência e denúncia.

Apesar de suas diferenças históricas e institucionais, *banlieues* e favelas compartilham uma condição comum: ambas são periferias racializadas, construídas como “outros internos” das metrópoles. Se na França a herança colonial molda o estigma associado às *banlieues* (Wacquant 2008; Kokoreff, 2021), no Brasil a escravidão e o racismo estrutural marcam a formação das favelas (Alves & Evanson, 2011). Em ambos os contextos, a violência policial é elemento

central da relação entre o Estado e os moradores, funcionando como mecanismo de controle social e reforço das desigualdades.

No entanto, também emergem diferenças significativas. Enquanto nas *banlieues* os protestos contra a violência policial se organizam em torno de revoltas de grande escala, com forte presença midiática e nacional, nas favelas brasileiras a violência é mais difusa, associada tanto à atuação policial quanto às dinâmicas do crime organizado e das milícias. A morte de jovens racializados mobiliza protestos em ambos os contextos, mas no Brasil esses episódios frequentemente se somam a denúncias contra a corrupção e a omissão estatal.

Outro ponto de convergência é o papel das produções culturais periféricas — *rap*, *slam*, literatura marginal, cinema comunitário — que funcionam como formas de resistência simbólica e de produção de conhecimento situado (Bhabha, 1994; Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández, 2015). Essas narrativas desafiam a visão dominante das periferias como espaços de carência e violência, enfatizando a dignidade, a criatividade e a agência de seus moradores. Tanto em Paris quanto no Rio de Janeiro, a arte se transforma em ferramenta política capaz de denunciar abusos, preservar memórias e projetar alternativas para além da exclusão.

3 NARRATIVAS FRANCESAS

Desde o seu surgimento, as narrativas cinematográficas e literárias das *banlieues* francesas formaram-se em estreita relação com a violência policial e com modos específicos de policiamento de populações marginalizadas e racializadas. *La Haine* (Kassovitz, 1995), filme emblemático de chamado gênero “filme de *banlieue*” — visto nos cinemas por quase um em cada três franceses — colocou o antagonismo entre juventude da *banlieue* e polícia no centro do enquadramento estético e político.

Como explicou Kassovitz ao BFI, a obra foi diretamente inspirada pela morte de Makomé M’Bowole, morto em 1993 por um tiro na cabeça quando se encontrava algemado, e nasce da necessidade de expor a perspectiva dos jovens para que o público compreenda as razões da sua raiva, da sua relação com a polícia e da sua recusa em aceitar a humilhação cotidiana. Filmado em preto e branco, o filme dialoga com o cinema afro-americano — não por acaso ecoa *Do the Right Thing*, de Spike Lee — e utiliza uma *mise-en-scène* quase documental. Ali se

estabelece uma gramática da violência urbana: reconhecimento de padrões de perfil racial, atritos cotidianos, insultos destinados a provocar reações puníveis, detenções abusivas, execuções sumárias, e, em seguida, revoltas, prisões em massa e ocupações quase militarizadas da periferia urbana.

A narrativa acompanha Vinz, Saïd e Hubert — judeu, magrebino e negro — que corporizam a diversidade socioétnica das *banlieues*; o seu vínculo é forjado menos por uma origem comum do que pela experiência partilhada da repressão policial. Ainda que o filme pareça, à superfície, alinhar-se com uma tonalidade “republicana” que privilegia lógicas de classe, a etnicidade permanece decisiva no exercício da violência: a tortura e a humilhação recaem sobretudo sobre os dois amigos pós-coloniais, enquanto o personagem branco escapa de certas formas de coerção.

As duas décadas posteriores intensificaram o que vários autores designaram como “super violência” ou “momento punitivo”. Michel Kokoreff (2021) descreve o período como de “violência excessiva”. Didier Fassin (2017) mostra como práticas de punição desproporcionais, toleradas pelo sistema judicial, tornam-se parte integrante da governação. Mathieu Rigouste (2012), por sua vez, interpreta a repressão em tempos de paz como produto de dinâmicas gêmeas: a expansão imperialista e o reforço da “segregação endocolonial”. Segundo o autor, essa dinâmica recicla dispositivos coloniais dentro do território metropolitano para governar as classes trabalhadoras racializadas.

A consolidação de um “socioapartheid” exige a naturalização de vigilância e repressão como mercados lucrativos; a violência policial estrutura rotinas, traça fronteiras entre “sujeitos legítimos” e “sujeitos sem valor”, e define quem pode ser ferido sem comoção pública. A discriminação policial, por si só, não explica a deslegitimação cidadã; esta engrena com segregação escolar, discriminação no trabalho e serviços públicos ausentes na periferia urbana. Como mostram Roux, Purenne e Talpin (2023), a experiência sistêmica de discriminação social, racial e territorial corrói a confiança nas instituições e desloca a participação para formas de protesto.

As mortes de Zyed Benna e Bouna Traoré, em 2005, eletrocutados quando fugiam de uma perseguição policial, marcam um ponto de inflexão. Três semanas de revoltas em 274 municípios e milhares de prisões tiveram efeitos imediatos sobre o imaginário e a produção

cultural. Entre 2005 e 2006 multiplicam-se romances que reescrevem a experiência das banlieues, dialogando com o rap — IAM, NTM, Kery James, Booba — que desde os anos 1990 surge como resposta ao racismo e violência policial. *Le Poids d'une âme* [O Peso de uma Alma] (Mabrouck Rachedi, 2006), *Du Plomb dans le crâne* [Chumbo na Caveira] (Insa Sané, 2008) e *Flic ou caillera* [Tira ou bandido] (Rachid Santaki, 2014) tomam as revoltas como pano de fundo, retomam *La Haine* como intertexto e criam verdadeiras trilhas sonoras narrativas.

Em Sané, o romance liga a violência contemporânea ao passado colonial, em particular ao massacre de 17 de Outubro de 1961, sublinhando a continuidade histórica da repressão. Uma característica típica desses romances é que frequentemente expressam pertença por meio da linguagem, incorporando o *français contemporain des cités* [francês contemporâneo das periferias] (FCC), conforme definido por Goudaillier (2001).

O uso desse vernáculo não apenas caracteriza o grupo de jovens protagonistas masculinos, reforçando sua identidade coletiva e experiência compartilhada, mas também evidencia uma dimensão criativa ligada à cultura juvenil. Ao mobilizar gírias e formas linguísticas inovadoras, os autores estabelecem uma conexão viva com o rap, um espaço cultural igualmente marcado pela destreza verbal e pela experimentação estética, tornando a linguagem um veículo central de expressão, resistência e afirmação.

A década de 2010 acrescenta novos marcos. Em 2016, a morte de Adama Traoré desencadeia um movimento conduzido pela irmã, Assa, que exige “verdade e justiça” e ressoa internacionalmente com o assassinato de George Floyd; em 2017, o caso de Théo Luhaka expõe níveis extremos de violência sexualizada em contexto policial. A repressão de mobilizações — Coletes Amarelos, protestos contra a reforma da previdência — difunde técnicas militarizadas para além das *banlieues*, atingindo franjas das classes médias, com uso massivo de balas de borracha e contenção violenta dos populares. Relatórios da Anistia Internacional denunciam ataques a liberdades, violência policial e impunidade quase sistemática.

O estado de emergência pós-2015, prolongado até à pandemia e seguido do estado de emergência sanitária, acentuou restrições sobretudo na periferia urbana, onde o toque de recolher é aplicado com mais severidade. Em 2023, o assassinato de Nahel Merzouk em Nanterre reacende revoltas localizadas em territórios marcados por pobreza, desemprego e presença pós-colonial.

Neste quadro, a literatura dos anos 2020 reinterpreta a dialética entre juventude da *banlieue* e Estado punitivo. *Comme nous existons* [Como existimos] (Kaoutar Harchi, 2021) revisita uma juventude muçulmana de origem marroquina em Estrasburgo e mostra como microagressões escolares, islamofobia e violência policial modelam vidas e destinos. A história de Ahmed — revistado, violentado e levado ao suicídio — torna-se um evento incontornável, catalisando luto, mobilização e memória, e reativando a conexão entre violências urbanas e coloniais. O antagonismo não é mero recurso narrativo: expressa um regime de controle que transforma a presença juvenil racializada em ameaça ontológica.

As marchas de mães, no romance, ecoam o pensamento de Fatima Ouassak (2020), que reivindica um poder político das mães na periferia urbana e recusa o seu confinamento ao papel apaziguador entre comunidade e as instâncias de poder. Contra discursos oficiais que culpabilizam famílias, Ouassak denuncia a adultização de crianças racializadas: o sistema recusa-lhes a inocência reconhecida a crianças brancas e, por meio de abordagens policiais com insultos e violência, fixa-as numa suspeição permanente.

Deux secondes d'air qui brûle [Dois segundos de ar ardente], de Diaty Diallo (2022) aprofunda esse “vocabulário global” do policiamento da periferia urbana. Inspirado por um “erro policial”, o romance narra o assassinato de Samy, 16 anos, e a resposta comunitária que a perda desencadeia. O narrador e os amigos vivem entre o trabalho e os estudos; as suas vidas “desinteressantes” são continuamente interrompidas por abordagens policiais que resultam em humilhações e violência.

A prisão de Issa expõe como a dignidade é atacada no corpo. O texto conversa com *Les Misérables* de Ladj Ly (2019), que atualiza o legado de Victor Hugo para mostrar uma brigada que atua cotidianamente contra jovens da periferia, gerando intimidação e o uso de armas não letais que, invariavelmente, ocasionam ferimentos e até mesmo a morte. A tese de Rigouste (2012) é decisiva: tais práticas não são disfunções, mas consequências de doutrinas e métodos ensinados e tutelados. Fassin (2017) distingue punição adequada de vingança; o que vemos nas *banlieues* aproxima-se de punições extrajudiciais, coletivas e aleatórias, que não respondem a crimes, mas a uma economia afetiva de demonstração de força. Ao inscrever assassinatos de jovens cujo “crime” foi existir no espaço público, a literatura registra um programa disciplinar que ensina, por repetição, inferioridade racial e moral. Diallo, assim

como Ly, não estetiza a violência sem mostrar uma resposta: luto, resistência e ato performático — como visto na passagem que relata a explosão de uma Pirâmide — que transforma o fogo em símbolo de purificação, vingança e reapropriação do território. O vazio deixado torna-se um monumento em negativo, cenotáfio de vidas interrompidas, enquanto a poética reumaniza os jovens, devolvendo-lhes dignidade, visibilidade e respeito.

Em *Comme Ali* [Como Ali], Fatima Ouassak (2025) recria as teses de *La Puissance des mères* (2020) a partir de uma forma poética que fala a crianças e adultos, inspirada no assassinato de Nahel. A voz infantil de Ali, com menos de dez anos, observa que “os árabes nunca são crianças”, condensando a adultização que Geoffrey Ward (2012), Robin Bernstein (2011) e Kristin Henning (2021) identificaram noutros contextos: a “inocência” como privilégio branco, a criminalização precoce de crianças negras, a perda da presunção de inocência.

O conto acompanha microagressões na escola, a segregação que destina ao fracasso e o controle da paisagem urbana por muros e um “céu atrofiado”, até que a execução sumária de Nahel irrompe no cotidiano e a vizinhança incendeia a delegacia. Ali desce para “salvar o fogo”: a narrativa mobiliza videogames, contos árabes e imaginário corânico para converter saberes decoloniais em arma simbólica ao alcance dos jovens.

O fogo torna-se metáfora de comunidade e libertação; o percurso noturno do narrador, entre drones, enigmas e *djinnns*, reconquista imaginariamente a cidade. A violência final — dardos elétricos que matam a criança ao amanhecer — reinscreve o diagnóstico: o sistema recusa a infância e humanidade às crianças da periferia. Ao mesmo tempo, a leveza, o humor e o encanto da voz infantil resistem à redução da obra a “romance de tese”, mantendo a complexidade de uma vida que deseja jogos, casacos com capuz e pastilhas elásticas.

Em conjunto, essas obras tratam a violência policial como estrutura — e não como acidente —, articulando o policiamento às dinâmicas de racialização, à precarização de direitos e à produção de fronteiras internas que definem quem pode circular, ser suspeito e ser punido. Nesse quadro, a violência opera simultaneamente como regime de controle territorial e como experiência afetiva (humilhação, medo, luto e raiva) que corrói pertença e confiança.

Os dispositivos estéticos são, eles mesmos, formas de resistência. As obras ancoram-se e friccionam-se com modelos anteriores — como o romance realista do século XIX — para produzir contranarrativas, representações positivas e complexas de juventudes

desumanizadas. No cinema, a hibridez entre documental e poético, o uso de códigos do hip-hop e das culturas urbanas, e a construção de uma “trilha sonora” identitária ampliam o alcance político e afetivo. Na literatura, um realismo experiencial fragmentário alterna com o lirismo, reconstitui a textura do cotidiano, humaniza sem didatismo, devolve voz a sujeitos relegados a alvos do policiamento. Ao mesmo tempo, a articulação entre memória colonial e presente securitário desvela continuidades: de 1961 a Nahel, de Oussekiné a Adama, ecoam nomes e modos de repressão que tecem uma história subterrânea da República.

As narrativas francesas analisadas revelam, assim, não apenas uma gramática da violência policial, mas também formas recorrentes de resposta estética e política: a centralidade da juventude racializada, a inscrição do território como espaço de conflito e pertença, a importância da linguagem como marcador identitário e a produção de contranarrativas que reumanizam sujeitos sistematicamente deslegitimados. Esses elementos estruturam modos específicos de narrar a experiência periférica, articulando violência, memória, afetos e imaginação política. É a partir desse quadro que se torna possível deslocar o olhar para outros contextos nacionais, interrogando como essas mesmas tensões se reconfiguram em realidades marcadas por histórias coloniais, regimes de policiamento e ecologias culturais distintas.

4 NARRATIVAS BRASILEIRAS

Na seção anterior deste artigo, procedeu-se a uma leitura crítica de narrativas francesas que tematizam a violência policial, buscando compreender seus enquadramentos estéticos, políticos e sociais. Nesta seção, o foco analítico desloca-se para o contexto brasileiro, com o objetivo de examinar produções narrativas de autoria periférica que abordam a violência policial, situando-as em seus regimes específicos de enunciação, nas condições históricas de produção e nas disputas simbólicas que atravessam a representação da violência policial nas periferias dos grandes centros urbanos brasileiros. Desde a publicação do romance *Cidade de Deus* (Lins, 1997), escrito por um ex-morador da favela homônima ao romance, a cena literária brasileira foi tomada de assalto pela presença de um considerável número de autores das periferias e favelas do Brasil. Além do sucesso de público e crítica, o romance ofereceu um modelo inovador de narrativa sobre a violência nas favelas, trazendo um ponto de vista

interno e uma linguagem que mescla a agilidade da linguagem do cinema com um certo lirismo.(Schollhammer, 2013) No romance encontramos a materialização de um discurso literário que potencializa o lugar da enunciação, uma vez que mesmo sendo ex-morador da favela homônima, o autor é formado em Letras pela Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro e durante oito anos foi assistente de pesquisa da antropóloga Alba Zaluar. Dessa pesquisa emergiu uma série de estudos que possuem como foco a favela Cidade de Deus e a criminalidade; parte destes estudos está publicada nos livros *A máquina e a revolta* (Zaluar, 1985) e *Condomínio do Diabo* (Zaluar, 1994), ambos assinados pela antropóloga. A experiência prévia foi decisiva para a feitura do romance por ofertar ao autor um modelo de percepção da realidade cotidiana e fornecer material bruto para a criação do romance.

Paulo Lins, ao retratar a realidade da Cidade de Deus, atualizou a forma de ler e compreender os conflitos sociais no Brasil, ao apresentar uma experiência vívida e multifacetada da favela, suas transformações e os impactos da violência. A obra influenciou profundamente a literatura brasileira contemporânea, abrindo espaço para novos protagonismos e ampliando as possibilidades narrativas sobre temas sociais marginais. São autores que se autoproclamam marginais e utilizam a literatura enquanto veículo de um discurso que mescla com desenvoltura ficção e testemunho em uma estética que podemos facilmente nomear como realista.

Contudo, a estética realista dos autores marginais pouco tem a ver com o que se codificou como realismo literário: trata-se um realismo experiencial, o que se lê são experiências vividas, mesmo e sobretudo quando reconstruídas ficcionalmente. Parte significativa desse grupo de autores passou a se autointitular marginal como uma forma de caracterizar sua produção e, principalmente, como resposta a uma interpelação identitária.

No espaço circunscrito deste ensaio, que busca examinar narrativas que tematizam a violência policial, ao nos debruçarmos sobre as produções brasileiras, elegemos como objeto de nossa análise três obras: *A número um* (2015), de Raquel Oliveira e dois livros de Geovani Martins, *O sol na cabeça* (2018) e *Via Ápia* (2023). Dois aspectos determinaram a escolha dos autores, ambos foram residentes na favela Rocinha e ambientam as suas respectivas obras no território.

Além disso, os dois escritores também participaram da Festa Literária das Periferias, a Flupp, festival literário que ao longo de mais de uma década de existência busca promover a

constituição de novos sujeitos da enunciação ao fomentar a realização de oficinas de criação literária para moradores de favela e periferias. Criada por Écio Sales e Julio Ludemir, a Flupp em sua origem, em 2012, foi pensada como uma intervenção cultural e artística que atuaria em diálogo com a política de ocupação de territórios de favelas empreendida pelo Governo do Estado do Rio de Janeiro a partir do projeto das UPPs (Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora). O vínculo com o projeto das UPPs foi logo desfeito devido às crescentes denúncias de violações de direito e violência realizadas pelos policiais vinculados à política de pacificação, cujo o caso mais flagrante envolveu Amarildo Dias de Souza, o morador da favela da Rocinha torturado e morto dentro da UPP da Rocinha em 2013. Ao romper com o projeto de segurança do estado, a Flupp ganha novos contornos de atuação, e passa a produzir intervenções em diferentes localidades, não mais restrita aos territórios pacificados. O traço que singulariza o projeto é seu trânsito por diferentes favelas, sem construir uma vinculação específica a um único território marginalizado. A ideia de uma festa literária das periferias oferta uma identidade aos participantes e, principalmente, aos autores que foram publicados pelo projeto.

Iniciamos por Raquel de Oliveira, autora do romance *A número um*, publicado em 2015, e adaptado para o cinema em 2024 com o título *Bandida: A Número Um*, sob a direção de João Wainer. Do ponto de vista estrutural, o romance se destaca por não adotar uma narrativa linear tradicional, o que representa uma estratégia literária bastante oportuna e eficaz. Ao romper com a cronologia convencional, a obra desloca o foco narrativo do evento central — a morte do traficante Pará — para uma outra questão, mais complexa e reflexiva.

O leitor chega à narrativa já sabendo do desfecho trágico, o que cria uma tensão distinta: a narrativa não se concentra em construir o suspense em torno do que vai acontecer, mas sim em explorar as circunstâncias, as relações e os afetos que envolvem esse acontecimento. Essa escolha permite que o romance se aprofunde na dimensão humana e psicológica dos personagens, mostrando suas vidas cotidianas, seus vínculos e as dinâmicas internas do grupo, antes e depois da morte de Pará. Assim, a narrativa ganha uma dimensão quase circular, que reflete a complexidade da experiência vivida nas favelas e o impacto da violência sobre essas comunidades. Ao antecipar o desfecho, o romance convida o leitor a uma reflexão mais crítica e empática, deslocando o foco da simples notícia policial para a construção de uma história rica em afetos, contradições e significados.

Pensamos que *A número um* é um romance sentimental, e nisto repousa uma leitura especialmente política e transgressora. Ao ser classificado como uma narrativa sentimental, uma história de amor, o romance estabelece uma forma de humanizar os personagens envolvidos no comércio varejista de drogas. As descrições das cenas do cotidiano do grupo, as muitas confraternizações, os afetos que são construídos e o estabelecimento de uma filia, tudo isso expressa uma espécie de contranarrativa que silencia o discurso comum que animaliza os sujeitos ligados às práticas ilícitas. Em resposta à imagem de homens violentos e sanguinários, Raquel de Oliveira pinta um quadro em que emergem sorrisos, abraços e afetos. Além disso, o romance da Raquel de Oliveira se aproxima do projeto da Flupp: ofertar uma resposta estética e ética ao processo de marginalização das periferias do Rio.

Geovani Martins figura hoje como uma das vozes mais expressivas da literatura brasileira contemporânea. *O sol na cabeça*, livro de estreia do autor, revela a sua dicção singular e o domínio de uma linguagem literária que entrelaça com desenvoltura gírias e a norma culta. Os contos reunidos no livro apresentam uma cartografia singular da cidade do Rio de Janeiro. Nós, leitores, somos conduzidos por uma cidade marcada pelas desigualdades sociais e por diferentes manifestações racistas, quem nos guia por essa cidade são personagens jovens que ocupam um entre-lugar entre a ordem e a desordem.

Os personagens não são retratados como jovens ligados ao comércio varejista de drogas e muito menos são sujeitos regradados que estão integrados ao mercado formal de trabalho, são personagens em situação de vulnerabilidade social e que são vítimas preferenciais da ação policial e da sociedade racista. Os personagens de Martins ocupam uma fronteira social entre morro e asfalto, em constante deslocamento por uma cidade que é refratária a sua presença. Outro aspecto importante é observar que a narrativa de Martins é marcada pela ausência de uma intenção educativa explícita. Ao contrário de uma pedagogia moralista, seus personagens são adictos e consomem maconha de forma recreativa, ofertando uma representação que rompe com formas maniqueístas fixas e investe no retrato do cotidiano de jovens que vivem nas margens da cidade.

Os personagens dos contos são jovens marcados por condições de vulnerabilidade social e estão em busca da construção de suas identidades em meio constante trânsito pela cidade, produzindo um relato cartográfico que desenha o Rio de Janeiro contemporâneo. Nos contos,

os personagens conseguem driblar a experiência-limite da violência, mostrando estratégias de resistência e sobrevivência que revelam a complexidade da vida periférica contemporânea. Essa abordagem contribui para uma literatura que não apenas denuncia, mas também explora as nuances da existência em contextos de vulnerabilidade, ampliando a compreensão sobre os desafios e as possibilidades desses jovens em formação.

Os contos “Rolezim” e “Espiral”, que abrem o livro, revelam como o autor promove uma alternância em sua linguagem, transitando entre o uso de uma dicção marginal e povoada de gírias, e a adoção de uma voz narrativa pautada na norma culta. Nos dois contos, Geovani Martins também expõe como o racismo violenta os corpos de jovens negros periféricos, tema tratado de modo especialmente impactante no conto “Espiral”. Na narrativa acompanhamos como um morador de favela é vítima do olhar racista dos moradores das áreas ricas da cidade. Lido como uma construção relacional, o racismo mobiliza uma nova postura por parte do personagem, que passa a encenar a atitude violenta e agressiva que os racistas atribuem a ele. Em “Rolezim” acompanhamos uma situação prosaica na cultura carioca, a ida a praia, ser narrada como um percurso dotado de muitas armadilhas para os jovens negros de periferia. Espaço público por excelência, a praia, na narrativa de Geovani Martins, surge como um território franqueado apenas para a elite branca carioca e a presença dos personagens negros é constantemente vigiada, ato que culmina numa abordagem policial violenta no final do conto.

Em *Via Ápia*, romance de Geovani Martins ambientado na favela da Rocinha, temas abordados nas narrativas curtas são retomados em novo fôlego. A experiência da linguagem se torna ainda mais radical e inventiva, contaminando inclusive o narrador extradiegético. Diegese e diálogos se confundem em um jogo de linguagem que utiliza marcas de oralidade e gírias. Em seu título o romance faz referência à principal rua da favela da Rocinha, a Via Ápia. Rua movimentada e com bares que funcionam durante 24 horas, a Via Ápia é o palco de parte da narrativa que esquadrinha a favela. O romance narra o cotidiano de cinco jovens moradores da favela da Rocinha às vésperas da instalação da Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora na localidade.

Cabe aqui uma pequena digressão, *Via Ápia* é a segunda narrativa de Geovani Martins que aborda o processo de pacificação na Rocinha, a primeira experiência foi o conto “A história do

Periquito e do Macaco”, reunido em *O sol na cabeça*. O conto também examina como a instalação da UPP altera a rotina dos moradores, especialmente para os jovens, agora vivenciando com maior frequência um cotidiano de violência e humilhações práticas pelos policiais da força de pacificação. O título da narrativa curta, bem como o seu desfecho, que nos apresenta uma espécie de moral da história, apresenta para o leitor um tom fabular que entra em contraste com violência narrada.

Feito o breve comentário, retomamos a leitura de *Via Ápia*. Ao centrar o relato na vida de jovens moradores de uma favela, Geovani Martins descortina uma realidade marcada pela precarização do trabalho, os momentos de lazer e o desejo de sobreviver em um cotidiano de violências. Podemos dizer que semelhante ao romance *Cidade de Deus*, em *Via Ápia* o assunto também é o crime. Contudo, trata-se do crime praticado pelo Estado, pela polícia, que ocupa e violenta o território. Sem recorrer a leituras demagógicas ou maniqueístas, aspecto já evidenciado em seu livro de contos, Geovani Martins apresenta uma contranarrativa da política de pacificação das favelas e expõe a forma como a intervenção das forças policiais na favela violenta os corpos dos jovens e cerceia as liberdades. Ao contrário dos discursos mais conservadores que aplaudiam o processo de pacificação como uma conquista do território, em *Via Ápia* o projeto é representado como uma invasão, mostrando que a violência não se restringe às disputas entre facções criminosas, mas está profundamente enraizada nas práticas estatais que, sob o pretexto da segurança, perpetuam a exclusão e a repressão.

Além da denúncia da violência do Estado, representada como uma fratura no romance, que divide a obra em dois momentos bem marcados, antes da UPP e depois da UPP, Geovani Martins visita com especial atenção o cotidiano de jovens moradores de favela e a precariedade do trabalho. Há um notável investimento na representação de vidas desimportantes, insignificantes. São jovens que trabalham, quase sempre de modo precário, fumam maconha e buscam sobreviver. Longe de maniqueísmos simplistas e de abordagens moralistas, o autor visita o dia a dia de rapazes favelados que são as vítimas preferenciais do Estado e nos apresenta as estratégias criadas por personagens que utilizam a ginga como força de driblar as desventuras da vida.

Ao utilizar a favela da Rocinha como cenário, o romance mescla com desenvoltura elementos ficcionais com dados da realidade imediata. Exemplar nesse sentido é a referência ao

assassinato de Amarildo por parte de policiais da Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora da Rocinha, episódio que é discutido por parte dos personagens e representa no romance o fracasso da política de pacificação, tal qual ocorreu no plano factual. Como argumenta um personagem ao citar o episódio: “Papo reto, precisou desse bagulho do Amarildo aí, depois disso a mídia caiu em aqui no morro. Foi isso que mudou. Aí eles teve que ficar na moral, aceitar o arrego e ficar no sapatinho”. Além de revelar o atento manejo de linguagem por parte de Geovani Martins, o fragmento também expressa de forma contundente a repercussão do caso Amarildo na dinâmica da UPP da Rocinha e na relação entre a polícia e a comunidade. O “bagulho do Amarildo” refere-se ao já citado caso do desaparecimento, tortura e morte do ajudante de pedreiro Amarildo de Souza, ocorrido em 2013, quando ele foi levado para a sede da Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora (UPP) da Rocinha por policiais militares, onde foi submetido a violência extrema por agentes do Estado. No trecho, o personagem sugere que foi justamente a exposição midiática e o impacto do caso Amarildo que forçaram uma mudança de postura por parte da polícia na favela: “eles tiveram que ficar na moral, aceitar o arrego e ficar no sapatinho”. Isso indica que, diante da pressão pública e do escrutínio, as forças policiais passaram a agir com mais cautela e menos violência ostensiva, para evitar novas denúncias e repercussões negativas. Essa fala sintetiza uma contranarrativa importante sobre a política de pacificação: longe de ser uma conquista pacífica e consensual, a presença da UPP na Rocinha foi marcada por violência, opressão e abusos, que só foram parcialmente freados após o escândalo Amarildo. O caso expôs a brutalidade institucional e a impunidade que permeiam a atuação policial, desmistificando o discurso oficial que apresentava as UPPs como um avanço na segurança pública.

5 COMPARAÇÃO

Antes de iniciarmos o exercício comparativo entre as produções francesas e brasileiras, consideramos oportuno expressar que utilizamos como referência o método do comparatismo intercultural, o qual se baseia na análise e no confronto sistemático entre produções literárias oriundas de diferentes culturas, com o objetivo de identificar trocas, diálogos, contrastes e influências que atravessam fronteiras geográficas, linguísticas e culturais. Ao ser aplicado ao campo da Literatura Comparada, essa abordagem rompe com modelos tradicionais centrados

na comparação binária entre literaturas nacionais ou na hegemonia do cânone ocidental, adotando uma visão mais ampla, aberta e receptiva a diversas formas de expressão literária e cultural, conforme formulado por Eduardo Coutinho (2025).

Mais do que comparar produções literárias, o comparatismo intercultural examina também experiências históricas, sociais e culturais, valorizando a pluralidade e a heterogeneidade cultural. Busca-se compreender como as obras dialogam dentro de um espaço cultural móvel e marcado por tensões, onde podem coexistir elementos conflitantes ou complementaridades que enriquecem a interpretação dos textos.

Ao adotarmos essa metodologia, buscamos elaborar um olhar atento às especificidades locais e, ao mesmo tempo, à sua inserção em contextos globais, promovendo um diálogo dialético entre o particular e o universal. Quando aplicado à literatura comparada, o interculturalismo destaca, além das relações entre obras, a interação entre sistemas culturais complexos e multifacetados, enfocados processos de hibridação, resistência, adaptação e rejeição cultural.

Trata-se, nessa perspectiva, de um método interdisciplinar que incorpora contribuições de áreas como história, sociologia, antropologia, estudos pós-coloniais e estudos culturais, o que permite analisar não apenas as semelhanças ou diferenças formais entre textos, mas também seu significado social, político e histórico em contextos específicos.

Em nossa visão, a literatura deixa de ser considerada apenas um produto isolado e passa a ser compreendida como uma interface de múltiplas vozes, discursos e práticas culturais entrecruzados, resultando na ampliação do nosso horizonte teórico. Dessa forma, a análise literária se expande, incorporando também o estudo das relações de poder, das identidades culturais e das dinâmicas dos sujeitos discursivos e suas representações.

Dessa forma, baseado no método do comparatismo intercultural, podemos observar que as narrativas periféricas francesas e brasileiras contemporâneas, embora originadas em contextos geográficos e históricos distintos, apresentam como ponto de convergência a produção de uma espécie de denúncia da violência policial e da marginalização estrutural sofrida por jovens periféricos. As produções discursivas oriundas de cada território não apenas documentam experiências de sofrimento, resistência e opressão, mas também elaboram sentidos sobre identidade, pertencimento e os desafios das políticas públicas diante de realidades intensamente marcadas por desigualdades raciais e socioeconômicas.

No contexto francês, é notório o impacto do filme *La Haine* de Mathieu Kassovitz, lançado em 1995, marcando um ponto de inflexão na forma como a questão periférica entra no imaginário coletivo e na produção cultural. Inspirado em conflitos reais, o filme apresenta jovens de diferentes origens étnicas unidos pela experiência comum da marginalização e da violência policial. A obra inaugura uma narrativa que enxerga a juventude periférica não primordialmente pela lente do etnicismo, mas por um prisma que privilegia uma vivência socioeconômica compartilhada, mesmo que tal perspectiva seja posteriormente tensionada pela constatação da racialização estrutural dessa mesma juventude. Obras literárias como as de Insa Sané, Rachid Santaki e Mabrouck Rachedi, claramente inspiradas e impactadas pela produção de Kassovitz, aprofundam essa reflexão, estabelecendo um diálogo entre o passado colonial da França — evidenciado pelas promessas não cumpridas da República — e o presente de marginalização, racismo e violência que os jovens das periferias enfrentam. Mais recentemente, escritoras como Harchi, Diallo e Ouassak têm articulado experiências interseccionais das comunidades pós-coloniais, em que a exclusão social se vê agravada tanto pelo sentimento anti-islâmico como pela discriminação de gênero dirigida a mulheres de minorias étnicas.

Por sua vez, a literatura brasileira periférica, exemplificada principalmente pelas obras de Geovani Martins, surge num cenário urbano e social cuja violência estatal encontra sua encarnação mais brutal nas favelas do Rio de Janeiro sob políticas como as das UPPs. Essa literatura adota o que se pode chamar de um realismo experiencial, que privilegia o instante, a cena e o cotidiano em sua multiplicidade e complexidade, sem a necessidade de uma moral pedagógica explícita. Diferentemente da idealização inicial francesa de uma comunidade multiétnica, a literatura brasileira enfatiza a racialização das identidades e a construção de vozes negras autônomas, locais e plurais, por meio da alternância entre uma dicção formal e a oralidade das gírias e do vernáculo marginal. O retrato dos jovens favelados não estigmatiza nem reduz; ao contrário, humaniza cenas de violência, lazer, trabalho e resistência, com ênfase nas estratégias individuais e coletivas para existir em sociedades marcadas pelo imenso desequilíbrio de poder e oportunidades.

Ambas as produções dialogam com o Estado e sua atuação repressiva, denunciando o autoritarismo e a violência institucional como continuidades de processos históricos e sociais mais amplos. Na França, a violência policial é frequentemente narrada como um eco direto do

colonialismo, uma repetição das práticas de exclusão e controle de populações racializadas. No Brasil, a violência estatal tem características próprias, calcadas no racismo estrutural e nas políticas urbanas de controle, que assumem um caráter quase invasivo através das intervenções policiais nas favelas — fenômeno que ganha especial destaque nas obras que abordam os episódios envolvendo a UPP e o caso Amarildo.

Ambos os conjuntos narrativos, apesar das diferenças de matrizes e especificidades, evidenciam a necessidade e o poder da produção cultural periférica como instrumento de denúncia, resistência e afirmação identitária. Eles desconstroem os discursos hegemônicos que estigmatizam territórios e sujeitos, e revelam a urgência de escutar vozes silenciadas. O entrelaçamento entre história colonial, violência policial e a busca por reconhecimento e justiça é um ponto de encontro crucial que mostra a persistência das feridas sociais e a vitalidade das culturas periféricas como espaços de reinvenção e luta.

Assim, a literatura e o cinema periféricos franceses e brasileiros não apenas refletem, mas atuam como espelhos e motores de transformação social, construindo narrativas que são simultaneamente dolorosas e de esperança, particulares e universais, locais e globais. São produções que convidam a repensar as cidades, as políticas públicas e as próprias noções de cidadania e humanidade, colocando no centro do debate os jovens que historicamente ficaram à margem.

CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

A partir da análise comparativa entre as produções culturais periféricas francesas e brasileiras, torna-se evidente a fecundidade do método do comparatismo intercultural para iluminar processos de diálogo, tensão e ressignificação que atravessam fronteiras nacionais, históricas e estéticas. Este método permite compreender que tais produções não devem ser vistas apenas como expressões artísticas isoladas, mas como práticas culturais que se constituem na interseção entre literatura, cinema, música, história social e memória coletiva. Embora originadas em contextos geográficos e históricos distintos, as narrativas periféricas da França e do Brasil convergem na denúncia da violência policial, do racismo estrutural e da marginalização a que são submetidos jovens habitantes das periferias urbanas, ao mesmo

tempo em que oferecem testemunhos e elaborações simbólicas que constroem identidades, sentidos de pertencimento e projetos de resistência.

No caso francês, o impacto de *La Haine* (1995), de Mathieu Kassovitz, representa um ponto de viragem fundamental, ao colocar a juventude periférica no centro do imaginário cultural e social. A obra inaugura uma narrativa que, embora inicialmente centrada numa vivência socioeconómica partilhada, logo se vê tensionada pelo reconhecimento da racialização estrutural que molda a experiência das populações de origem imigrante. A literatura de autores como Insa Sané, Rachid Santaki e Mabrouck Rachedi e o filme de Ladj Ly retomam e ampliam essa reflexão, ligando o presente da exclusão social e da violência policial ao passado colonial francês e às promessas não cumpridas da República. A intertextualidade recorrente com *La Haine*, assim como a incorporação de referências da cultura hip-hop, evidencia a formação de uma estética híbrida, capaz de articular dimensões documentárias e poéticas, populares e políticas. No entanto, nos últimos anos temos assistido à ascensão de várias escritoras, como Harchi, Diallo e Ouassak, que se distanciam do modelo republicano francês, expressando experiências especificamente interseccionais das comunidades pós-coloniais, nas quais a exclusão social é amplificada pelos sentimentos anti-islâmicos e pela discriminação de género contra mulheres de minorias étnicas.

No Brasil, é possível localizarmos a publicação do romance *Cidade de Deus* (1997), por Paulo Lins, como marco fundador de um movimento que resultou na emergência de novos sujeitos da enunciação ao se proclamarem como autores de periferia. No início do século XXI, tal fenómeno é representado de forma emblemática por autores como Raquel de Oliveira e Geovani Martins. Suas narrativas emergem em diálogo direto com a violência cotidiana das favelas e com políticas estatais repressivas, como as Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora (UPPs). Essa produção distingue-se pelo uso de uma linguagem marcada pela presença de gírias e por um realismo experiencial que privilegia o cotidiano, recusando qualquer moral pedagógica explícita. A ênfase recai na racialização das identidades e na construção de vozes negras autónomas e plurais, que transitam entre registros formais e a oralidade marcada pelo vernáculo popular. Se, na França, ainda há espaço para uma imaginação de comunidade multiétnica, no Brasil a brutalidade é mais explícita: as taxas de homicídios, de violência policial e de circulação de armas são muito mais elevadas, e a representação do dilema entre “vida criminosa” e “vida honesta” assume um peso central.

As diferenças temáticas refletem essas condições sociais, mas ambas as tradições narrativas sublinham a violência como elemento estrutural: a polícia aparece como instrumento de controle de populações racializadas, tratando periferias e favelas como zonas ocupadas onde lógicas de segurança se sobrepõem a direitos. As narrativas registram o impacto dessa violência, revelando como a mesma molda identidades juvenis, corrói pertencimento e confiança, e mina a dignidade e os direitos humanos. Revelam também um “vocabulário global” da polícia nas periferias, visível em motivos comuns como a juventude racializada como alvo, geografias estigmatizadas, narrativas de sobrevivência ou vingança, e a erosão da cidadania. Se na França a resposta estética tende a emergir em forma de rebelião ou motim, no Brasil a ênfase recai mais na resistência cotidiana e na capacidade de suportar, revelando a adaptabilidade desse vocabulário a diferentes contextos.

Do ponto de vista estético, as estratégias literárias e culturais funcionam como formas de resistência. Inspirando-se em modelos anteriores, como o romance realista francês do século XIX, mas também rompendo com eles, os autores criam representações alternativas que reconstróem a dignidade e reumanizam sujeitos constantemente desumanizados. Esse gesto reforça a importância da produção cultural periférica como prática de contestação e de afirmação positiva.

Assim, a comparação entre França e Brasil revela como condições sociais partilhadas e respostas criativas distintas iluminam as dinâmicas globais da marginalidade urbana e da violência racializada do Estado. Literatura e cinema periféricos não apenas refletem realidades locais, mas também atuam como motores de transformação social. Eles desconstróem discursos hegemônicos, projetam horizontes de justiça e cidadania, e afirmam a urgência de escutar vozes historicamente silenciadas. Simultaneamente particulares e universais, locais e globais, dolorosas e esperançosas, essas narrativas centram a juventude periférica no debate sobre humanidade, comunidade e futuro.

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ECOCIDADE: Territorial Co-Production, Insurgent Citizenship and Community Climate Resilience in São Paulo's Urban Peripheries

Abstract

This paper examines the ECOCIDADE project, a community-led urban resilience initiative operating in Brazil's marginalized peripheries, implemented by the NGO The City Needs You Institute. By centering care practices, circular economy dynamics, and grassroots climate adaptation, ECOCIDADE challenges conventional technocratic approaches to resilience. Drawing on fieldwork in Brasília, São Paulo, the analysis demonstrates how the project reframes sustainability as a process of insurgent citizenship and shared governance—one through which informal settlements reclaim agency amid environmental and political crises. The article argues that ECOCIDADE's four-phase methodology (capacity building for autonomy, network activation, policy prototyping and cooperation, collective and intersectional care) constitutes a robust strategy for territorial co-production. This strategy offers a critical alternative to mainstream climate urbanism and suggests that such co-productive approaches—which treat peripheries as sites of epistemic innovation rather than as deficits—are essential for the renewal of democracy in contexts marked by deep inequality.

Keywords: participatory urbanism; climate justice; territorial co-production; insurgent citizenship; community climate resilience; circular economy; favela; periphery; Brazil.

Introduction: The Crisis of Urban Resilience While Planting Another Future

While Brasília ranks as one of São Paulo's most vulnerable neighborhoods (Instituto Cidades Sustentáveis, 2025), residents like Noemia, Nivalda and Hilda insist on planting a different future. These veteran activists have long fought not only for basic services, but to reinvent what their territory might become. In retirement, their care labour persists through urban gardens that function as multifunctional socioecological infrastructures: it generates mental and collective health, creates spaces for intergenerational learning, harvests rainwater and compost, and generates income through food preparation. This seed initiative encapsulates the central thesis of this article. Brazil's urban peripheries, home to over forty million people, face compounding crises of climate vulnerability and extractive governance (Caldeira, 2017). Yet within these landscapes of precarity, sophisticated strategies of territorial co-production—collective processes through which residents partner with or

pressure state and non-state actors to produce and govern public goods (Mitlin, 2008; Ostrom, 1996)—are forged daily. These strategies represent a vital renewal of democratic practice, one rooted in insurgent citizenship (Holston, 2008) and the reclamation of the right to co-produce the city.

According to Samson and Arruda (2022), the ECOCIDADE project, aims at just agroecological transition in *Brasília* by working with a mosaic of community-led initiatives for climate collapse mitigation and socioenvironmental justice. By establishing a decarbonized local system, urban and food resource flows are redesigned through cooperation between production, consumption, and organic residue destination in public spaces. The project consists of a community economy based on resource exchange, integral care, local and circular approaches.

This article analyses ECOCIDADE as a paradigmatic case of co-productive strategy. Beyond a critique of technocratic resilience planning, it dissects ECOCIDADE's methodological framework, which systematizes a pathway for radical participatory democracy and community-based adaptation in the era of climate emergency. The project operationalizes resilience through four interconnected pillars: 1) capacity building for autonomy; 2) network activation; 3) policy prototyping and cooperation; 4) collective and intersectional care. This article is based on theoretical analysis and empirical data from participatory action research conducted in *Brasília* between 2021 and 2023, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and collaborative mapping.

The argument proceeds in four parts. First, it critiques the limits of mainstream climate urbanism. Second, it details ECOCIDADE's four-phase methodology. Third, it presents findings from *Brasília*. Finally, it reflects on the project's lessons for equitable urbanism, democratic renewal and community-based adaptation—lessons that position the periphery as a vital epistemic center for reimagining the future city.

While revealing complex dynamics based on the relationship between capacity building, distributed networks, policy prototyping, and care, we ask whether it is possible to think of strategies for territorial co-production and for the renewal of democracy without those relevant dimensions—and we propose to look for pathways already existing in Brazilian peripheries.

Section I: Beyond Technocratic Resilience

The Limits of Mainstream Climate Urbanism

Dominant paradigms of urban climate resilience, often originating in the Global North, prioritize techno-managerial approaches and large-scale, expert-led infrastructure (Bulkeley & Castán Broto, 2013). In this framework, vulnerability becomes a technical variable and communities are cast as passive beneficiaries. When applied to contexts such as Brazil's peripheries, this approach suffers from critical flaws: it tends to ignore situated knowledge

of micro-climates (Scott, 1998), and depoliticize the socio-spatial production of vulnerability (Ranganathan & Bratman, 2021).

As Roy (2005) argues, planning often operates through 'civic governmentality,' that invites participation primarily to legitimize predetermined outcomes. That creates what Holston (2008) identifies as a 'mediated citizenship', where rights remain conditional. The result is a persistent disconnection: international frameworks advocate for inclusive cities, but local implementation remains technocratic and capitalist, failing to engage marginalized communities as epistemic and implementation agents (Watson, 2014). This raises a difficult question: what would it mean to entangle radical participatory democracy with climate urbanism in a genuinely transformative way?

The Need for Community-Based Climate Action: repairing inequalities

Climate change impacts fall disproportionately on vulnerable populations, who are more exposed and possess less capacity to cope with the effects. Mainstream projects typically fail to address existing layers of vulnerability and often reproduce extractive modes of production based on surplus accumulation by construction companies, with little attention to local capacity development. This combination, widely recognized by literature and policy makers, tends to exacerbate existing inequalities in the territories, making the intention to achieve justice and equity even more complex.

Considering that, it is essential that climate adaptation strategies consider the vulnerabilities in the territories, in its intersection with the effects of extreme events, and beyond: society needs effective adaptation measures that strengthen capacities of the most vulnerable populations, in a more just, secure and resilient way, therefore allowing them to respond to extreme events but also promoting better living conditions. Effective adaptation requires strengthening the capacities of the most vulnerable and the repair of historic inequalities, to promote better living conditions.

Community-based initiatives address the root problem through a focus on capacity development for autonomy, climate and community resilience, the reduction of long-term climate risks, and the responsibilities' share for care ethics. The relevance of this approach is recognized in Brazil by the ministries through recent guides such as 'Community Plans for Climate Risk Reduction' and 'Community Nature Based Solutions' (Ministry of Cities, 2025; Ministry of Environment, 2025). Yet, critical questions remain: how can historic inequalities be repaired while an adaptation for the climate crisis proceeds? How can local people be included in the co-production of solutions during the implementation of climate action? How can innovative democratic processes be installed that go beyond listening and toward co-produced community action, with confrontation of inequalities, redistribution of resources, and the leverage of citizen-owned (scalable and more efficient) policy responses to climate change?

Data as a Political Tool

In this context, data becomes a crucial political terrain. The 'worst neighbourhood' ranking is a form of data violence that erases agency and complex realities (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020). Official data on peripheries is often aggregated, outdated, or designed for surveillance. A foundational strategy of territorial co-production is reclaiming data generation.

Participatory mapping and community-led monitoring are acts of counter-cartography (Parker, 2006), making visible not just risks but assets, skills, networks, and existing solutions created by the territories. When residents map gardens, water sources, dumping sites, they are building evidence-based alternatives. This data strengthens local networks, empowers state negotiations, and challenges technical expertise monopolies, asserting residents as knowing subjects with essential local knowledge (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). ECOCIDADE's starting point is this epistemic shift, framing data co-production as the foundational democratic act of resilience-building itself.

Section II: The ECOCIDADE Methodology - A Four-Phase Framework for Co-Production

The failure of institutional responses to sociospatial injustice during the COVID-19 pandemic motivated decentralized civil society responses, particularly in urban peripheries. Complex social arrangements and entanglements emerged, involving for example the rural and the urban: MST (Movimento Sem Terra - the Landless Movement) fostered associations with food production and right to the land with informal and vulnerable settlements in the peripheries of the cities, with the support from organizations of the third sector. ECOCIDADE emerged as one initiative that supported food security through solidarity and proximity networks. Distinctively, its strategy was not merely emergency food delivery but established a more local and circular food system—from production in urban gardens to consumption in food culture spots to composting in schools. As a long-term strategy, based on nature and culture-based solutions, the project recognized and connected existing initiatives, which strengthened capacities for sustainable and lasting impact in Brasília (fig.1).

From recognizing the territory, its citizens' initiatives, its knowledge, its proposed solutions, ECOCIDADE, initiated by A Cidade Precisa de Você in Brasília in June 2021, proved to be a methodological framework for structuring territorial co-production around food systems and local climate action, which can be systematized into four iterative phases.

Phase 1: Capacity Building for Autonomy

Based on existing initiatives in the territory, this phase focuses on the development of abilities and solutions test and prototype. Rather than the imposition of external training, it starts with existing knowledge and addresses identified gaps. The strategy supported small-scale interventions like community composting hubs or expanded gardens as tangible 'proofs of concept', which delivered immediate benefits. Technical advice supports local initiatives through workshops on nature-based solutions (fig. 2, 3) and through the implementation of technologies such as biodigesters, rainwater harvesting systems, and ecological water treatment systems. Initiatives receive technical advice on circular and solidarity economies, including the development of business models for urban farmers and cooks (fig. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). Additionally, the initiatives receive a seed fund with shared governance that allows the continuation of activities. This phase recognized that for sustained participation throughout time, initiatives must address material needs, going beyond the alternative and towards substitutive technologies (Ventania, 2021), which can offer viable distributive pathways, far from the capitalist centre-periphery paradigm. As the project evolves, it focuses on "work, income, and autonomy: enabling initiatives to generate income through sustainable models" (The City Needs You, 2023). Over six months, this phase engaged over 3,100 community members across fifteen workshops and thirteen technical assistance visits, with the installation of three composting systems and the distribution of three hundred seedlings.

Phase 2: Network Activation

Resilience is underpinned by connectivity. This phase focuses on the forging of horizontal links through spatial and social mapping and through an asset-based approach to underutilized resources, which are identified and categorized around the dimensions of alliances, knowledge, services, spaces, and nature (e.g., vacant lots for urban farming, informal waste collectors). With simple GIS tools, local students mapped physical assets such as vacant lots and gardens (fig. 9, 10). Workshops produced a catalog of social capital, with the identification of gardeners, builders, educators, and caregivers. A digital-physical platform connected forty-seven local initiatives—community kitchens, urban farms, schools—through a 'classifieds' system that matches needs and surplus resources. These alliances are based on reciprocity, blending academic and community epistemologies, and having as output a 'living territorial profile' as a constantly actualized care ecosystem for the commons, owned and safeguarded by the community.

A digital counter-cartography was produced as an exchange tool that allows the flows and relationships within the eco-citizen action network to be visualized (fig. 11, 12, 13, 14). ECOCIDADE's team of technical advisors and local students walk around the neighbourhood to map underused resources available in the region, related to the food cycle. Through an asset-based approach, with pedagogical and ludic methodologies, underutilized resources are identified and categorized around the following dimensions: alliances, knowledge, services, spaces, nature (e.g., vacant lots for urban farming, informal waste collectors). The information about the resources mapped is uploaded in a digital platform, as a means of crossing data and establishing possible collaborations, exchange between needs and offers, tracking flows of goods and services in the neighbourhood

Besides the material assets, one of the most fundamental resources are the diverse stakeholders. Community members, NGOs, sympathetic municipal departments and actors, and universities are identified by interest, indicated by trust, and classified by their needs and what they see as value. Therefore, an eco-citizen action network is organized by confluences of what people desire and what they can offer. On a territorial scale, it created a portfolio of twenty-five socio-environmental services, a territorial curriculum with classes offered by local citizens - being the common spaces (the gardens and the food culture spots) the classrooms. It materialized the concept of sustainable proximity¹ (Moreno, 2020) in the context of urban peripheries, where short cycles of food, waste, and knowledge build community autonomy and climate resilience. The project received an award from Moreno in 2022 as a practical example of this concept.

Within a year, the project promoted sixty activities with engagement of over three thousand participants. Evaluations show that fifty-six percent of interviewees reported new relationships with other initiatives, with eighty-nine percent of those attributing these relationships to project actions. A total of ninety-five percent felt that a local mutual support network had solidified, and eighty-six percent noted that this network included actors with no prior contact. One participant offered a reflection on the "valuation of one's own territory," with an observation that even in the periphery, possibilities and skilled people exist who only needed incentives.

Phase 3: Policy Prototyping and Cooperation

This phase translates grassroots innovation into institutional change through the systematization of learning into evidence-based policy briefs and intersectoral policy creation, support for territorial co-governance spaces, and facilitation of institutional dialogue. The project organized events that gathered residents, health agents, teachers, and local politicians to co-draft local climate adaptation proposals; facilitated institutional dialogue by using prototypes and community data to advocate within formal policy channels; and influenced intersectoral public policy creation. Multiple actions, in different

¹ The sustainable proximity concept gained international attention when the '15 minute city' was elaborated by Professor Carlos Moreno and implemented by Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo in Paris. As highlighted in the IPCC report, urban form, planning and infrastructure can be used to encourage sustainable lifestyle changes, and urban areas that develop effective 15-minute city strategies are very likely to reduce urban energy use and emissions (C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group - Global Observatory of Sustainable Proximities, 2025). The ECOCIDADE project was awarded by professor Carlos Moreno in 2022 in Megacities Festival, considered as an example of a '15 minute city'. By placing people and nature at the centre of urban planning, the proximity concept aims to ensure an equitable distribution of all essential social functions – such as housing, job opportunities, everyday needs, public services for care, leisure and education, green and biodiversity areas – so that all residents can benefit from shorter access time and high quality life. This systemic approach of urban planning frees people from time spent travelling in long distances of pendular movement between centre and periphery, strengthening territorial development in local centralities. In our case, there is a specific adaptation of this concept to a peripheral context, where proximity is often about survival networks rather than just amenity access.

scales, could build ways of continuing the work done by the project and develop a leaving strategy of The City Needs You NGO from the territory.

The project sustained hybrid governance—from the territory to municipal, federal, and international scales—through collaborative networks, multi-level coordination, and the strategic use of formal regulations. With the aim of long-term change, the project supported multiple governance mechanisms: collaborative networks (as a distributed platform for the exchange of knowledge, resources, and labour); multi-level coordination (a link between social capital and a connection among local, regional, and national governments for policy alignment); awareness and strategic use of formal regulations (tactical engagement with legal, administrative, and bureaucratic frameworks that define the rights and obligations of actors within the territory, such as advocacy for legal recognition and new typologies of tenure to provide security); formal spaces of participation (the strengthening and occupation of mechanisms such as councils and community assemblies for increased legitimacy and sustainability); informal institutions and norms (a foundation in informal social capital and community ethics of care, plus customary rules and traditions that guide community behavior and resource use); and technical and financial instruments (the development of participatory tools such as mapping and data generation, plus direct payment for community members, as a leverage of civic provision through community-contributed labor and resources).

With a focus on local activists, the project offered advocacy training for a shift from insurgent citizenship toward formal policy influence and co-production. The recognition and collection of knowledge from diverse people across different sectors of the city administration produced a collective intelligence about how systems work and how to achieve advocacy with a synchronized agenda for the well-being of the territory. Beyond the mapping of this knowledge, the project organized it into communication materials for access by the general public.

This advocacy resulted in concrete policy access: three urban gardens now receive scholarships (POT hortas), and one initiative won a thirty-thousand-reais acceleration award (Sampa+ Rural). The methodology was systematized and scaled through the ECOCIDADE Game, which was tested with twenty initiatives across São Paulo (fig. 15, 16). The 'Fazer Juntos' policy laboratory contributed to the conception of an intersectoral program for financial aid to unemployed mothers as school food cycle guardians (POT Maes Guardiás), a benefit to two thousand women over two years (São Paulo City Hall, 2023). The project also influenced federal programs (the National Program for Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture, and the Green and Resilient Cities Program) and Brazil's Climate Plan, with a final culmination in recognition at the UN Habitat Assembly (2023) as a reference for sustainable proximity.

Phase 4: Collective and Intersectional Care

Underpinning all phases is an ethics of care—a recognition that environmental work in contexts of structural violence cannot be separate from emotional and social burdens (Tronto, 2013). Care was operationalized as processual care (meetings with provision of food and childcare, besides celebrating rituals for the small victories) and as recognition of the often-invisible feminized care work as essential social infrastructure. The project, with a composition predominantly of Black and brown peripheral women, nurtured networks of intersectional care, acknowledging how gender, race, and age shape experiences of participation, and how collectivity and mutual support is crucial when working in urban peripheries and with female leaders.

To counteract extractive dynamics that often plague participatory projects,, ECOCIDADE institutionalized fair remuneration for participation, with priority on payment for young people and unemployed women. Recognizing that the burden of participation falls disproportionately on the economically precarious, this reframed community work from voluntary feminized labor into a valued economic activity, directly addressing material needs while building common capacity. The project also identified the need for dedicated 'guardians of collective care'—individuals with responsibility for the continuous activation of networks, the translation of institutional information, and the coordination of common agendas. Through the visibility of urban agriculture subjects in municipal policies, the project contributed to the institutionalization of care.

Section III: Findings - The Politics of Community and Climate Resilience in Action

ECOCIDADE's implementation in Brasília revealed both transformative potential and inherent tensions. While the initiative successfully fostered knowledge sovereignty, activated circular economies, and strengthened solidarity networks, it also surfaced structural limits that defined the contemporary frontier of participatory governance in peripheries (fig. 17). These limitations are deeply political, revealing the contested nature of co-production within contexts of inequality and institutional inertia. The findings present a dialectical portrait: the emergent power of territorial reclamation stands alongside persistent constraints imposed by a hostile political-economic architecture.

The core achievement was a demonstration that resilience is a social and epistemic process before it is a technical outcome. Through a map of latent resources—material, natural, human, and financial—the project shifted narratives from scarcity to abundance and challenged the dominant deficit-based portrayal of the peripheries. A fundamental strategy was the activation and connection of local initiatives for a cooperative ecosystem, with a focus on the better use and distribution of multidimensional resources. A critical operational insight was the strategic identification and engagement of community members with time availability and intrinsic motivation, particularly elders. Their involvement provided not just labor but crucial intergenerational knowledge and social continuity, grounding the project in the territory's historical memory and cultural fabric. This was complemented by the

indispensable role of trusted local mobilizers—residents who acted as cultural translators and micropolitical navigators. Their deep, embedded knowledge allowed them to map power dynamics, build legitimacy, and foster a sense of belonging, ensuring that actions were widespread and culturally resonant.

The aspiration to translate this mobilized energy into durable change demands engagement with formal political structures. The project made a concerted approach towards formal mechanisms of participation, actively engaging with the territory's elected community counselors to strengthen the bridge between grassroots mobilization and public authorities. This was part of a broader strategy to structure a formalized territorial climate action plan. Through regular meetings, co-organized events, and the establishment of multi-sectoral co-governance tables, the project exercised radical democracy, fostering people's agency in the creation of public policies. This territorial action promoted dense local networks that actively sought to engage public servants from diverse sectors and facilities—schools, health centers, subprefectures—building relationships of sustainable proximity and co-envisioning a common future for the territory.

However, this intricate sociopolitical ecosystem does not emerge instantaneously. One of the project's most profound learnings concerns temporality and time constraints. The rhythm of building trust, negotiating conflicts, and cultivating collective agency follows a distinct logic from the productive capitalist time, from the funding cycles and the policy mandates. Encompassing these different time frequencies is one of the biggest challenges. Effective co-production demanded from the project management a deep comprehension and flexibility to move at the speed of the community's challenges and possibilities, recognizing that cultural shifts are forged through frequent, regular, and often slow-burning encounters.

Underpinning all these processes was the explicit institutionalization of a care ethics as a transversal principle. With recognition of how the intersectionalities of gender, race, class, and age shape both vulnerability and participation, meetings provided material support such as food sharing and childcare, alongside spaces for the valuation of the emotional labor required for the sustainment of collective action in a context of structural violence. These provisions were vital to the cohesion and momentum of the network, and transformed isolated initiatives into a collective political subject. Through work primarily with women, the project revealed a territorial sociocultural change through the women's appropriation of the habits encouraged by the project. With considerable capillarity in health centres, schools, and among neighbours, the women who participated became multipliers of a more healthy and resilient culture in Brasília, and they received recognition and invitations to share their knowledge with the youngest. The powerful sociocultural capital generated by the project can be considered a driver for climate resilience in the territory, once it was converted into urban governance capacity and into access to public policies.

Yet, for all its methodological innovations, ECOCIDADE's implementation revealed the formidable structural challenges that define the frontier of participatory governance. The most tangible are the issues of land regularization and shared management. Many of the project's flagship initiatives, such as gardens in health centre areas, occupied land are under precarious tenure—whether public, private, or contested—, once there is not an accessible or standardized pathway to formalize it, depending many times on political will of the responsible body in the municipality. Besides that, many times the cooperation agreements

can only be signed by a legal entity, restricting the scope of possibilities for more community and “informal” organizations. This lack of legal security of possession or use concession casts a permanent shadow, being a central risk factor and making long-term planning and ecological restoration fraught with risk. This tenurial insecurity points to a deeper, underlying challenge: a profound lack of clarity on formal pathways to regulate and legitimize community-led urbanism. Existing bureaucratic and legal frameworks are often ill-equipped to recognize or support such initiatives, leaving processes vulnerable to being transposed by opaque exercises of micropolitical power, making systemic change elusive. How territorial co-production can persist without land regularization?

This challenge is symptomatic of a broader set of intersecting gaps identified by the project: gaps in information sharing between state and community, in local knowledge translation into bureaucratic evidence, in implementation capacity within fractured state agencies, and in replicating methodologies beyond isolated pilots. Crucially, all these limitations are exacerbated and often perpetuated by the overarching issue of chronic funding precarity. The reliance on short-term grants and unpredictable public earmarks creates a cycle of uncertainty that jeopardizes continuity, distorts community agendas towards funders’ priorities, and exhausts the emotional and social capital of leaders. This financial instability tends to trap transformative grassroots innovation in a perpetual “pilot phase”, directly threatening the long-term viability of the very resilience it seeks to build. However, the ECOCIDADE strategy of building autonomy on local citizens’ initiatives could create a pathway out of this vicious cycle, mapping existing resources, strengthening capacities and relationships based on social capital that started to build a long-term sustainability. This has proven to be true once, two years after the end of the project, the initiatives are still there, the community members are being hired by local services and other organizations, as well as being financially subsidised by urban agriculture public policies.

Thus, the findings from Brasilândia present a clear, if complex, equation: the renewal of democracy and the building of genuine climate resilience in the peripheries depend on co-productive strategies that are as sophisticated in their social and care protocols as they are uncompromising in their confrontation with the political-economic structures of land, law, finance and time that currently constrain them. The periphery’s agency is not in question; the challenge lies in restructuring the systems that have historically sought to suppress it.

Knowledge Sovereignty and Circular Economy in Practice

ECOCIDADE demonstrated that data justice is a foundational prerequisite for climate justice. Participatory mapping transformed abstract vulnerabilities into actionable evidence, putting Brasilândia on the urban agriculture map and shifting municipal debates from generic demands to specific proposals. This epistemic shift—from residents as beneficiaries of data to owners and protagonists of knowledge—challenged extractive research traditions (Rocha & Moreira, 2023) and reasserted the value of local knowledge for effective adaptation.

The project enacted circular economy as tangible climate adaptation. The pilot composting hub achieved an estimated 30% organic waste reduction, which mitigates methane emissions while producing fertile soil for the urban gardens, creating a virtuous cycle that strengthened local food sovereignty and reduced carbon footprints. However, this success was tempered by challenges around food delivery and waste collection logistics—highlighting that socio-ecological circularity must confront the need for public policies subsidizing cooperative systems in vulnerabilized communities, instead of multimillionaires private concession contracts that still throw organic waste in the landfills.

Social Capital, Value Creation and Implications of Cooperation

The project's emphasis on connectivity materialized in an expanded eco-citizen network. According to much of the literature, social capital is a notable mechanism that enables climate adaptation, being broadly defined as the effective possession of a network of relations capable of being mobilized. Social capital emerged through multiple actions of the project. Multiple axes of the project (amongst Network Activation, as well as Collective and Intersectional Care, and Policy Influence) allowed trust, reciprocity, recurring interactions, and shared norms and values to emerge amongst the communities that were forged. The bonding-bridging-linking triad (Pelling & High, 2005; Craig et al., 2023) helps understand this multidimensional concept: bonding refers to close ties within defined groups; bridging spans social divides; linking denotes vertical ties with hierarchical institutions.

In ECOCIDADE, bonding allowed residents to understand themselves as part of a movement for neighborhood wellbeing; bridging connected producers with consumers of goods and services; linking with Municipal Secretaries and Ministers leveraged relationships accessing public policies. Previously, São Paulo's north was not seen as having urban agriculture—this blind spot reinforced the invisibility of peripheral women's labor. Personal access to decision-makers opened opportunities; after experiencing initiatives firsthand, they emerged from invisibility to access subsistence opportunities, transforming social exclusion into inclusion. Therefore, the connectivity and social capital reinforced by the project's linking with Municipal Secretaries and Ministers leveraged relationships and accesses that contributed for the maintenance and sustainability of the initiatives, through the access of public policies.

Social capital thus proved a driver for climate resilience by enabling access to financial support, physical assistance, informational mechanisms, and emotional mutual support. Social connections influence community resilience once they allow people to access resources such as financial support, physical assistance and local logistics, informational mechanisms, and emotional mutual support. Social capital is converted into urban governance capacity through a deliberate, multi-phased process that builds and leverages different types of social capital to engage with formal political structures. The project began by strengthening bonding capital within the community, then built bridging capital to connect disparate local groups, and crucially, developed linking social capital by forging vertical ties with municipal and federal institutions. Value creation serves as the central driver and cohesive force in network activation and partnerships by generating multidimensional benefits that give all stakeholders a vested interest in the network's

success. For the community, value emerged as new social capital, income generation through a circular economy model, personal empowerment (especially for women), and access to public policies and awards. For the state and institutional partners, the project offered a tangible, low-cost proof-of-concept for effective climate adaptation—a replicable model that provided external legitimacy and prestige. This reciprocal value creation ensured that cooperation was not merely transactional but transformative, as each actor—from residents to municipal secretaries to international bodies like UN Habitat—derived concrete benefits that reinforced their commitment to the work.

The implications of cooperation and salience are profoundly dialectical, revealing both transformative achievements and persistent structural constraints. Positively, cooperation enabled the transition from insurgent, outsider status to formal political influence, creating a unified eco-citizen movement, capable of embedding community-generated solutions into state structures. Simultaneously, the project strategically asserted salience by using participatory counter-cartography to challenge deficit-based narratives, making invisible peripheral knowledge and feminized care work visible and politically relevant to policymakers. However, these achievements were shadowed by negative implications: cooperation risked co-opting community agendas to funder priorities and imposed heavy participation burdens on women, while salience often collided with institutional inertia and fragmented governance, revealing that even when a community becomes visible, decision-making power and budgets remain concentrated in higher authorities that systematically neglect the periphery.

The Structural Limits and Lessons of Participation

ECOCIDADE crystallized several structural limits circumscribing participatory models. First, land tenure insecurity proved fundamental—many vibrant community gardens operated on public or informally occupied land without legal security. This constant eviction threat undermines long-term investment and reveals that environmental justice is inextricably linked to urban land reform.

Second, funding precarity creates dependency cycles. Reliance on short-term grants distorts community priorities toward funder agendas and exhausts leaders constantly seeking resources. However, ECOCIDADE's strategy of capacity building of existing citizen initiatives created pathways beyond this cycle—two years post-project, initiatives continue existing, through public policies support and income generation from selling goods and services.

Third, institutional inertia and fragmentation in the state apparatus presented formidable barriers. This inertia can be translated as a "lack of autonomy of the subprefecture", as the project documents cite (The City Needs You, 2023). Even with decentralized subprefectures, true decision-making and budgets remain concentrated in higher authorities—a manifestation of sociospatial inequality. Besides that concentration, the public policies are fragmented into multiple Secretariats, many times not relating to one another. To tackle this, a public policy laboratory was promoted, uniting different sectors to look systemically at the same complex phenomena.

Multiple negotiation strategies were employed to overcome institutional inertia. Visits by politicians and ministers to the community gardens shifted negotiations from abstract ideas toward the scale-up of functioning solutions. The existing initiatives in Brasília enacted the tangible multidimensional benefits delivered by the urban gardens, a demonstration of the need for proof-of-concept for public policy innovation. Strategic links with mid-level public servants created internal allies who navigated administrative labyrinths and advocated from within. The 'Fazer Juntos' laboratory gathered those servants for intersectoral coordination and public policy co-creation, a response to the challenge of policy fragmentation in the areas of food security and territorial development. During the laboratory, forty-five public policies were mapped and organized into accessible communication materials (fanzines with simplified language), a direct address to the fact that information does not reach the borders.

In order to build long lasting capacities in the local activists from Brasília, the project acted as a mediator through cultural and bureaucratic translations: the mapping of public policies demystified state resources for communities, while the transformation of community knowledge into bureaucratically legible evidence served the state. The convening of multi-layered tables created shared accountability, dispersed opposition, and increased the political cost of inaction. The leverage of external legitimacy—recognition from federal ministers, UN Habitat, and national television—created powerful leverage, raised the stakes for local actors, and made collaboration a source of prestige. This external validation applied gentle top-down pressure while it brought value to initiatives.

Finally, the project exposed how participation burdens fall disproportionately on women, who juggle community labor with care responsibilities—underscoring the non-negotiable necessity of feminist care ethics and fair remuneration. Participation cannot be founded on the extraction of free labour from the most vulnerable.

Conclusion: Towards a Radical Urban Climate Praxis

How did the transition from insurgent citizenship to co-production and political influence occur? ECOCIDADE employed multi-pronged stakeholder negotiation strategies that reframed community-state relationships, shifting from demand (where community asks) to co-production and demonstrated value (when community offers a solution).

This transition was a deliberate process of redistributing power through layered capital. Insurgent foundation began with the reclamation of space and self-reliance, which bonded social capital among women as an eco-citizen network. Systematization transformed insurgent energy into a replicable methodology (the ECOCIDADE Game), built bridging capital, and connected disparate groups into a collective political subject. Strategic engagement built linking capital through participatory channels, trusted mobilizers, and intersectoral policy laboratories. Formalization embedded community solutions into state structures through policy creation (POT Mães Guardias), tool adoption (in federal programs), and agenda influence (UN Habitat recognition). The transition happened not by insurgency abandonment, but by moral authority's leverage to build bridging and linking capital, a channel for insurgent ideas to reshape formal institutions.

ECOCIDADE stands as a powerful testament to a fundamental truth: within the polycrisis of climate breakdown and democratic erosion, urban peripheries are not passive vulnerability zones but active terrains for societal renewal. Its methodology, refined through daily praxis of women like Noemia, Nivalda, and Hilda, presents a framework for territorial co-production as the engine of democratic praxis and effective climate action. By the centering of knowledge sovereignty, the activation of sustainable proximities to local resources, and the ground-up prototyping of policies, ECOCIDADE reframes resilience not as a technical outcome but as an ongoing form of insurgent citizenship—a collective reclamation of the right to co-produce the city.

This blueprint comprises: the transformative use of idle spaces that convert liabilities into assets and fulfill social and environmental functions; social technologies for democratic management; solidarity economies that circulate goods within short and circular circuits and generate abundance from discard. This ecosystem represents prefigurative politics, enacting the future eco-city paradigm, organized around care, cooperation and ecological regeneration, co-produced by those historically excluded from its design.

For policymakers, scaling impact requires a shift beyond pilots and toward the institutionalization of participation: permanent community climate councils with decision-making power; public finance directed by community priorities; legal recognition of citizen-led initiatives through new typologies (such as commons concessions); and the internalization of care ethics through fair remuneration and support for care responsibilities.

As final provocation, ECOCIDADE challenges radical epistemic inversion: what if ministries of cities took direction from favelas? What if the favela, long stigmatized as a problem, was recognized as an advanced laboratory for post-carbon urban living? The renewal of democracies and the effectiveness of climate responses depend on this capacity for epistemic humility—a redirection of power and resources toward strategies of territorial co-production already sown in these fertile grounds of resistance and resilience. The periphery is not at the margin of the urban future: it is its vital heart, a demonstration that another city is already under construction, garden by garden, through insurgent citizenship and collective care.

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