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ATELIER 11: **Subaltern and (In)Subordinate: Contested Cultural Territories in the Peripheries of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

Subaltern and (In)Subordinate: Contested Cultural Territories in the Peripheries of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concepts of 'contested territories' or 'contested urban spaces' are increasingly present in the recent literature of Urbanism and Urban Planning (Satgé and Watson, 2018; Schwarz and Streule, 2020). Still, a clear definition of them is not easy to come by, and might be enriched with some help from the field of Cultural Studies. Some authors use these terms in a more literal sense to address areas or times of political, military, religious or ethnic conflict (Yiftachel and Ghanem, 2004; Vicino and Fahlberg, 2017). Others focus on disputes centered on natural resources and environmental issues (López, 2016). Some even mention more abstracts terms, such as "contesting time spaces" (Massey, 2005: 177). Still, after years of interdisciplinary research in Urban Planning and Social Anthropology, we have still not come across works that mention how the development of cultural and artistic activities can lead to the contestation of territories that go beyond issues of racial dispute (see Rolnik, 2007). In this article, we argue that certain self-organized and bottom-up cultural spaces in Latin America consist in more than just cultural territories. They are complex and contested territories of culture, filled with objective and subjective conflicts of multiple natures – within the group responsible for their creation and with the outside city. When embedded with a resistance character, they also become contesters of the imposed order because they propose the creation of alternative activities, which do not necessarily operate within the formal industry and economic system. These territories can be helpful to guide future urban planning policies focused on inclusion and on creating room for informal and adaptive transformations of urban space.

Since 2004, we have investigated several cases of self-built cultural spaces in peripheral areas of Brazilian cities, with most of them being controversially perceived by local inhabitants. From museums and urban parks in favelas to improvised cinemas and hip-hop cultural centers under flyovers, these spaces often bear the mark of tension and dispute. They are living proof

that communities do not accept constructed territories unanimously, and that they present different facets once we analyze the actors and interests behind them.

Our main goal is to build on the original concept of contested territories of culture as a planning tool, and a key in the fight for cultural access in unequal Latin American cities. We argue that bottom-up cultural spaces have long been perceived as a homogenous phenomenon through a rather romanticized and equalizing approach (Vaz, 2007; Hollanda, 2012), which can ignore their complexity. We understand these complex territories as results of conflicting leaderships and clashing inner relationships.

In our research, we used two different methodological approaches. Firstly, we applied the contextual analysis of the existing literature on the concept of cultural territories per se and their potential for resistance. Then, we analyzed a case study in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) through ethnography.

We begin this article by discussing how cultural territories are symbolic defined, seen as the product of everyday lives (Lindón, 2019) and as results of collective action and cultural identities (Bonnemaison, 1981; Vaz, 2018). We, then, highlight the importance of the concept of territories for Latin American studies and for the local social and resistance movements (Zibechi, 2015; Saquet, 2018).   We privilege authors who can provide us with more contextualized perceptions and postcolonial approaches in favor of the decentralization of knowledge production (Porto-Gonçalves, 2001; 2008). These references show us how today's Latin American territories are filled with fluidity, undergoing constant processes of "multiterritorialization and reterritorialization" (Haesbaert, 2004), which contribute to their contested facets. These authors also show us how territories can be a foundation for the elaboration of more efficient public policies and for the achievement of a more sustainable development (Flores, 2007).

After its analysis, we build on our own concept of contested territories of culture, pointing out how those can also be contesting territories of the established order and of unevenness, as places for counter-hegemonic struggles in the pursuit of more equality. To illustrate our arguments, we introduce the case study of the Realengo Flyover Cultural Space in the periphery of Rio de Janeiro, depicting the conflicting inner relationships that make up this bottom-up improvised territory.

[…] Points 2 and 3 have been suppressed from the extended abstract

4. THE REALENGO FLYOVER CULTURAL SPACE

The "Realengo Flyover Cultural Space" (Espaço Cultural Viaduto de Realengo) is located in the neighborhood of Realengo, in the West zone of Rio de Janeiro. This macro region contains the second highest number people living in favelas in the city, also accounting for 41% of its total population (3 million) (IPEA, 2010). Most of the local dwellers belong to the low or low middle classes.

In 2012, with the goal of improving local mobility for the Olympic Games, the municipality built a 300 meter-long flyover in proximity to an existing train station. The Aloysio Fialho Gomes Flyover, better known as the 'Realengo Flyover,' resulted in the demolition/eviction of 80 family homes in Realengo as part of the larger Transolympic highway and Bus Rapid Transit system urban project (Bastos, 2012). It had a huge impact on the neighborhood and, in 2013, an artistic collective by the name of Original Black Sound System (OBSS) occupied the area under it. Led by one artist that stands out among the rest of the group

(musician Oberdan Mendonça), the improvised cultural territory became both a site of praise and of dispute for different actors.
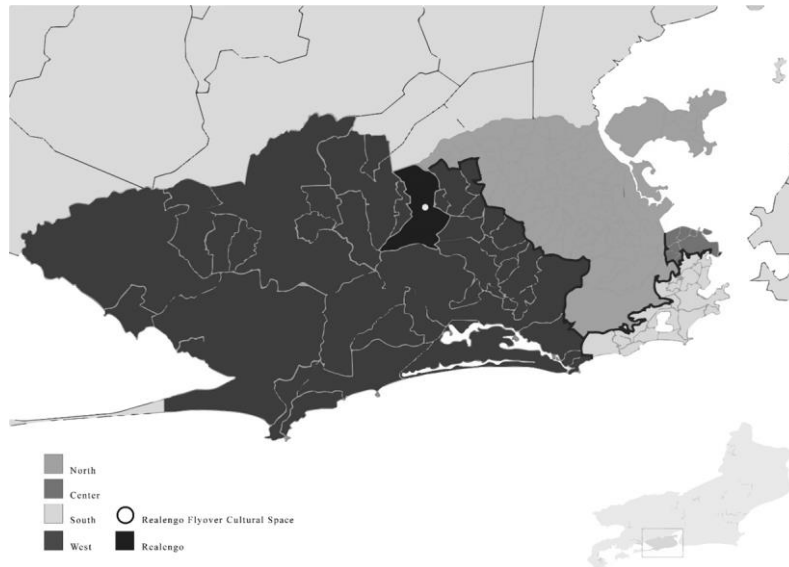

Figure 2. Map of Rio de Janeiro, highlighting the West zone and the Realengo Flyover Cultural Space. Source: Authors.

4.1 Methodological notes

Our research used ethnography to follow up on one of the most popular activities under the flyover, the "Holy Tuesday Rap" battle (Sagrada Terça-Feira do Rap). It consists in a weekly event and its observation enabled a better understanding, not only of how it was organized, but also of how the group built their narrative about this territory. Our visits showed a focus on alternative cultural production and a direct concern with the changing dynamics and reconfiguration of the site. We observed how they perceive themselves as "fillers of an empty space," previously taken over by "violence, darkness and danger," in their own words.

We first approached this territory in 2018 to interview Mendonça, take photographs and conduct an online survey with the attendees to find out more about their profile and experiences. In the following year, we kept visiting the site to conduct other interviews and register their events for a short video documentary about leftover spaces resulting from the construction works connected with the Olympic Games. That led to the need to understand how the site articulated itself culturally to the neighborhood and the city of Rio de Janeiro as a whole. In 2019, we followed the weekly rap battle through participant observation, approaching it in a manner inspired by Haraway's (1988) notion of "situated knowledges." We argue here that the OBSS creates a situated knowledge because, even though most of their activities center on hip-hop, they do not simply replicate the cultural movement that originated in the 1970s in New York (USA) (Barros, 2020). They take this as one of their references, but comprehend the major geographic/cultural distance between Realengo and the Bronx. That means that the Flyover's activities are, in some ways, more inspired by Brazilian rap bands (i.e. the Racionais MC's), who address in their lyrics contextualized social issues, in line with the nation's problems. Furthermore, hip-hop music is just one of many activities that were gradually incorporated to the group's calendar, which also includes musical lessons for nearby public school pupils, a barbershop course, commerce of food and reading material, fashion shoots and much more.

The use of ethnography was essential to understand the group and the attendees' varied relationships to that particular site. The ethnography helped us to understand the Realengo Flyover as a socially constructed territory with different levels of participation from the locals. This method also enabled us to capture the different temporalities of that particular site. Because of its intermittent events, the visits on different times, days, and seasons brought

about interesting insights regarding the tactics of the almost clandestine occupation. It is a dead passage area during most of the day and a lively open-air cultural center on certain nights.

Another important methodological inspiration was the concept of "ethnobiography" by Gonçalves (2012), which deals with the tensions between ethnography and biography in hopes of dealing with the classic dualisms of sociology regarding the individual/society, and one's personal identity/social role. Through the ethnobiography, it is possible to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the individual, assuming that their personal choices have a direct effect on their social trajectory. Instead of condemning the subjectivity of their personal views, this approach understands them as part of a broader phenomenon. In this sense, lyrics and rhymes sung by the subjects at the Flyover were also incorporated as part of our observation, reflecting their opinions and experiences on the site, and in the city.

4.2 The case study

The Western neighborhood of Realengo is located 25.5 km away from Rio's center. It has a population of approximately 180 thousand inhabitants with an average monthly income of around U$120 (Instituto Pereira Passos, 2018). The official records show the existence of only two State financed cultural facilities: the Gilberto Gil Cultural Arena and the Arlindo Cruz Cultural Space.

The Realengo Flyover takes up an area of approximately 200m² limited by two walls. The site resembles a corridor or passageway, connecting the local train station to the neighborhood's main street. Going through the underpass of the flyover is the only option for many workers returning home on the train. The empty and dark area often poses a risk, with many interviewers mentioning the occurrence of crimes at the site.

Given its strategic location in relation to the transport infrastructure and the high daily flow of people, the site caught the attention of the artistic group OBSS, who decided to occupy it intermittently through several different activities. Led by musician Oberdan Mendonça and composed of other young graffiti artists, DJ's and MC's, the OBSS aimed at strengthening the local cultural scene, producing events and renting out technical equipment. In 2013, the Realengo Flyover Cultural Space became a reality, later gaining the support of the Municipal Secretary of Culture and officially ensuring the status of a cultural facility. The OBSS altered the aesthetics of the site through the graffiti art, also contributing to the installation of urban furniture. That included a bookstand, which works as a communal library, and a collective container, which holds musical equipment, folding chairs, and a retractable awning, also functioning as a closed space for gatherings once they take out the objects.

By 2019, the cultural space functioned as a successful self-organized, improvised and temporary open-air center. Its calendar contained over fifteen different types of events, including rap battles, dance parties, music concerts, samba rounds, film screenings, photo shoots, graffiti practice, a barber school, a pop-up library, school tutoring, street markets, skate boarding, and even neighborhood association meetings. This high number of activities reflect Haesbaert's (2004) view about the contemporary phenomenon of multiterritorialization. The territory created under the flyover is fluid and multiple. Not only does it allow for the development of a new function (from transport structure to cultural and social space), but it also becomes an ever-changing reference point for diverse practices and users.

The most famous activity of the calendar, the rap battle, is a weekly gathering of young black men – dwellers of Realengo and adjacent neighborhoods. Their main goal is to ridicule and demoralize the opponent through rhymes. The audience is who defines the winners and losers through clapping and shouting. The rapper with the loudest acclaim moves over to the next round, until reaching the "final phase." Unlike other rap and slam battles, this one does not entail in prizes or monetary gain. The participants do it for the fun, the practice and the possibility of social encounter with other hip-hop enthusiasts.

Still, the occupation under the flyover is not homogenous nor unanimously accepted, leading to underlying disputes and conflicts that, together, help build a complex contested territory of culture.

[…] Points 4.3, 4.4 and 5 have been suppressed from the extended abstract

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