

## Urbanism(s) and informality(ies) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil \*

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**Abstract:** This article examines urbanisms and informalities intertwined with Brazilian popular culture, in the light of a theoretical and empirical study of two examples from the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The primary conclusions underscore a tension between formal urbanism, which attempts to propagate a uniform way of urban existence, and the exuberance of life in the urbe. This highlights that urbanism is inherently multifaceted and requires the incorporation of multiple urban existences within global south cities while considering their distinctions.

**Keywords:** urbanism, informality, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, global south.

**Resumen:** Este artículo analiza los urbanismos y las informalidades entrelazados con la cultura popular brasileña, a través de un estudio teórico-empírico de dos ejemplos de la ciudad de Río de Janeiro, Brasil. Las principales conclusiones subrayan una tensión entre el urbanismo formal, que intenta establecer un modo uniforme de existencia urbana, y la exuberancia de la vida en la urbe. Esto pone de relieve que el urbanismo es intrínsecamente polifacético y requiere la incorporación de múltiples existencias urbanas dentro de las ciudades del sur global sin dejar de considerar sus distinciones.

**Palabras clave:** urbanismo, informalidad, Río de Janeiro, Brasil, sur global.

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Urbanism is an intricate phenomenon with dual facets: one encompasses precision, lines, and rationality, while the other is invariably entangled with the unplanned elements of a city. Therefore, urbanization always presents a formal, deliberate dimension alongside an informal, spontaneous counterpart that often challenges the very notion of marginality within urban processes. Beyond these dichotomies, the trajectory of urbanization in the global south, particularly in countries like Brazil, has historically followed a unidirectional path. Guided by the ideals of an “organized” city, this trajectory constructs a varied of spaces according to a purportedly universal model - an “urbanistic frame” that designates anything evading urban planning as insufficiency.

This “frame” fosters a singular, monolithic urban lifestyle, rendering numerous alternative urban experiences invisible. In turn, this invisibility involves concealing something that exists but should not be seen. When a specific urban archetype becomes a norm or standard, all other urban diversities are relegated to the informal category, thereby becoming both a product of and resistance against a homogenizing force that prescribes a solitary, unique urban structure. Consequently, informality encompasses all that exceeds the scope of formal planning, i.e., it embodies alternative ways of urban inhabitation that are not just a product but an inseparable component of urban planning itself. Thus, informality becomes the very idiom of urbanization (Roy, 2009). The operational approach of urbanism, centered on formalizing urban lifestyles, fails to encompass those who exist at the margins of planned urbanization.

Scrutinizing and drawing lessons from these informalities, with their interplay of conformity and resistance, constitutes a political endeavor that acknowledges other forms of urban existence. Recognizing that informality arises in reaction to context necessitates understanding how distinct urban lifestyles are configured within varied relationships with established norms and standards. This pursuit does not seek to replace a Northern urban rationality with a Southern one in a universalist fashion; rather, it undertakes an ethical stance in recognizing the city as a tapestry of differences and divergence. As such, it calls for plural urbanisms that are attentive to the multifarious nature of urban life.

The discourse surrounding cities in the global south surfaces as a critique of this perspective, advocating for an outlook that accommodates cities defying singular conceptions of modernity and progress. These cities are understood as against hierarchies and the categorization trap (Robinson, 2006). Consequently, we adopt a political standpoint that views the city as a locus of differences and what is different, allowing for the inclusion of varied modes of existing/inhabiting the urban space into our analysis. Anchored in the conceptual framework of the city as a space of differences and what is different (Saraiva, 2020), this article endeavors to explore urbanism and informality in their manifold forms (Robinson & Roy, 2015), intricately woven into the rich tapestry of Brazilian popular culture (Chauí, 1986).

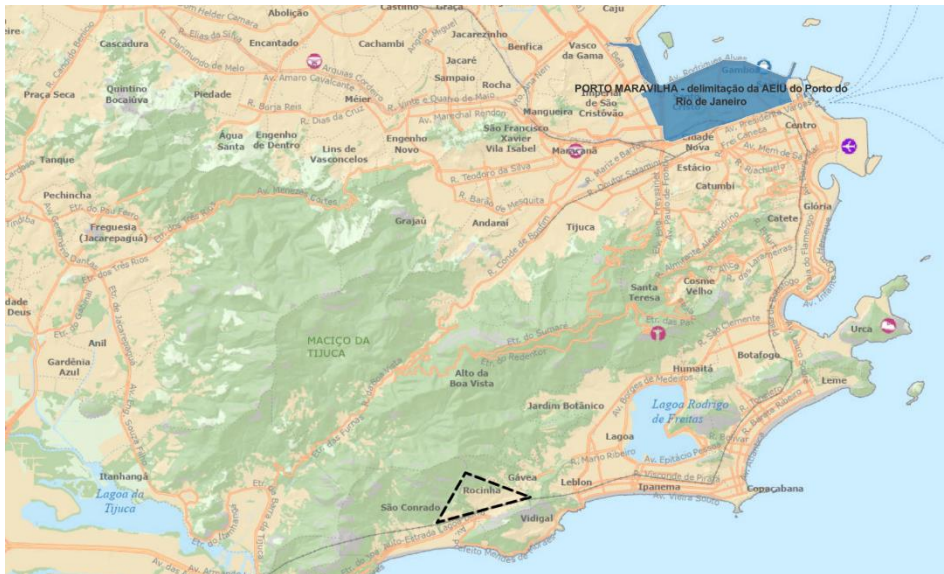


Figure 1: Favela da Rocinha and Port Region at Rio de Janeiro's city map. Rocinha's area is identified with black dashed lines, while Port Region is marked by the blue shadowed area.

Source: Adapted by the authors from a map retrieved from <https://www.data.rio/datasets/PCRJ::aeiu-porto-maravilha/explore> (accessed: 22-02-2024).

Both cases explored in this theoretical-empirical article are the result of more than 10 years studying informality in the city of Rio de Janeiro and were researched at two different times. Firstly, an ethnography was carried out in the Favela da Rocinha, exploring the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC), the 'PAC of the favelas', during master's research between 2007 and 2009 (Sarayed-Din, 2009). The urban redevelopment plan for Rio's port region -Porto Maravilha- was explored during doctoral research between 2012 and 2017, as part of a comparative study between two historically inhabited traditional communities that were under pressure from large urban developments. In this case, the community of Kampong Bharu, below the Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and Morro da Conceição, located in the heart of Rio de Janeiro's port area and under heavy pressure from the urban interventions resulting from the mega-events that took place between 2007 and 2016 in the city (2007 Pan American Games, 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games). Figure 1 shows the location of Favela da Rocinha and the Port Region in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Both are located in prime areas of the city, with Rocinha surrounded by neighborhoods whose square meter is one of the most expensive in the country, and the Port Region being located in the central region, surrounded by offices and for a long time 'forgotten' by the real estate market, but home to the oldest favela in Brazil (Morro da Providência) among other groups with a history of social

vulnerability. Grounded in an understanding of informality transcending mere poverty (Roy, 2009), this research strives to advance conversations regarding urbanism that challenge the rigid formal/informal dichotomy and prevailing developmentalist narratives.

## 1. URBANISM(S)

The urban landscape has surged to the forefront of discussions addressing the challenges afflicting our planet in the 21st century. The predicaments of poverty, inequality, pollution, and disease, coupled with the necessity for interventions within urban domains, are supported by data heralding an imminent shift in global inhabitation patterns. For the first time in history, a majority of the population resides in cities as opposed to the countryside (UN-Habitat, 2006). Through meticulous monitoring that gauges population aggregation, categorizing nations and cities based on universal criteria, experts at the United Nations have proclaimed that since 2008, the world has witnessed the largest proportion of its populace dwelling in urban settings. Notably, this trend is paralleled by burgeoning population growth in peripheral countries, urging for a more discerning (and deliberate) examination of the urban trials besetting these areas. These profound transformations have not only steered conversations concerning urban predicaments but also underscored the exigency of an approach dedicated to alleviating inequality in developing cities while acknowledging their unique characteristics (UN-Habitat, 2006).

However, this cry for action exhibits a certain degree of insensitivity to differences and nuances. Its foundation rests upon a perspective that delineates urbanism, cityscapes, and development through the prisms of universalism, hierarchy, control, and statistics. In this regard, Brenner and Schmid (2014) challenge the assertion of universality intrinsic to the conceptualization of the post-2008 era as the inception of the Urban Age. Unearthing geographical, historical and political constraints tracing back to post-war interests and strategies for quantifying the world's urban populace, the authors contend that this notion of urbanism is "it is empirically untenable (a statistical artifact) and theoretically incoherent (a chaotic conception)" (Brenner & Schmid, 2014: 734). The Urban Age perpetuates a grand narrative that not only privileges concentrations of population and urban experiences of a solitary kind, centered on the construct of the nation-state, but concurrently shrouds alternative urban manifestations existing and evolving in contemporary times.

Acknowledging the diversity of experiences omitted from this urban concept and its inclination towards universalization within immensely divergent population contexts, infrastructure and administrative structures, the analytical coherence of a theoretical construct committed to urban homogeneity appears questionable at best. Brenner and Schmid (2014) champion urbanization as a historical, non-homogeneous and interconnected process, an amalgamation that

emerges within the socio-cultural and political-economic realms of capitalism. As the urban phenomenon is a continually evolving historical construct (Lefebvre, 2001, 2002), its interpretation cannot be constrained by a solitary perspective. In addition, due to being under construction, such a process is dynamic, variable and polymorphic, distancing itself from homogenizing understandings as urbanization is unevenly generated within the fabric of capitalist relations (Maricato, 2000) and therefore requires a new idiom.

One avenue to cultivate this new vocabulary lies in the negotiation and formulation of a more comprehensive theoretical discourse encompassing cities and contexts that frequently fall beyond the spectrum of conventional urban understanding, as is the case of the global south. In line with a debate centered on the imperative to extend and reshape urbanism beyond the iconic cities of the global north, Robinson and Roy (2015) echo the critical appraisal by Brenner and Schmid (2014). They advocate an interpretation of “urbanisms” in their plural form, that is, new forms of urbanization, aiming to shed light on the vitality and diversity inherent in nascent perspectives on the urban. These perspectives emanate from a multitude of interventions, productions, and performances. The authors draw attention to “off the map” cities, historically relegated to the periphery of scholarly discourse (Robinson, 2006) and spaces that engender urban experiences, capable of informing alternative forms of urbanization that embrace the concept of pluralism of and within urban settings.

Hence, harnessing the multiplicity inherent in the understanding of “urbanisms,” we will underscore two tenets pertinent to the urban phenomenon: first, our political commitment to conceptualizing the city as a locus of differences and of what is different, and second, our resolve to discern the multiple ways through which this urban landscape constructs new focal points and fringes. Through this critical vantage, which emerges as we approach the global south without prescriptive notions, we ascertain that the formal blueprint of urbanism functions as an ostensibly civilizing process. It accords legitimacy to a singular narrative, which merits scrutiny when juxtaposed against the backdrop of informalities.

## **2. INFORMALITY(IES)**

The endeavor of defining informality is a challenging task, especially when one is confronted with a one-sided and formal rendition of urbanism: such a perspective often results in delineating much of what the city is not. As a counterpoint to established regulations and practices, which constitute an “ideal” mode of urban dwelling, informality must be viewed not solely as an undesirable byproduct of impeccable planning but rather as something that transcends the confines of formal definition. Within this context, it challenges the one-dimensionality of urban planning by questioning the civility - Pertaining to what?

By whom? For whom? At whose expense? - of the civilizing process (Arantes, 2000), which is rooted in the daily existence of individuals.

In the 1950s, Larissa Lomnitz (1998) discerned informality as a survival strategy adopted by marginalized and vulnerable segments of the population who possess a distinctive approach to urban dwelling. Lomnitz underscores the role of bonds of trust and personal connections as a form of social security mechanism, expanding the discourse on informality beyond the purview of a malfunction to be rectified by urban specialists. After her initial investigation into Mexican slums, where she surmised informality was associated with poverty, Lomnitz (2006) delved deeper into these informal experiences, striving to unravel their mechanics.

Hernando de Soto (1987) introduced an economic and entrepreneurial standpoint to the quandary of informality, proposing that through judicious intervention, informality could transition toward formalization, a notion later embraced by development-oriented policies of international entities such as the World Bank during the 1990s. Approximately two decades later, upholding the same universalizing urban paradigms, Hall and Pfeiffer (2000) addressed the urban development crisis, termed “informal hyper-growth,” linking informality with poverty, violence, and the inadequacies of previous urban planning endeavors. This perspective, in turn, heralded the need for fresh mechanisms for comprehending and intervening in cities. In both these perspectives, informality is perceived as a challenge to be eradicated through suitable methods.

This discourse gains further prominence within the contemplations of a group of scholars who scrutinize diverse urban inhabitation experiences through the lens of “global urbanisms,” including Simone (2020), Parnell and Oldfield (2014), Robinson and Roy (2015), Roy (2011, 2009, 2005), Miraftab (2009), Yiftachel (2009a, 2009b, 2006), Robinson (2006), and Roy and AlSayyad (2004). Encouraging the broadening of horizons beyond the confines of hegemonic urban theories, which often emanate from and cater to English-speaking nations, these authors champion an understanding of cities in the global south that endeavors to transcend hierarchies and dichotomies. Although often a concept subject to dispute and occasionally co-opted by a Northern-centric or economic perspective (Brandt, 1980), this perception of cities in the global south confronts the established intellectual mainstream (Parnell & Oldfield, 2014). It champions a cosmopolitan vision of cities (Robinson, 2006), countering the notion of the North as the sole producer of urban models and the South as the crucible of problems (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004).

From this “southern perspective”, the discourse on informality within various African and Southeast Asian cities, for example, moves beyond the constraints of poverty and the discourse of exception. Drawing from studies of cities in the Middle East and Asia, Roy and AlSayyad (2004) posit that urban informality constitutes a governing logic that steers the process of urban

transformation. Reflecting on Indian cities specifically, Roy (2005) invites us to reevaluate the epistemology of urban planning. He situates the informal dimension not as a sector contrasting with the formal economic/city sector but as an idiom of urbanization. Analyzing Palestinian urban occupations, Oren Yiftachel (2006) underscores that urbanism has primarily focused on interventions and how to enact them, disregarding the mechanisms through which these processes unfold within the lived experience of urban spaces. Building on years of inquiry into African cities, AbdouMaliq Simone (2020) regards informality as an orchestrated challenge to the prevailing form of social wealth production and distribution.

Yiftachel (2009a, 2009b) highlights planning as the core axis of urban order, a force that both creates and criminalizes what he dubs “grey spaces.” The very planning that defines and develops “white spaces,” aligned with the universal city model, concurrently limits (or eliminates) possibilities for inclusion and acknowledgment for a sizable portion of the population relegated to informality. The areas intentionally overlooked by the urban logic responsible for their creation underscore urbanism as a system that manages and sustains deeply unequal cities (Yiftachel, 2009a). What remains, constituting a substantial portion of the city, is that which eludes planned constructs for being informal in nature.

Roy (2009) emphasizes that certain forms of informality are labeled illegal, while others enjoy state endorsement or even State practice. For the author, privately owned and commercialized urban formations, nestled within both the city and its suburbs, wield influence over and attract public infrastructure and services as a demonstration of class dominance. This phenomenon, in turn, renders some informalities illegal while conferring legitimacy upon others. Consequently, informality becomes an idiom of urbanization, a mechanism through which diverse spaces and practices in the city receive varied valuations, managed by and benefiting the dominant group (Roy, 2011).

Hence, it becomes paramount to examine the city and its historical trajectory through the lens of the differences that form its essence. This endeavor entails acknowledging the diverse voices and interconnected processes that shape a place’s history, recognizing them as political tools of opposition against a particular narrative of the past that is intertwined with power differentiation and legitimation of authority (Harvey, 2000). Urban action should pose the question “Whose history is this?” while critically evaluating the implicit association between informality and failure within global south cities. Instead, informality could be seen as a triumphant testament to their success in resisting Western models of urban planning and development (Miraftab, 2009). Embracing history as a pivotal aspect in understanding cities and envisioning alternative futures, Leonie Sandercock (2003) contends that the process of planning should consider these distinct historical accounts. That is, cities should be perceived in all their diversity, interwoven with differing interpretations of informality, necessitating

attention to the multifaceted histories of urban communities, whose histories intersect with struggles for space, claims to place, urban policies, resistance, local planning traditions, and questions of identity, belonging, and acceptance of differences.

### **3. AUTHORITARIANISM AND DIFFERENCE IN BRAZILIAN POPULAR CULTURE**

When we transpose the fundamental issues underlying much of the urban critique in the global south to the Brazilian context, Brazilian popular culture emerges as a multifaceted component fraught with contradictions and tensions. Addressing this phenomenon is imperative, as it affords us the opportunity to approach concealed dimensions within the myriad ways of existing in and inhabiting Brazilian cities. Moreover, this endeavor aids us in comprehending, on one side, how informality is situated within this overarching narrative and, on the other side, the plethora of responses to this universal idealization of Brazilian culture, which subsequently inform diverse interpretations of informality within cities of the global south.

In the broader sense, popular culture in Brazil bears the indelible imprint of historical authoritarianism (Schwarcz, 2019), and social interactions are often characterized by relationships predicated on tutelage and favor rather than the recognition of rights (Pimenta, 2020), with a propensity for issues to be resolved through top-down actions. This phenomenon finds its resonance in pivotal moments of Brazilian history, whether it's the Proclamation of Independence by the Prince Regent of Portugal in 1822 or the Abolition of Slavery in 1888 under the edict of Princess Isabel. Indeed, such events unfold within a pattern where the leading figures are consistently drawn from the dominant echelons. This authoritarian disposition further entails the obliteration of other dimensions of dissent that underscored the struggle for these transformations, resulting in a national memory characterized by an "authoritarian memory" (Chauí, 1986: 51) that renders acts of resistance and social contestation by the populace invisible.

The myth of Brazil's formation propagated through this unilaterally constructed imagery of Brazilian popular culture portrays the nation as a harmonious blend of races, the product of processes, and devoid of significant conflicts (Ianni, 1994). Within this overarching narrative, popular expressions were absorbed and reshaped to conform to the conservative contours of the national discourse. Instances such as *samba* and soccer, for instance, underwent this transformation, aligning with universalizing concepts of national development during the era of military dictatorship. Examining these instances, Chauí (1986) underscores that our incapacity to navigate social distinctions and asymmetries culminates in their transformation into inequalities.

In this relational society, the dominant figure is the "master-citizen", leveraging the law to their advantage, thereby casting citizenship as a privilege



of class: “Laws have perpetually functioned as tools to safeguard privileges and as potent instruments for suppression and subjugation, rather than outlining rights and responsibilities” (Chauí, 1986: 54). Those not sheltered by legal protection confront two choices: conformity or resistance. A sizable portion of the populace opts for conformity, often rationalized by explanations that bestow a semblance of meaning upon persistence. Conversely, the counter-response emerges from the ambiguity between one’s present state and potential, an individuality firmly maintaining its existing position without necessarily “constituting an alternate social existence” and essentially remaining “entangled within the structures of the established” (Chauí, 1986: 178). Scrutinizing these movements of conformity and resistance furnishes insights into the diverse facets of social dynamics within Brazil - a nation where urban informality reflects the role of law as an instrument in service of uniformity, grounded in historical authoritarianism and the prerogative of the dominant faction to dictate the “proper” form of urban sociability (Valladares, 2005).

#### 4. THE INFORMAL AND THE URBAN IN BRAZIL

The discussion surrounding informality and urban dynamics in Brazil is closely tied to the history of *favelas* and the intricate relationship they share with the formal urban landscape. This article delves into two illustrative cases within the city of Rio de Janeiro. Having been established as the capital of the nation in 1763, Rio de Janeiro stands as a unique example globally, being the sole city that evolved from a colony into the center of the colonizing kingdom. A pivotal turning point emerged in 1808, as the Portuguese royal family, seeking refuge from the European conflicts, relocated to Rio de Janeiro. Alongside them arrived customs, distinct social and political structures, institutions, significant investments in infrastructure and architectural endeavors to house the royal court. The city’s harbor also played host to one of the nation’s key ports, welcoming not only commodities but also over a million enslaved Africans brought to Brazil (Guimarães, 2014). The harbor region, often referred to as “Little Africa,” housed a black cemetery where the remains of those unable to endure the harrowing transatlantic voyage were interred. It also witnessed the first clusters of freed slaves and consequently served as the birthplace of substantial cultural expressions.

Additionally, Rio de Janeiro bore witness to Brazil’s inaugural large-scale urban interventions during the early 20th century. The Urban Perform of Mayor Pereira Passos, inspired by the grandeur of architect and urban planner Haussmann’s designs in Paris, involved the demolition of tenements and the creation of spaces conducive to the realization of a modern city narrative within the national capital. This transformation was achieved through an authoritarian and forceful process, justified by hygienic progress (Carvalho, 2019; Chalhoub, 2018). This period marks the first recorded usage of the term *favela*, which was

associated with the irregular occupation of land prompted by the unmet promise of land allocation to soldiers following the Canudos War in 1897. Subsequently, it encompassed a substantial number of homeless individuals after Pereira Passos's initial wave of evictions from the city's central precincts.

The year 1962 witnessed the inception of removal policies under the governance of Carlos Lacerda in Rio de Janeiro, leading to the expulsion of over 27 *favelas* and the displacement of 40,000 slum dwellers. This eviction drive intensified during the era of military dictatorship, culminating in what Burgos (2006) terms "authoritarian eviction." During the period spanning 1968 to 1972, more than 16,000 shacks were violently razed by State forces in one of the most brutal phases of urban repression and exclusion in the state's history. Interestingly, these removal actions were predominantly concentrated near the affluent neighborhoods of South Rio de Janeiro (Faulhaber & Azevedo, 2015), thereby forcing this substantial populace to migrate to peripheral housing complexes devoid of essential services such as sanitation, education, transportation, and healthcare, effectively relegating them to the fringes of the formal city.

Along with the violence of these forced removals, it is noteworthy to highlight the remarkable "resilience of *favela* dwellers" (Zaluar & Alvito, 2006: 37). Largely absent from official historical narratives, the III Congresso de Favelados do Estado da Guanabara ("III Congress of Slum Dwellers of the State of Guanabara") took place, uniting representatives from more than 75 slums, accentuating the imperative of urbanizing these areas. Zaluar and Alvito (2006) underscore the impact of this and other resistance initiatives, which rendered the removal policies exorbitantly costly. Indeed, to this day, 52 *favelas* persist within the city's affluent neighborhoods.

Rio de Janeiro, with its highly fragmented socio-political and spatial territory (Souza, 2000, 2003), also served as the stage for another wave of urban interventions spurred by investments linked to the mega-events hosted in the city in 2007 (Pan American Games), 2013 (FIFA Confederations Cup), 2014 (FIFA World Cup) and 2016 (Olympic Games). This complex interplay between national and international political and economic interests (Gaffney, 2010) facilitated the realization of projects that had previously been deemed politically or economically unfeasible. Notable among these were the Growth Acceleration Plan (PAC) designed specifically for the *favelas* and the Porto Maravilha project, both of which unfolded under the global spotlight cast upon the city during these landmark events.

The PAC of the *Favelas* marked a significant investment of over three billion reais into the revitalization of 30 disadvantaged areas in the city (Cardoso & Denaldi, 2018). This endeavor was made possible through an unprecedented alignment of municipal, state, and federal governments, which, in 2007, collectively committed to investing in urbanization strategies. Initially, these

strategies were directed at only two *favelas*: Rocinha, nestled in an affluent region, and Complexo do Alemão, adjacent to the Linha Vermelha expressway, linking the international airport to downtown Rio. Nevertheless, despite intensive participatory processes and thorough discussions, the plan for Rocinha's housing construction, tailored to its terrain and the needs of its population, faltered during the construction phase. The absence of financing options to cover the community-approved proposal compelled the use of funds solely for constructing popular standard buildings featuring two bedrooms but failing to meet the genuine demands identified within the community (Sarayed-Din, 2009).

The right to housing and the daily challenges encountered in Brazil's *favelas* and peripheral areas drive substantial debate and interventions, including those from the State, academia, and private entities invested in the real estate sector (Abramo, 2003). The complexities of *Favela da Rocinha* are epitomized by its fervent real estate market. Situated in a prime city area, this locale sustains a continuous high demand for renting rooms and modest dwellings within its population of around 200,000, who live, interact, and circulate through the region.

The case of Porto Maravilha, a district interlaced with diverse memories and histories, experienced a "redevelopment" designed to cater to tourist consumption -primarily international- and real estate speculation. Urban planning in this port area was orchestrated by a consortium of three major corporations that shouldered numerous responsibilities within the region. Among its features, the district houses Morro da Providência, the city's earliest *favela*, interwoven with other historical narratives and tales of resistance. However, the investments following the mega-events primarily favored developments aligned with real estate and tourism interests. From transportation systems to Olympic Villages, public funds were funneled to private enterprises (National Coalition of Local Committees for a People's World Cup and Olympics, 2012). Consequently, the pre-Olympics period witnessed the displacement of approximately 67,000 individuals, surpassing the combined tally of those displaced by the urban reforms initiated by Pereira Passos and Carlos Lacerda (Faulhaber & Azevedo, 2015).

Additionally, within the scope of the Porto Maravilha project, the case of the Pedra do Sal Quilombo exemplifies the tensions and resilience within the area. Situated within the port region, this historically significant site for *samba*, *Candomblé*, and Black laborers (INCRA, 2010) has become a battleground for disputes over land ownership between the Catholic Church and the descendants of the *quilombolas*. While the remnants of the Quilombo Pedra do Sal assert the area's significance in Afro-descendant memory, the Catholic organization Venerável Ordem Terceira de São Francisco da Penitência ("Venerable Third Order of St. Francis of Penance," VOT) has sought legal recourse to reclaim the "invaded" properties. The religious organization has invoked the history of European immigrants and Catholics in the region to justify its claim. These contentions - pitting a European/elite/Catholic faction against an Afro-

descendant/popular/Candomblecist group - lay bare the tensions that underpin the daily struggle for memory, land ownership, and recognition within Brazilian urban landscapes.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The intricacies of the cases presented herein underscore the profound impact of Brazilian popular culture on informality and urbanism. This analysis entails a twofold exploration: firstly, delving into aspects concerning urbanization frame that dictate the appearance of urban areas irrespective of contextual variation, and secondly, recognizing that the unique attributes of specific locales necessitate surpassing the imposed order. The former exercise involves comprehending historical authoritarianism and the conversion of distinctions into disparities to uncover the roots of Brazilian urbanization's proposed civilizing process. Based on this frame of urbanization, the latter exercise identifies experiences that deviate from what was prescribed and, therefore, overflow it. Since these overflow experiences are plural in nature, they demand new vocabularies (Brenner & Schmid, 2014) for identifying and analyzing what lies beyond urbanism in its singular form.

Examining the urban interventions within Rio de Janeiro exposes the presence of authoritarianism in dictating the "proper" way of inhabiting cities across diverse historical junctures. From the organization of the city to welcoming the Portuguese court in 1808 to the various experiences of beautification and urban renewal, it is evident that certain ways of inhabiting the city are undesirable, ultimately leading to their exclusion (Yiftachel, 2006). The coexistence of urbanization and displacement in Brazil is no coincidence; it results from the convergence of technical and cultural elements, signifying an incapacity to engage with divergence and consequently amplifying inequality. This is evident in the relegation of Black individuals -whose existence was subjugated through centuries of slavery- to the margins, leaving them with either conformity or resistance as responses to their assigned roles within the city. Urban spaces and the corresponding legislation in Brazil have historically catered solely to the elite's lifestyle. Divergent ways of life are relegated to informality, presenting itself as an ongoing process molded and undone through the ambiguous interplay of social dynamics (Chauí, 1986), particularly within the asymmetry between formal stipulations and actual experiences, the junction of standardization and overflow, all far removed from the idealized city of the global north.

For the portion of the populace excluded from local elites, the options entail conformity with or resistance against a city blueprint not designed for them but nevertheless producing pockets of informality through the prescription of urban life (Roy, 2011; Yiftachel, 2006). Thus, informality should not be perceived as a lack but as the very excess that defies uniform urbanism, emerging as its own

byproduct. Amidst daily dispossession, conformity is not a passive acceptance of mandated urbanism; it signifies an adaptation that necessitates valid rationales for enduring in a city that has not been devised to accommodate differences. Conversely, resistance surpasses a mere confrontation with urban form; it represents a resolute stance that reinforces distinctions in relation to urban directives, irrespective of their nature.

Overflow experiences function as manifestations of resistance against imposed order, an order consolidated by laws intricately woven within and by the socio-cultural and politico-economic facets of capitalism (Brenner & Schmid, 2014), which reinforce the concept of citizenship in Brazil as a class prerogative (Valadares, 2005). Interpretations of informality in Brazil are contingent on the observer's perspective: for the master-citizen, practices and ways of life in the city are fortified by the privileges accompanying their status. This manifests in illicit scenarios, such as the cession of government responsibility for public space management and service provision to private entities, as exemplified by Porto Maravilha. Conversely, examining housing challenges during the Rocinha Growth and Development Program (PAC) underscores the position of those excluded from citizenship. Without allowing for any relaxation of the regulations meant for the construction of affordable housing, buildings were erected based on the assumed demands of this segment of the population (Roy, 2011; Yiftachel, 2006). By enforcing uniform housing standards, the urbanization frame dismiss distinctions, enforcing conformity or resistance as the only options for those affected.

Observing the resistive manifestations within urban spaces necessitates a comprehensive examination of the city's various distinctions and interwoven histories of urban communities. The tensions apparent in the battle for space and recognition around Pedra do Sal in Rio de Janeiro's port district serve as an illustration of overflow experiences demanding a comprehensive exploration of the myriad histories and recollections that constitute the city. The challenges confronted by the vulnerable population -victims of urbanism sanctioning a solitary narrative- are identical to those that render the memory of the Pedra do Sal quilombo, invisible, by replacing it with an institutionalized narrative. This narrative of existence was forged through resistive endeavors, unlocking the possibility of existing beyond sanctioned historical narratives. This effort underscores how matters linked to informality warrant an examination through a lens of "urbanisms" in their plural form, attuned to the multifaceted constituents shaping cities in their full diversity.

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