

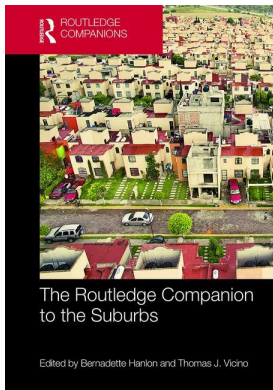
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Uneven development and the making of Rio de Janeiro

Anjuli N. Fahlberg

Brazil's troubled initiation into the global arena

The tensions of inclusion and exclusion in Rio de Janeiro cannot be understood outside of the city's historic role as Brazil's capital until 1960 and its continued significance as a major urban economic and political hub. Beginning in the 1800s when Brazil embarked on a long process of modernization and state-building, Rio de Janeiro served as a critical site for negotiating citizenship by determining which members of society would be entitled to full political, civil, and social rights, and which populations would be excluded from the privileges of formal belonging (Carvalho, 2013). Although voting rights expanded and contracted throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, high rates of poverty and illiteracy prevented women and poor men (including former slaves) from direct political participation in Brazil's emerging democracy. Political rights were further curtailed after the 1964 military coup, which ended open elections and rights to free speech and assembly for the following 20 years.

In 1985, Brazil's modern democratic project gained full steam as the dictatorship collapsed and elections were finally opened to all Brazilian citizens. Brazil's 1988 constitution – widely touted as one of the most progressive constitutions in the world – further expanded the legal, civil, and social rights of poor citizens. While these changes have paved the way for universal healthcare, workers' rights, and increased investments in education, inequality across Brazil remains high. The endurance of traditional regional political machines and the lack of economic investment in citizens' social rights have largely prevented Brazil's urban poor from accessing political institutions or from claiming the political and civil rights guaranteed by the constitution (Fischer, 2008; McCann, 2008). As a result, Brazil has been labeled a “disjunctive democracy,” in which many citizens – particularly poor black populations – are unable to access their rights due to lack of social services and effective law enforcement (Caldeira and Holston, 1999).

Despite these internal political and social struggles, in the last 20 years Brazil has experienced a dramatic ascension into the global economic arena as a result of its investment in commodities production. Under the leadership of Luiz “Lula” Ignácio da Silva of the leftist Worker's Party (or PT, Partido dos Trabalhadores), Brazil was able to pay back much of its national debt, stabilize the domestic economy, and become one of the largest exporters of raw materials in the world. At the same time, Lula invested in several welfare programs, including the controversial “Bolsa Família,” which provided a monthly stipend to poor families and brought millions of Brazilians out of extreme

poverty. Brazil's status as an emerging superpower was solidified when it was selected to host the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics, both important signifiers of global status.

Sadly, Brazil has struggled to hold onto the gains of the last two decades. Corruption – an endemic feature of Brazil's political landscape – contributed to the downfall of Petrobras, Brazil's state-controlled oil company, when several of its top executives were imprisoned for money laundering and graft in the Lava Jato (Carwash) scandal beginning in 2014. Then, in August 2016, Lula's successor, President Dilma Rousseff, was impeached after misappropriating funds to hide budget deficits during a time when dozens of other political leaders were also facing charges for bribery and graft. The political takeover of the more conservative PMDB (the Partido do Movimento Democrático do Brasil, or the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party) with the rise of former Vice President Michel Temer, coupled with the economic recession that followed, led to a wave of austerity measures. This political transition erased many of the social gains made by the poor and working classes during the reign of the Worker's Party. This fiscal conservatism, along with growing distrust in Brazil's political elite, provoked widespread protest among the working classes across Brazil's urban centers that increased tension between social classes and conflicts with police (Vicino and Fahlberg, 2017). Rio de Janeiro, as the host of several World Cup soccer matches and the Summer Olympics and the site of many protests and class struggles, has been at the center of these conflicts.

The making of inequality in Rio de Janeiro

In both past and present, Rio de Janeiro played a central role in Brazilian economics, politics, and culture. It began as one of the main shipping ports for exports from Brazil to Portugal, became the capital in 1763 – over 50 years before Portugal declared Brazil's independence in 1822 – and has been a key military and logistics center (Lessa, 2000). One consequence of Rio's central role in nation-making was that urban concerns were often of secondary consideration to local politicians. This issue was exacerbated by the lack of a directly elected mayor until 1960, which left the Federal Senate in charge of municipal laws and resource allocation. As Osorio et al. (2015) argue, Rio de Janeiro's historic role as a national city led to haphazard urban planning and public policies, and contributed to economic, social, and infrastructural decline after it lost its status as the nation's capital to Brasilia. Relative to Brazil's other major urban centers, Rio de Janeiro's population has experienced fewer improvements in employment, healthcare, and education since then.

Despite these setbacks, Rio de Janeiro continues to grow at a dramatic pace (Vicino, 2017). In 2015, the city had an estimated 6.5 million residents within its limits, and a total of 12.2 million inhabitants across the metropolitan area, making it the second largest metropolitan region in Brazil (after São Paulo) (G1 do Rio, 2015). Like other urban centers in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro benefited from the economic stability that set in in the 1990s and has experienced relatively steady growth in extractive and industrial production and exports, particularly oil, and more recently in the service, commerce, and industrial transformation sectors (FGV Projetos, 2011). In 2009, the rate of illiteracy across Rio de Janeiro reached a low of 3.97 percent. The city also witnessed a significant decline in the infant mortality rate and improvements in housing quality, internet and telephone access, and transportation.

While Rio de Janeiro has witnessed an overall improvement in its human development indicators, it continues to struggle with two interconnected issues: spatial segregation and public insecurity. Over one-fifth (22 percent) of Rio's population resides in substandard housing areas popularly termed favelas, which grew at a rate of 27.5 percent between 2000 and 2011 (compared to a growth rate of 3.4 percent for the rest of the city) (Hurrell, 2011). Though there is dramatic variability between favelas (Cavallieri and Vial, 2012), these areas tend to have higher rates of

poverty, illiteracy, infant mortality, and homicides than more formal residential areas. They also have higher concentrations of blacks and *pardos*, meaning “brown” or “mixed-race.”

The first favelas emerged in the late 1800s and early 1900s, populated primarily by freed slaves and poor migrants from Brazil’s rural northeastern states. Most of these informal settlements were constructed on the hills bordering plantations or commercial areas where dwellers were employed. During the early 1900s, city officials mostly ignored these informal settlements and offered few public policies to improve their inhabitants’ quality of life or enforce their rights. Over the course of the twentieth century, the relationship between the city and its favela population changed in two significant ways. For one, as favelas grew as a result of rapid urbanization without accompanying social supports for poor city dwellers, policymakers came to see favelas as a visual and moral blight on the city. Forced evictions became common as the city attempted to rid itself of poor residents – particularly those deemed politically subversive during the dictatorship – by destroying their homes and displacing homeless families to more distant areas (Valladares, 2005).

At the same time, favela residents experienced growing access to legal rights, first under the nationalist and leftist regimes of Getúlio Vargas and Juscelino Kubitschek between the 1930s and 1950s, and then under the new democratic regimes following the fall of the dictatorship in the 1980s and 1990s. As Brodwyn Fischer (2008) has argued, however, the gains made by Rio’s urban poor in legal and political rights resulted in little material progress due to a lack of investment in the social services – education, healthcare, basic infrastructure, etc. – necessary to access and advocate for their rights. While favela residents’ mobilization efforts between the 1950s and 1970s were somewhat successful in earning legal claim to their houses, their neighborhoods remained largely neglected by city officials and therefore struggled to attain the same development standards as the rest of the city.

Beginning in the 1970s, a second issue came to characterize favela living: the establishment of the drug trade. As a major South American port, Rio de Janeiro became a key site along the global drug trade route, which proliferated along with increased trade between Brazil, the United States, and Europe. At the same time, recently released political dissidents and petty criminals imprisoned during the dictatorship united to establish the first drug faction – the Comando Vermelho, or the CV – within Rio’s favelas (Amorim, 1993). The lack of police presence in favelas, and the proximity of favelas to many wealthy neighborhoods and tourist sites, made these neighborhoods ideal spaces to store, package, and sell drugs (de Souza, 2005).

Under pressure from the United States to support the war on drugs, Rio de Janeiro’s military police launched an aggressive, decades-long campaign to combat the drug trade. With the exception of a few isolated community policing efforts, Rio’s police adopted extremely brutal tactics that provoked heavy armed combat with drug traffickers but did little to decrease their control over favelas. While the recent “Pacifying Policing Units” – which employed a combination of military tactics and community policing principles – were able to temporarily expel the drug trade from some occupied favelas during a few years preceding the Olympics, the long battle between the state and drug traffickers has resulted in homicide rates in favelas that parallel those of many warzones (Fahlberg and Vicino, 2016; Zaluar, 2007). Although public insecurity is an issue across the city, the ongoing armed struggles between the police and the drug trade is a feature unique to favela living that shows little hope for improvement in the near future. Let us now explore the contemporary markings of inequality and exclusion between favelas and the rest of the city.

Spatialities of inequality in Rio de Janeiro

Despite their proximity to the city’s main downtown areas, the residents of favelas have been systematically excluded from the benefits and privileges of urban living, becoming de facto “outsiders” within the city. The favelas’ exclusion from the city can be largely seen as an interplay

between the real and the imagined, the production of material inequalities based on socially constructed differences. Although the polarization of Rio de Janeiro exists along several axes, six are addressed here: economic, political, social, geographic, security, and symbolic.

Economic exclusion

Two of the clearest divides between favela residents and other city residents are income disparities and their struggles to access the formal job market. A comparison between some of Rio's largest favelas and bordering neighborhoods found that non-favela neighborhoods had average household incomes between five and 20 times higher than favelas (Rocha et al., 2011). This is owed to several factors, including the concentration of low-skilled workers within favelas, as well as discrimination against favela residents within the formal job market. Furthermore, Ribeiro and Telles (2011) argue that the exclusion of Rio's poor from real estate and consumer markets – a feature increasingly visible as the city sought to insert itself into the global economy – further exacerbating economic polarization between favelas and the city. The decrease in the availability of industrial jobs in the 1980s gave way to a growing informal work sector and contributed to the favelas' dramatic expansion, as the urban poor lost their ability to afford houses in working-class neighborhoods and relied upon informal employment opportunities available within favelas.

Political exclusion

There are several ways favela residents struggle to access the city's political institutions in order to advocate for their individual and collective needs. For one, favela residents are severely under-represented in municipal government. Of the 51 city councilors elected in the 2016 municipal elections, for instance, only one – Marielle Franco – was a favela resident. Additionally, the *milícia* – criminal vigilante groups composed of retired police officers and firefighters who impose high taxes on many favelas and other poor neighborhoods in exchange for protection from drug traffickers – exert a great deal of control over local elections in order to ensure that their operations continue unhindered (Gombata, 2014). The needs of favelas are often neglected within this context. Even when policymakers set aside funding for social or economic projects in favelas, the local political institutions in charge of overseeing the implementation of these projects are often ineffective as a result of systemic corruption, the coercive control of drug traffickers, and local clientelistic practices (Arias, 2006; Gay, 2006). As a consequence, resources are often allocated disproportionately within favelas, and many programs are either abandoned before completion or deteriorate quickly due to the misappropriation of funds.

Social exclusion

Although Rio de Janeiro, like Brazil in general, has seen steady improvement in citizens' access to education, healthcare, and cultural and leisure activities, favela residents remain less connected to public institutions and continue to suffer deficiencies in many of these areas relative to other city residents. According to a 2008 study, only 2.5 percent of favela residents across the city had attended some college, compared to 24 percent in the rest of Rio de Janeiro (Agencia Brasil, 2010). Racial dynamics must also be mentioned. Although Brazil has not suffered from the same types of institutionalized racism as the United States, there remain nonetheless strong racial disparities across the country that, in Rio de Janeiro, have taken on a distinctly spatial composition: favela residents are more likely to be black or *pardo* than other city dwellers. Not only does this mean that the city's black and *pardo* populations are more likely to struggle with the many

issues that accompany favela living, but they are also much more likely than their white urban counterparts to be mistreated or killed by the police (Amnesty International, 2015), discriminated against by employers, and perceived as criminals.

Geographic exclusion

Favela residents experience elevated vulnerabilities related to the geography of these environments. For one, Rio de Janeiro is prone to flooding, which often results in landslides along favela hillsides where vast deforestation during the twentieth century and poorly engineered housing structures facilitated erosion (Jacobi, 2016). Favelas on flat land, such as the City of God, have suffered devastating floods as a result of dysfunctional drainage and sewage canals filled with trash. Another significant form of inequality is the challenge of access to the city. Many households were built far up in the hills where there are no paved roads. While cars and buses are able to access the lower hillside areas of major favelas thanks to more recent urbanization projects, most residents living in hilly favelas must carry groceries, appliances, children, and all other belongings up dozens (or hundreds) of steps. As a result, residents of the upper areas of hillside favelas struggle to access the transportation necessary to get to work, school, or leisure activities outside of the favela, despite their neighborhood's proximity to downtown areas. Those with physical disabilities are often unable to leave their homes. In 2010, the municipal government constructed cable cars in the Complexo do Alemão, one of the largest favela complexes in the city, in order to facilitate residents' mobility. Residents, however, complained that state investment in the project – an estimated R\$210 million (or USD\$70 million) – would have been better spent on updating the sewage system or improving security (Richardson, 2017). Shortly after the Olympics, the government stopped paying operating costs for the cable cars, and now these sit empty as a symbol of a temporary, but ultimately failed state intervention.

Security

Rio de Janeiro is widely perceived by its residents as a dangerous and violent city. High rates of homicide, theft, muggings, and physical assaults are exacerbated by sensationalized media stories that reinforce fear and residents' sense of vulnerability (Penglase, 2007). Machado da Silva (2004) has argued that Rio de Janeiro is governed by a “violent social order,” wherein power is determined by those with access to weapons and violent networks. However, like other social problems, the risk of violence is not evenly distributed across the city. Young black men are much more likely to be victims of homicide than any other group (Zaluar, 2007). Favela residents are also most likely to suffer ongoing disruptions to everyday life imposed by drug traffickers and other criminal groups seeking to maintain territorial control (Arias and Rodrigues, 2006; Penglase, 2009; da Silva, 2008). Disorder and vulnerability in favelas has been amplified by aggressive policing practices that prioritize frequent, irregular invasions into favelas that often result in shootouts with drug traffickers and high casualty rates (Misse, 2011).

Symbolic exclusion

Although the preceding features demonstrate that there are numerous material differences between the lived experiences of favela residents and those of other city dwellers, these differences are in many ways a product of socially constructed divisions that continue to influence policy-making and societal beliefs about “favelados” – the pejorative term for favela residents. As Penglase (2014) highlights, the urbanization and formalization of many favelas has helped to

decrease some of the historic divisions between many favelas and other city neighborhoods. In fact, a recent study by Cavallieri and Vial (2012) found that fewer than 10 percent of all housing in neighborhoods popularly considered favelas was “subnormal” (i.e., informal and precarious). What remain are the two most poignant features among neighborhoods labeled “favelas” are a history of informal housing and outsiders’ ongoing perception of favelas as places of moral depravity and criminality.

Many scholars have suggested that favelas should be understood as symbolic demarcations of difference and inequality, spaces of “otherness” through which belonging and inclusion in the city are defined and affirmed (Burgos, 2005; Silva et al., 2009; Valladares, 2005). In her seminal book *The Invention of the Favela*, Licia Valladares (2005) describes the century-long process, beginning in the early 1900s, through which policymakers, borrowing from and adding to popular beliefs about the inferiority of Rio’s urban poor, worked to institutionalize difference between favelas and the rest of the city. Social scientists, Valladares (2005) argues, have been complicit in the social construction of spatialized difference through theories that attributed poverty, informality, and other forms of inequality to cultural and moral differences, a perspective that still persists in academia, public policies, and social attitudes, both in Rio de Janeiro and around the world.

Uneven government interventions in favelas

While the disparities between favelas and other city neighborhoods may give credence to the popular assumption that the government has been largely absent from favelas, both the local and national governments have been extremely present in Rio’s favelas for decades. At times, this presence has been more harmful than beneficial, such as in the case of police interventions in favelas. However, investments in favela urbanization and the urban poor’s social rights have contributed to increased opportunities for social and economic mobility among favela residents.

The police

Police presence in favelas has been a subject of great contestation. Until the 1980s, the police primarily entered favelas in order to evict tenants, tear down shacks, and arrest petty criminals. Once the drug trade began to proliferate, the police launched an aggressive security campaign that emphasized sudden, short-term invasions often resulting in shootouts with drug traffickers and the brutal assault of local residents, but this initiative had little effect on decreasing the drug trade’s power over the local territory. As a result, the state’s presence in favelas has often been viewed as mostly pernicious, promoting a penalization of poverty rather than supporting the urban poor (Wacquant, 2008). There have been some notable exceptions to this approach. The *Grupo de Policiamento em Áreas Especiais* (GPAE), or the Policing Group in Special Areas, was launched in 2000 in two Rio favelas in an effort to decrease aggressive policing practices, reduce access to and use of guns among local residents, and prevent youth from joining the drug trade. Though the program had some notable successes, it was disorganized and susceptible to political influence and deteriorated quickly. In 2007, the federal government committed to supporting changes in policing practices by investing in police re-training and promoting community policing efforts in poor neighborhoods. Rio de Janeiro was the largest recipient of funding from the project, known as PRONASCI, the *Programa Nacional de Segurança Pública com Cidadania*, or the *National Program for Public Security with Citizenship*, although the program was discontinued as a result of political conflicts (Ruediger, 2013).

Perhaps the most famous policing program in Rio was the UPP – the *Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora*, or *Pacifying Policing Units*. Designed and run by Rio de Janeiro’s governor and Secretary of Security, the intervention intended to expel drug traffickers from Rio’s favelas by deploying specially trained military police that combined aggressive military tactics and weapons with “policing of proximity” practices to gain and maintain control over select favelas. Though the intervention weakened after the 2016 Summer Olympics, it temporarily subdued drug traffickers, lowered homicide rates in favelas by as much as 75 percent, increased social services in targeted neighborhoods, and promoted better relations between the state and the favela (Abdala, 2011; Cano et al., 2012; Menezes, 2017; Oosterbaan and van Wijk, 2015). The UPP offers an example of how state security measures can promote polarization (Fahlberg and Vicino, 2016) as well as inclusion among favela residents.

Urbanization efforts

The state has played an important role in the uneven development of its informal settlements. While a detailed description of all government projects in favelas fall outside the scope of this chapter, a few deserve mention. Launched in 1994 with funding from the Inter-American Development Bank, the *Favela-Bairro* (Favela-Neighborhood) program is the largest slum-upgrading project in Latin America to date. Focused primarily on medium-sized favelas, which house approximately 60 percent of the favela population, the city claimed the program benefited over half a million people by 2006 by improving infrastructure, transportation systems, housing, and public spaces, building new schools and community centers, and investing in job trainings, among other efforts (Fiori et al., 2000). In 2010, the municipal government implemented the “Programa Morar Carioca” – the “Program Living Carioca” (“Carioca” is the popular term for residents of Rio de Janeiro), which aimed at expanding urbanization and integration efforts within favelas.

The federal government has also helped support investments in Rio’s favelas. In 2007, the federal government implemented the “PAC” (Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento, or the Program for Growth Acceleration), which prioritized investments in infrastructure, such as housing construction and improvements, and building water and sewage systems, new schools, and health clinics. “Minha Casa Minha Vida,” or “My Home My Life,” has funded public housing projects in several favelas since it began in 2009, and thousands of favela residents receive financial support from the welfare program “Bolsa Família.” Additionally, race and income-based quotas in public universities, coupled with federal investments in scholarships, have given favela residents greater access to higher education and created a small but growing group of university graduates from favelas, who have greater access to social mobility than has ever been historically possible (Valladares, 2017).

While these recent programs and funding streams have helped urbanize many favelas and provided needed assistance to poor residents, they are not without problems. Fiori and Brandão (2009) argue that many of the state’s social interventions into favelas have been conducted in a piecemeal, disorganized, “schizophrenic” nature that neglected to structure favela-based projects around larger urban planning efforts. Furthermore, political corruption and bureaucratic red tape have led to extremely costly slum-upgrading projects often characterized by poor quality and cheap materials that deteriorated shortly after the project’s conclusion (Perlman, 2010). Finally, in many neighborhoods, violent criminal networks play a role in managing the allocation of government resources, which results in the uneven provision of benefits.

The fringes within the city

Rio de Janeiro's favelas offer several important implications for how we understand urban development in the contemporary Global South. For one, Rio de Janeiro's favelas do not easily lend themselves to categorization (as urban, suburban, peri-urban, etc.). On the one hand, their continued exclusion from broader urban systems and privileges reflects the peripheralization of many squatter settlements across the Global South. Yet, decades of state urbanization efforts have helped raise the quality of living among many favela residents and given them some of the resources needed for integration and social mobility. Rather than attempt to classify them as a particular socio-spatial agglomeration, favelas are best defined by the processes that make and remake them. Like many other poor neighborhoods, favelas are dynamic spaces where both material and symbolic realities are continually recreated and reaffirmed within the modern urban landscape. The mechanisms by which they are excluded from the city and the opportunities through which favela residents integrate into the broader urban fabric continually readjust to local and global forces.

These dynamic processes of development and regression also complicate assumptions about polarization within global and emerging cities. Much of the recent literature in urban studies has tended to view cities – particularly those in the Global South – as increasingly divided as a result of neoliberal economic and political policies that decrease state-based social services and limit employment opportunities among low-skilled workers (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982; Sassen, 2011). States, it is suggested, are gradually surrendering their role in the development of poor areas (Wacquant, 2009). Yet, in Rio de Janeiro, state presence in favelas has increased dramatically since Brazil's rise to democracy and shift to neoliberal policies. Although Rio remains a highly unequal city, the urban poor have witnessed several improvements as a result of government intervention. Many of the challenges they face are also a result of the state's presence, particularly policing. In Rio de Janeiro, poverty and exclusion are not products of state abandonment but of uneven, unsustainable, and often dysfunctional government projects that both improve residents' quality of living while also creating new challenges.

Finally, the tensions and opportunities of uneven development have helped produce a wide array of identities and practices within favelas that at once reaffirm and challenge favelas' exclusion from the city. Residents have created strong local economic and social systems that foster informal employment and support systems necessary for adapting to security issues and the lack of dependable public services (da Silva 2008). While many of these systems provide a critical safety net not afforded by the government, informal political dynamics also serve to reinforce local inequalities and power dynamics (Arias, 2006; da Silva, 2008). Additionally, favela residents have been extremely engaged in mobilization efforts to demand increased legal and human rights. These campaigns were critical in obtaining many of the services described previously and in securing greater protections for residents' rights (Fischer, 2008; McCann, 2014). Favela residents have also been outspoken in broader movements for identity-based rights around race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion, with a particular focus on the ways that discrimination in these areas exacerbates the challenges of favela living. Through these efforts, activists help to connect favelas with social justice networks across and beyond the city.

Ultimately, uneven development has made favelas into dynamic spaces that must constantly adapt to the costs and opportunities of unpredictable government intervention. While the challenges of transition often serve to retrench historic forms of inequality, they also create new practices and possibilities. As Brazil grapples with economic recession and a chaotic national political arena, future research should focus on the examination of how federal and municipal policies affect the socio-spatial dynamics of favelas, their integration into the broader urban fabric, and

the strategies of adaptation, resilience, and action constructed by favela residents to make the most of emerging opportunities.

Guide to further reading

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