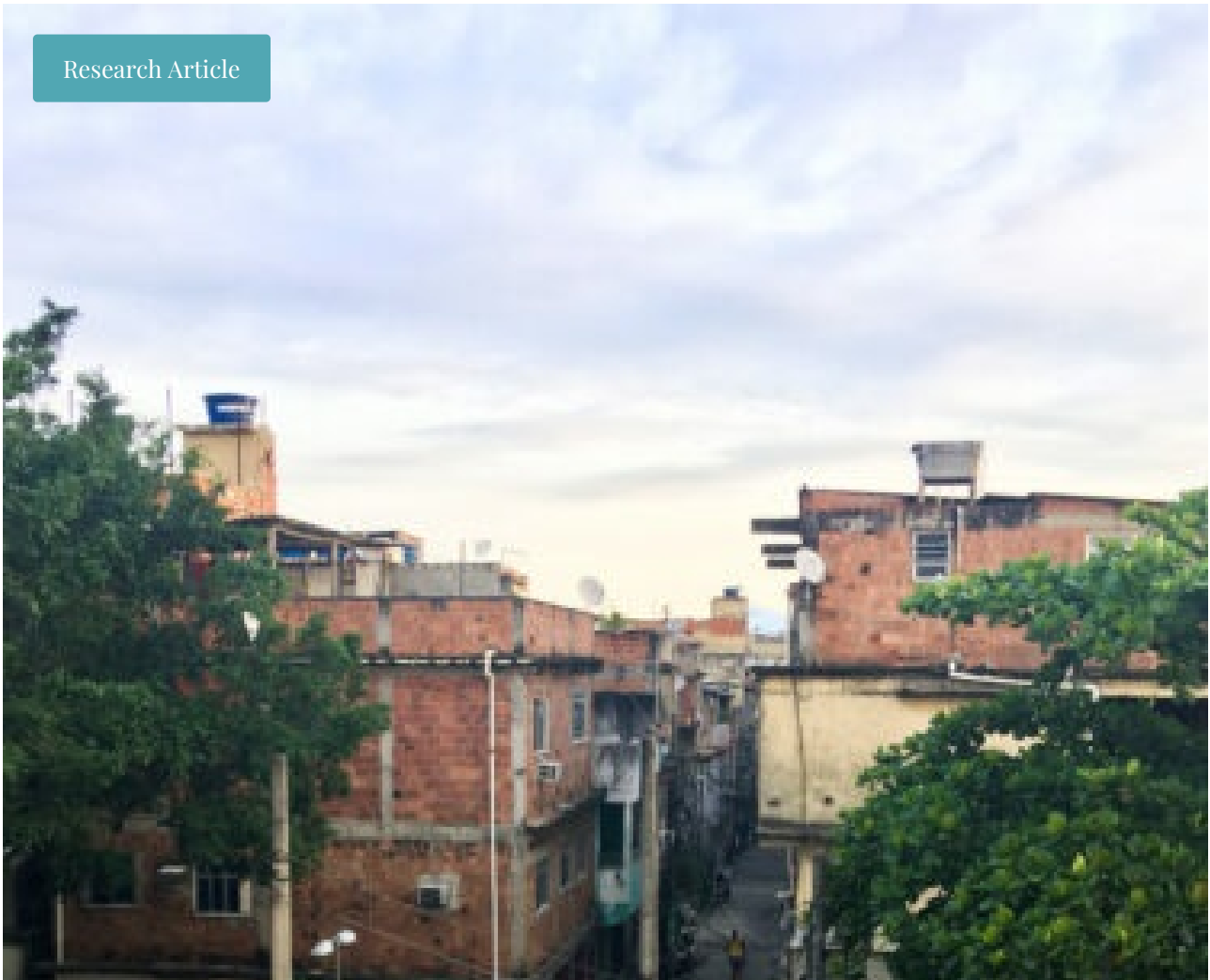


Research Article



Cartography of hidden narratives: practices of insurgent citizenship in Maré, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

May 13, 2022

Issue: [Dislocating Urban Studies](#)

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In my PhD research, I have been investigating the work of Redes da Maré, a resident-led organisation based in Maré, a compound of favelas in the north side of Rio de Janeiro. Since 2007, they have worked to guarantee that residents have access to their rights, from basic needs and public services to intangible rights, such as identity, history, memories, and ancestry. They conduct activities that create awareness over citizenship, exploring the potentialities of the territory through the voice and lived experiences of residents (see Redes da Maré 2022). Drawn by the collective action of its members, my research looks at the counter-narratives they produce to challenge stereotyped representations of favelas and favelados (favelas' residents).

By joining daily activities from September 2019 to January 2020, I observed how counter-narratives of rights were shared, affecting the built environment and the spatial relations in place. The oppositional word counter used here refers to narratives that are insurgent, meaning they emerge from the fight and lived experiences of favelados to resist and change a state project of control in favelas. Stemming from modernist and neoliberal policies to “clean” the city, this project embeds a hegemonic narrative that portrays favelas solely for their precariousness, violence and exclusion. One example was when national media portrayed Maré as a “bunker of criminals” (see Martins, 2020), and residents counter-argued showing the compound as a vibrant territory formed by plural trajectories where families built their homes and communities.

The idea of insurgent citizenship, from James Holston (2008), is useful to understand the nature of these counter-narratives. The concept refers to spaces where citizenship has been historically denied, and citizens fight for legitimacy to guarantee that rights are fairly distributed and exercised. Equivalently, the counter-narratives observed in Maré aim to disrupt the imaginary imposed by the State and the media, amplifying favelados' voices fighting for their citizenship. Drawing on the context of Maré and its spatial disputes, this piece takes narratives as a site for critical reflection. It sheds light on the relevance of counter-narratives to inform future imaginaries for planning based on the experiences held in spaces of insurgent citizenship.

As it will be depicted below, favelas were excluded from official planning decisions until the 1980s, being constantly removed to give space to real estate development. A consequence of the unequal planning was the absence of a complete cartography for Maré containing streets, postcodes, blocks, and buildings, leaving it as a blank shape in the city's official cartography. By exploring a combination of selected maps and fieldwork excerpts, I navigate from hegemonic narratives to local counter-narratives to discuss two topics. The sources include maps from Google, mainstream, and community-led newspapers, the Maré population census (Redes da Maré 2019a), notes and reflections from diaries and interviews.

The first topic focuses on the legitimacy of narratives to understand knowledge and space production in the territory. It builds on the right to narrate as a right to exist (Bhabha 2014), concerning the silenced voices that carry knowledges and authority to narrate Maré. The second topic draws on insurgent planning (Miraftab 2017) and counter-narratives as a method employed in Maré's context to retrieve citizenship. Questioning

Western-dominant perspectives, the topic discusses an epistemological shift for planning based on the histories of struggles, fights and the knowledge production of favelados.

I begin exploring narratives as a site of critical reflection, and draw on a decolonial perspective to critically engage with them. In addition, I provide a brief history of Maré showcasing the combined maps. It is important to mention that I am not from Maré, and this paper brings my own interpretation of its reality based on seven years of collaboration with Redes da Maré.

Narratives as a site for critical reflection

In urban research, narratives have been employed as a reading method to apprehend the city, whether through oral, spatial, cartographic or literature means. As discussed by Suzanne Hall (2008), narratives may reveal power and spatial disputes, the experience of different subjectivities, and evidence from effaced historical accounts. They grapple with nuanced perspectives, cutting across different scales, from urban governance to the subjective experiences on-the-ground. They unfold the multiple layers between past and present, revealing what stories, plans, maps, documents and policies dismiss in the processes of city-making (Id.). As we position narratives at the center of knowledge production in planning, taking them as a site for critical reflection, the dispute of narratives and hidden conflicts becomes evident.

Considering the invisible layers of history in Maré, I adopt narrative as a form of articulation, expressed through stories, testimonies, statements and within conversations. Beyond oral means, narratives are present in the built environment, not always visible. In the essay on “The right to narrate”, Bhabha (2014) describes narratives as “a sign of civic life”. The act of narrating goes beyond a linguistic act, entangling agency and self-determination as an enunciative right: to speak and to be heard. Narratives are, therefore, a method for recuperating this other side of history, and foreseeing a future that recognise these struggles.

In days of police operations, for example, police officers drive inside the favelas to combat crime (i.e., drug and arms dealing) equipped with a militarised apparatus and employing violent behaviour. Their aggressive approach transforms the streets of Maré, which become empty and silent, only disturbed by the sound of shootings, exposing the narrative of police law enforcement. This narrative reveals the constant awareness, fear and curfew of residents during these days. From this example, I question: could narratives work as a tool to make visible the planning and policy practices that reproduce the social and spatial exclusion of Maré? What about the efforts of local organisations, favelados and their partners working to sustain the spaces of insurgent citizenship?

A decolonial perspective to critically engage with narratives

I often heard from residents how little they knew about their families’ histories or where their ancestors came from. Others I interviewed held onto the stories passed from

previous generations as their main source of history and memory of the place they live. Both Holston (1998) and Hall (2008) recast to the analogy of the city as a palimpsest, a parchment where original writing is overshadowed to make room for new writing. The traces of effaced writing refer to the histories that were never told and the knowledges passed among generations that resist the obliteration from the city's official historical accounts.

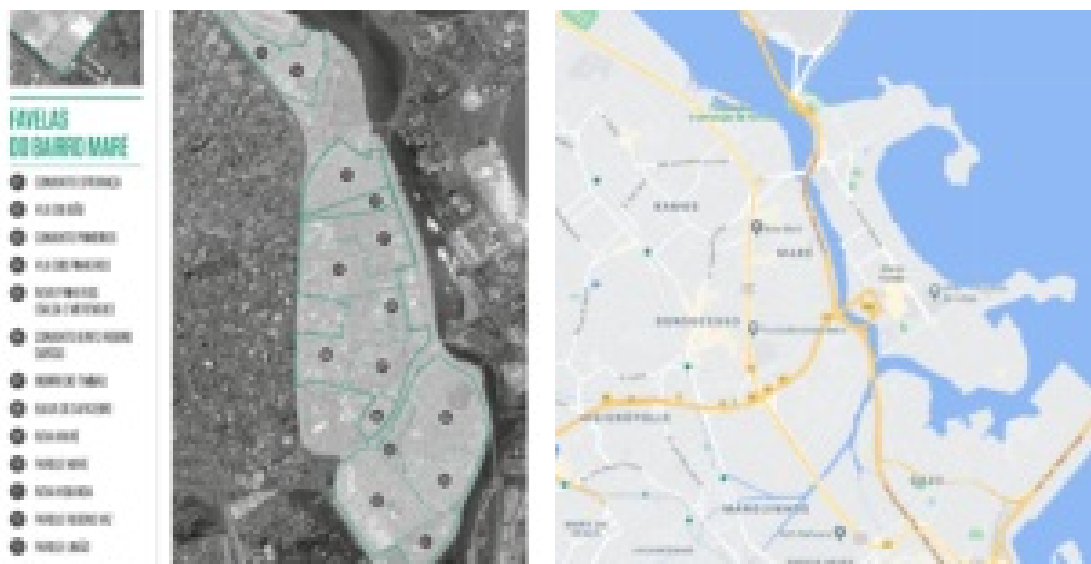
Countering the palimpsest mechanism, a decolonial lens gives relevance to the bodily experiences that are often obliterated and oppressed by the legacy of colonisation. The latter is ingrained in our knowledge production, subjectivity, the formation of our cities and social relations in a country that dealt with 300 years of colonial rule and nearly 400 years of slavery. This legacy refers to the coloniality of power, which, according to Quijano (2000), addresses the separation of categories of race, gender and labour as a form of domination. This exploitation aims to accumulate knowledge, power and capital for the white elite through discourses of development and progress. It reflects modernity's mechanisms of universality and erasure, making invisible histories of struggle, diaspora and ancestry.

In the case of favelas, coloniality is intrinsic to their processes of existence since they were significantly formed by former enslaved people and their descendants. Brazilian anthropologist Lélia Gonzalez (2019) explored coloniality through the entrenched racism in Brazilian society. She pointed out the fallacy of the conviviality of races, denouncing the racialised division of labour that reproduces social and spatial segregation in the country. Those living in favelas have a long history of being segregated. Until 1985, the majority of their populations could not vote since they were illiterate. To this date, they are still a labour force that is denied full citizenship, with limited access to land and housing, in constant threat of removal, and under violent control of the state (see Valladares, 2005).

Foremost, they deal with the obliteration of their past, not always knowing where their families originally came from, precluded from fully accessing memories and identities. For this reason, decolonial lenses are taken to enquire how coloniality prevails in narratives and discourses, revealing when the right to narrate is infringed. These lenses unveil what stories emerge at the intersections of the aforementioned category markers.

A brief context of Maré: the dispute of narratives that shaped the territory

Maré comes from a generation of favelas that emerged as a consequence of Rio de Janeiro's modern urban planning and late industrialisation (Valladares 2005). Its first residents arrived from the northeast of Brazil in the 1940s as a labour force for the construction of Avenida Brasil under a broader agenda to modernise the city. It was formalised as a neighbourhood without residents' acknowledgment in 1994 and is currently organised in 16 communities (Map 1), which house almost 140,000 residents. Maré is located on the northside of the city, lying between two highways and crossed by a third (Map 2), situated next to Guanabara Bay in a flooded land that gave its name, which in English means tide.

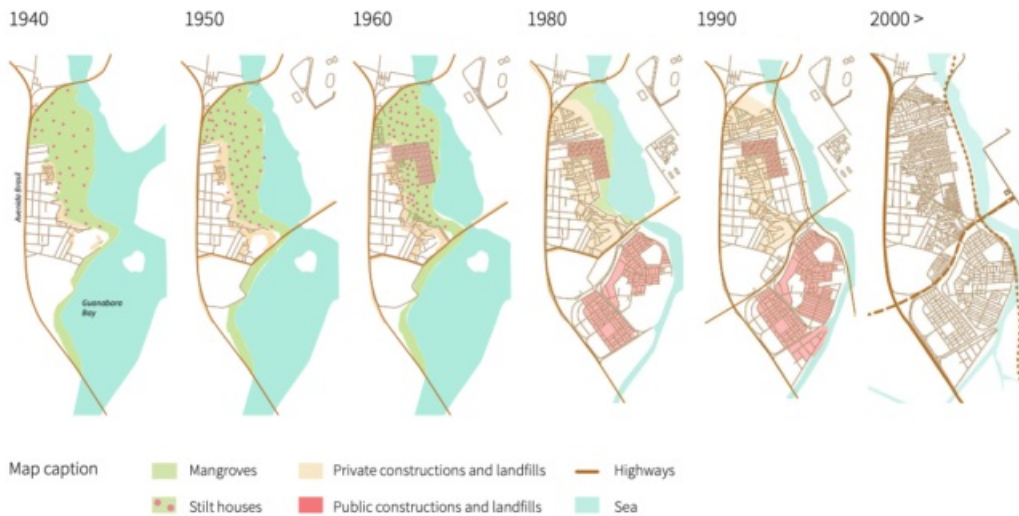


Map 1: Satellite map of Maré with the 16 favelas (Redes da Maré 2019a). Map 2: Google maps with the main highways identified in yellow. Source: Google Maps, 2021.

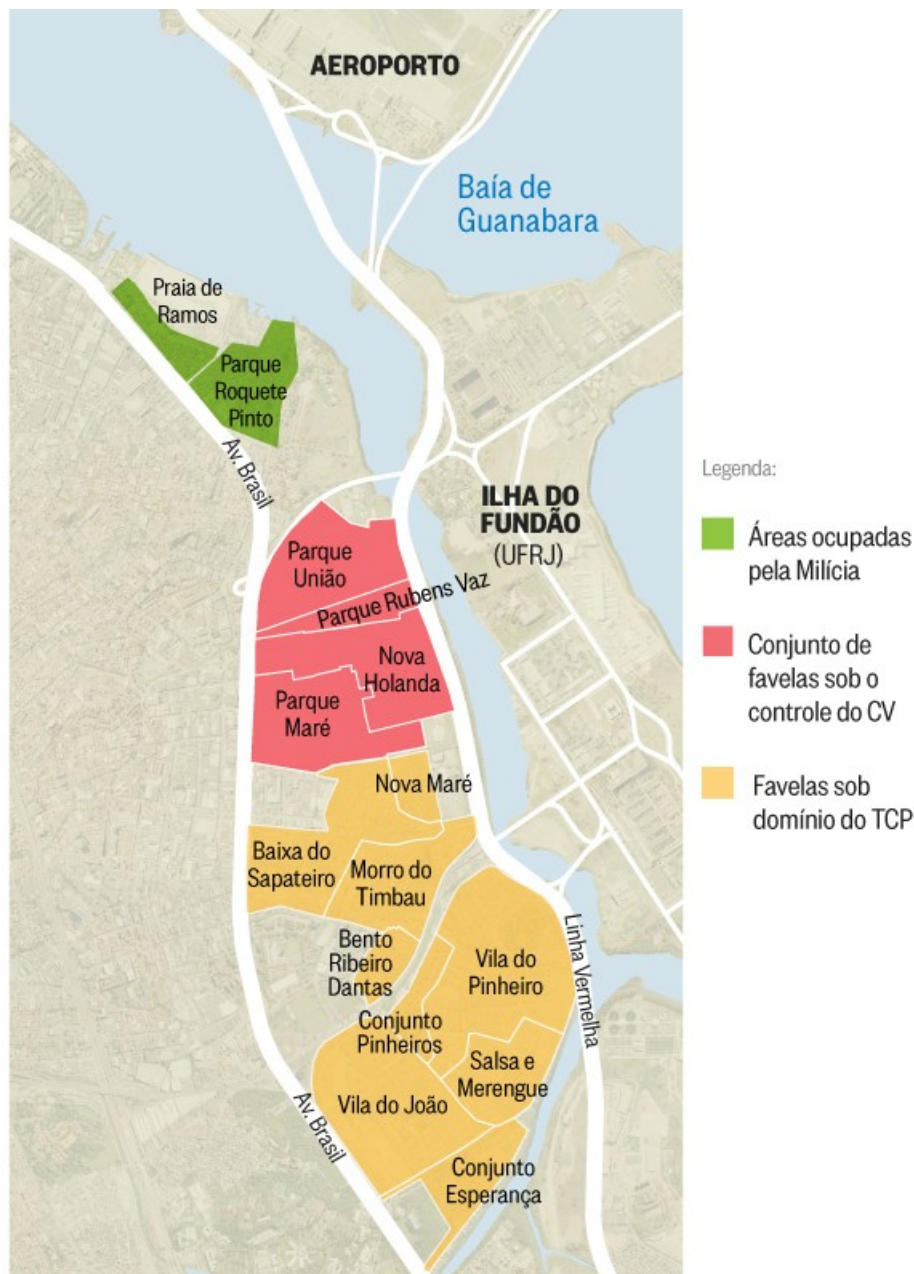
Among its typologies, we find a provisory housing centre that later became permanent (Nova Holanda), housing estates that adhered to the logics of favelas self-regulation and dynamics (Parque Maré, Parque Roquete Pinto, Bento Ribeiro Dantas, Conjunto Esperança, Vila do João and Vila dos Pinheiros), self-built houses in public and private allotments (Morro do Timbau, Baixa do Sapateiro, Parque União, Rubens Vaz), and houses produced through collective building processes (*mutirão*) counting on the efforts of residents and architecture cooperatives, after being removed as stilt shacks (Nova Maré).

From the early years, residents have resisted the human rights violations of police authorities, especially during the dictatorship from 1964 to 1985 while dealing with undermining forms of representation by the media. Stereotypes of illegal occupiers of land, indolent and unsanitary, criminalised their bodies and ways of living. Silva (2002) argued that favelas have always been associated with absence, recognised for being an urban problem rather than territories of struggles and achievements. As modernisation progressed, visible in the construction of highways and urban developments, workers deprived of land and housing either occupied the territory or were taken to it after being removed from other favelas (map 3).

The urban evolution



Map 3: the urban evolution of Maré. Source: Paola Jacques (2002) with visuals reconstituted by the author (2021). In the 1980s, armed groups involved with drug dealing erupted in Maré directly affecting residents' right to get in and out and commuting without restrictions. Currently disputed by three armed groups, residents recount that the more years passed, the heavier the weapons used by military and civil police, and subsequently by local armed groups. Based on literature in favelas' studies, this is not a coincidence. The public security policies installed in Maré always had the intention to control peoples' bodies and subjectivities under the excuse of a "war on drugs" (Silva 2017). Through their ostensive armory, they unfolded an arms race competition with armed groups, using a combative discourse (Machado da Silva and Menezes 2019). According to a Redes da Maré (2020) publication, 49 people were killed by guns, of which 34 deaths were a result of police action, and all of them were black and *pardo* (mixed-race from African ancestry) people.



Map 4: Armed disputes in Maré territory according to a hegemonic newspaper. The green areas are of paramilitary groups (militia); the red and yellow are of two armed groups. Source: O Globo, 2017.

From the 1990s to 2000s, neoliberal development and the absence of the State in favelas propelled the local social movements in liaison with residents' associations to reconfigure themselves as local nonprofit organisations (Brum 2019). Today these organisations still litigate for the rights of favelados, producing counter-narratives that change the imaginary imposed through projects in education, art, culture, public security, urban and environmental rights. One example is the newspaper *Maré de Notícias*, which emerged in 2009 and builds on residents' points of view. In the 100th edition, they published one page for each favela with one protagonist narrating their history and involvement with the place. The result is a map that locates the protagonists within the territory (map 4). According to Helio Euclides, journalist of *Maré de Notícias*, "residents need to see themselves as the protagonists of the territory".



Map 4: an infographic on top of Maré's satellite map with the main protagonists of each favela. Source: Maré de Notícias, 2019.

Currently, Maré is portrayed by the media as a space of violence, having this narrative defied by local (counter) narratives. Through collective action emerging from within, various forms of media (such as newspapers, research, books, events, visual productions, etc.) convene narratives of Maré as a place of strength where citizens claim to be part of the city, and to be entitled to rights as much as any other citizen.

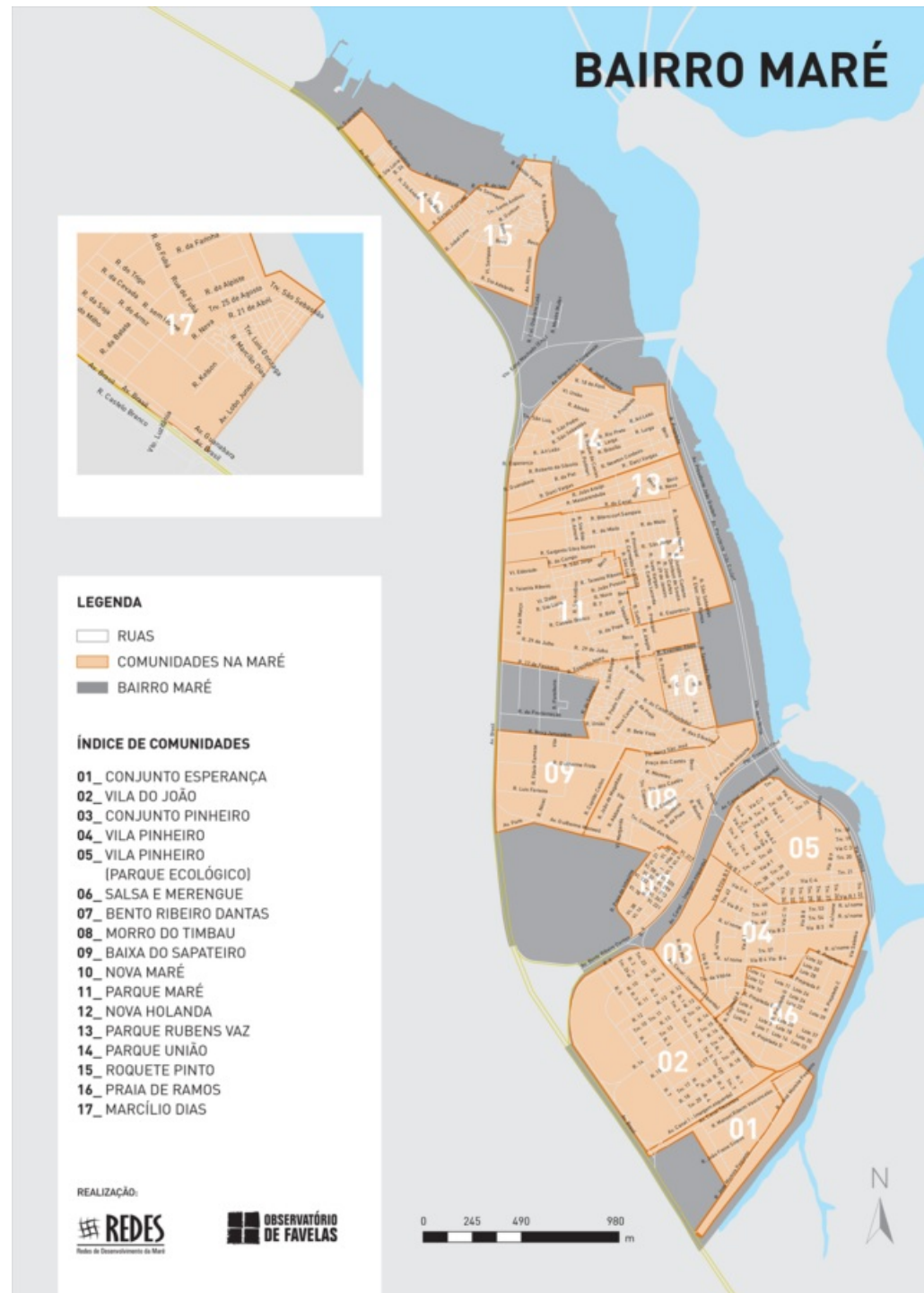
The incompleteness of Maré's cartography

In fieldwork, one of the first events I participated in was the launch of the Maré Population Census, a project from 2012 to 2019. In a room with more than 30 people, including organisation members, residents' associations presidents, political leaders, researchers and activists, the organisation director Eliana Silva and Geographer Dalcio Marinho presented their seven years of work. One of the points they stressed was the methodology they used to collect the data, which was adapted from the one used for the national census in the country by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).

The need for an adapted methodology revolved around the fact favelas are not mapped as other areas of the city since they are framed by IBGE as a special sector formed by subnormal agglomerations (the name given to informal settlements). They are special because the tools and methods to collect data are not appropriate to their non-linear profile – self-regulated, incremental, not static, disputed by multiple forces – thus excluding them from the “formal” city as told in interviews. As a consequence, Rio favelas have incomplete data on demographics and access to public services such as internet connection, post services and health equipment.

As a result of their research, Redes da Maré members produced a map with streets, addresses, and postcodes compiled in a street guide internally produced (Map 5).

Notwithstanding, there is still a gap of complete cartography with blocks, lots, pavements, buildings, and other details that support the elaboration of policies, regulations and planning practices. In 2013, in the peak of neoliberal decisions and the transformation of Rio to receive mega events, the city town hall asked Google to remove the word favela from Google Maps, substituting it with the term “hill” and framing these spaces as green areas with no occupation. The lack of complete cartography endorsed narratives of exclusion, reinforcing stereotypes of marginality and illegality.



Map 5: The cartography elaborated in the census project. Source: Guia de Ruas da Maré, 2014.

The maps above illustrate a platform of overlapping narratives that show spatial disputes of ownership and belonging. Considering the multiple narratives embedded in the maps, in the following section, I unfold two topics of discussion that encompass fieldwork

excerpts and theoretical ideas from urban scholars committed to plural worldviews for planning.

1. The legitimacy of narratives to understand knowledge and space production

Observing the maps, one may notice the invisibility of stories that were responsible for the construction of Maré's built environment. The legitimacy of the modern and subsequent neoliberal State discourse enforced the rejection of black, *pardo*, and northeastern bodies from their "self-determination" in plans, programmes and policies. However, the efforts of local social movements resist these forms of erasure through their knowledge production. Currently, Maré has a range of research groups that emerged from within disputing narratives that challenge the imaginary of its space.

Among these research groups are Memória Ambiental^[1] (i.e., environmental memory), Data Labe^[2], and Casa Preta da Maré^[3] (i.e., black house of Maré). The first is organised by people from inside and outside Maré working with environmental education and urban rights. They look at stories narrating the impact of climate change in popular territories across memory, language, history, environmental racism and food sovereignty.

The research laboratory Data Labe works in between hegemonic and counter-narratives to disclose social and spatial injustice, calling for public policies and urban interventions. One example of their projects is "cocozap" – from Portuguese "poo WhatsApp". It consists of a WhatsApp account in which residents can send images of areas with open sewage, telling their own stories about the lack of a good sanitation system and the impact on their lives.

The third, Casa Preta da Maré, is a project from Redes da Maré conducted by black and *pardo* members and promotes monthly events that gather black protagonists to discuss blackness, racial inequality, and spatial experience. It recovers forgotten stories, contrasting them with authorities' political decisions and denouncing the genocide of black people (see Ortegá 2018) since the early stages of Maré. Their events promote Afro-diasporic knowledges and their conceptions of home, family, community, and ancestrality.

All cases exemplify the battle of counter-narratives seeking ways to understand the root of problems visible in Maré's built environment, and building on their citizenship. Stories of eviction, of dealing with racist controlling public security policies, of solidarity and community reflect histories of oppressions that are not visible through cartographic representations. Without legitimising counter-narratives as knowledges, only a partial reality of the spatial production of Maré is conceived.

Alluding to Bhabha (2014), by not accessing the right to narrate, residents' subjectivities are pervaded with the discourse of coloniality. Those I have interviewed expressed the reduction of their identities as favelados imposed early in their lives as potential criminals. They expressed the identity of the favelado transmuted from a form of humiliation, seen as pejorative by society, to empowerment, grown out of collective action, recognition and

pride. On different occasions, members who were *cria* – i.e., the ones born and raised in Maré – described their transition from recognising their identity of favelado as a pejorative aspect to a form of empowerment. During the Maré census presentation, presenters highlighted the value of *crias*' knowledges as fundamental to grasping the details underneath the streets, alleys, and corners that were hard to reach with the official methodology of IBGE. Members who are *crias* yielded on their experiences of rejection outside of Maré as favelados, affirming the term had another connotation when seen from a perspective of pride of being part of a network of solidarity and an intergenerational fight for rights.

The recognition of the favelado identity has been documented and debated in events, publications, books, newspapers, spectacles and platforms by Redes da Maré and other organisations. The publication “Vida na Favela” (Life in the Favela) gathered personal records of residents and NGO members describing their life experiences seeking to dismantle stigmas such as the favela as a “factory of guns” (Viana in Redes da Maré 2019b, 26), emphasising these territories as places of encounter and knowledge exchange. The publication “Meu nome não é Cracudo” (My name is not cracudo) (Redes da Maré 2015) criticises the stereotypical view on crack users – pejoratively called “cracudos” – by addressing the true realities, spatial relations, and dynamics in the crack scene, retrieving their dignity as citizens.

The above-mentioned groups and publications provide evidence based on counter-narratives of lived experiences of struggle. Counter-narratives create a fissure in developmental ideas pointing that rights cannot be conceived through participation based on neoliberal inclusion (Miraftab 2017) pressed down as a homogenous cry for help. The right to narrate implies acknowledging the voices of favelados as legitimate narratives to understand the social and spatial construct of favelas.

2. The ways narratives allow practitioners to reconfigure Western dominant perspectives

Building on radical and insurgent planning, Miraftab (Ibid., 277) noted that an epistemic shift has already begun through the recognition of settlements (squatter, favelas, townships) as spaces of insurgent citizenship and where insurgent planning practices may occur. She (2009, 4) called “insurgent planning” the spatial practices that are “counter-hegemonic, transgressive and imaginative”. They destabilise normality and the status quo while recognising past and present struggles to reimagine the future. In an attempt to reconfigure the role of inclusivity and participation in planning, Miraftab (2017) offers a change of focus from actors to practices. Analysing narratives through the point of view of practices rather than the actors allows us to see the various disputes taking place in the space of Maré: the presence of the state through the control of police authorities, the constraints of armed groups, the collective action of a network of solidarity, and the speculative market.

With much effort from local social movements, internal voices from the favelas echoed in urbanisation programmes after the 1980s granting them access to few public services

(Silva 2016). However, the insurgent practices of citizenship related to this fight could not be interpreted as invited, as discussed by Miraftab (2017). By “invited”, she referred to being supported by government and private institutions, being often co-opted by neoliberal forms of participation instead of interfering with the status quo. Maré’s insurgent practices are invented as they seek to move beyond state’s structures, rather than reforming it, destabilising the same historical logic of reproducing inequality that prioritises an agenda to capitalise on the city (Silva 2016). Moreover, these practices endure a legacy of fights and conflicts founded on pillars of collectivity and solidarity (Id.).

The narratives entailed by these practices reflect the legacy of social movements and the litigation of rights acknowledged in Brazil’s City Statue (Holston and Caldeira 2014, Rolnik 2013, 2019). Nevertheless, the role of self-determination, particularly in the production and definitions of plans, programmes and policies, still defy paradigms of stigma, homogenisation of peripheries and reductionisms on poverty. The deep entrenchment of knowledge hierarchies that pose scientific, modern and colonialist thought on the top, requires transgression in urban studies education towards learning plural ways of seeing, knowing and thinking.

In other words, urban studies have yet to build an account of counter-narratives that are based on the voice of favelados and acknowledge the inadequacy of historical accounts endorsing social and spatial segregation. An account stressing an epistemological shift that moves the focus from capital accumulation to the heterogeneity of favelas’ knowledge production. One prioritising the spatial relations that support the existing networks of solidarity and their power to disrupt systemic inequality.

Final considerations

This paper addressed the role of narratives as a site for critical reflection to uncover true stories, memories and testimonies that produce and shape territories of insurgent citizenship. Narratives as a method and resource in light of decolonial perspectives have the potential to disclose the reality of subjectivities historically trapped at the intersections of oppressions. Through the context of Maré, I shed light on the dispute of narratives that acknowledges it as a by-product of the State’s planning processes, demystifying categories of marginality and exclusion.

As counter-narratives foreground the production of knowledges of organisations and movement-led groups to change the current scenario of urban fragmentation in Rio de Janeiro, in both public security and urban planning, it is urgent to endorse their credibility and recognition in urban research. By discussing the legitimacy of narratives through the gaze of internally produced evidence, I pointed out the right to narrate as a right to exist and belong in a place: an entitlement to citizenship and self-determination. Finally, an epistemological shift for planning requires the recognition of counter-narratives as knowledges. It requires the transgression from ideals on progress and productivism toward an ethos that nurtures a network of solidarity and supports the autonomy and freedom of subjects producing the spaces of insurgent citizenship.

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