



Situating Fortaleza: Urban space and uneven development in northeastern Brazil

Jeff Garmany*

University of Arizona, School of Geography and Development, Harvill Building, 1103 E. 2nd st., P.O. Box 210076, Tucson, AZ 85721-0076, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 September 2009

Received in revised form 17 May 2010

Accepted 31 August 2010

Available online 22 September 2010

Keywords:

Urban

Brazil

Fortaleza

Development

Favela

Latin America

ABSTRACT

The academic literature on Brazilian cities focuses overwhelmingly upon the metropolises of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. While fruitful in its own right, this research confronts scholars of Latin American cities elsewhere with two ongoing limitations: (1) Despite estimates that nearly one quarter of Brazil's urban population inhabits the conurbation of Rio and São Paulo, at least 75% of urban space in Brazil, an area populated by roughly 120 million people, is consistently overlooked; and (2) the findings from these two megacities are often (and unfairly) extrapolated across other urban contexts in Brazil, perpetuating lingering misgivings about the overall 'nature' of Brazilian cities.

In this paper, I consider the Northeast of Brazil, drawing upon my own research from the *favela* (slum) community of Pirambu, located in the city of Fortaleza, to help understand urban development outside of the Rio/São Paulo corridor. By considering historical circumstances, geographic specificity, theoretical implications, and the course of Brazilian development, I highlight informal urban growth in an oft-overlooked region of Latin America while, at the same time, revealing many of the geographic attributes that give Rio and São Paulo their truly *exceptional* character. My goal in this work is not to refute the work of others, but rather to underscore the importance of geographic context to socio-spatial processes of urban development.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Positioned along the Northeast coast of Brazil, roughly one thousand miles southeast from where the Amazon River flows into the Atlantic Ocean, lies the city of Fortaleza, capital of the state of Ceará. Already the largest city in Brazil north of Recife, according to Bolay and Rabinovich (2004), Fortaleza's population has swelled in recent decades to well over two million people (*not* including the entire metropolitan area). While few would call it a 'global city,' Fortaleza's recent growth has solidified its reputation as a viable economic center in Brazil (e.g., Rossi & Taylor, 2005). Spurring this upturn has been an expanding tourism industry, known both nationally and in Europe for its year-round, beach-going climate. To capitalize upon this burgeoning market, nearly 25 years ago, city planners introduced a roadway project aimed at creating a multi-use, boardwalk-style district adjacent to the community of Pirambu, a low-income area located along the (underdeveloped) coast in the northwest part of the city (see Fig. 1). Lying in the construction path of this project (known as 'Vila do Mar'¹), however, are the homes of several thousand *pirambuenses* (residents of Pirambu). First established by squatter-settlers over 60 years ago (da

Costa, 1999), Pirambu is a favela community, comprised of multiple low-income neighborhoods where residents have (at best) possession rather than property rights to the land their homes are built upon.² With construction of Vila do Mar, now almost 15 years in the making, and as the relocation of families in the construction zone has already begun, opinions regarding the effects of the project are drastically split in Pirambu. In many cases, the crux of this debate pivots upon for whom this development will be beneficial, and how the community has already changed as a result of the construction.

The tensions unleashed by Vila do Mar, however, are by no means unique to Pirambu or even the city of Fortaleza: nearly every major Brazilian city (including most others in Latin America) has faced these issues, and often within the context of 'urban development' (Burgos, 1998; Fernandes, 2005; Gay, 1994; Gil, 1992; Holston, 2008; Jacobs, 2002; Kowarick & Bonduki, 1994; O'Hare & Rivas, 2007; Outtes, 2003; Suplicy, 1988). To more affluent urban residents, favelas are regularly perceived as dangerous spaces, the inhabitants as uneducated and a drain upon city resources and land-use policies, and the communities as no more than eyesores and impediments to progress. For *favelados* (favela dwellers), though, they are sites of social reproduction, usually

* Tel.: +1 520 621 1652; fax: +1 520 621 2889.

E-mail address: garmany@email.arizona.edu

¹ The project's name (and scope) has changed several times since it was first inaugurated: renamed in 2007, 'Vila do Mar' is now its official title.

² In many respects, the difference between possession and property rights is what distinguishes informal urban encampments, favelas, and formalized neighborhoods. For a more complete analysis of this topic, please see Holston (2008), pp. 203–232.

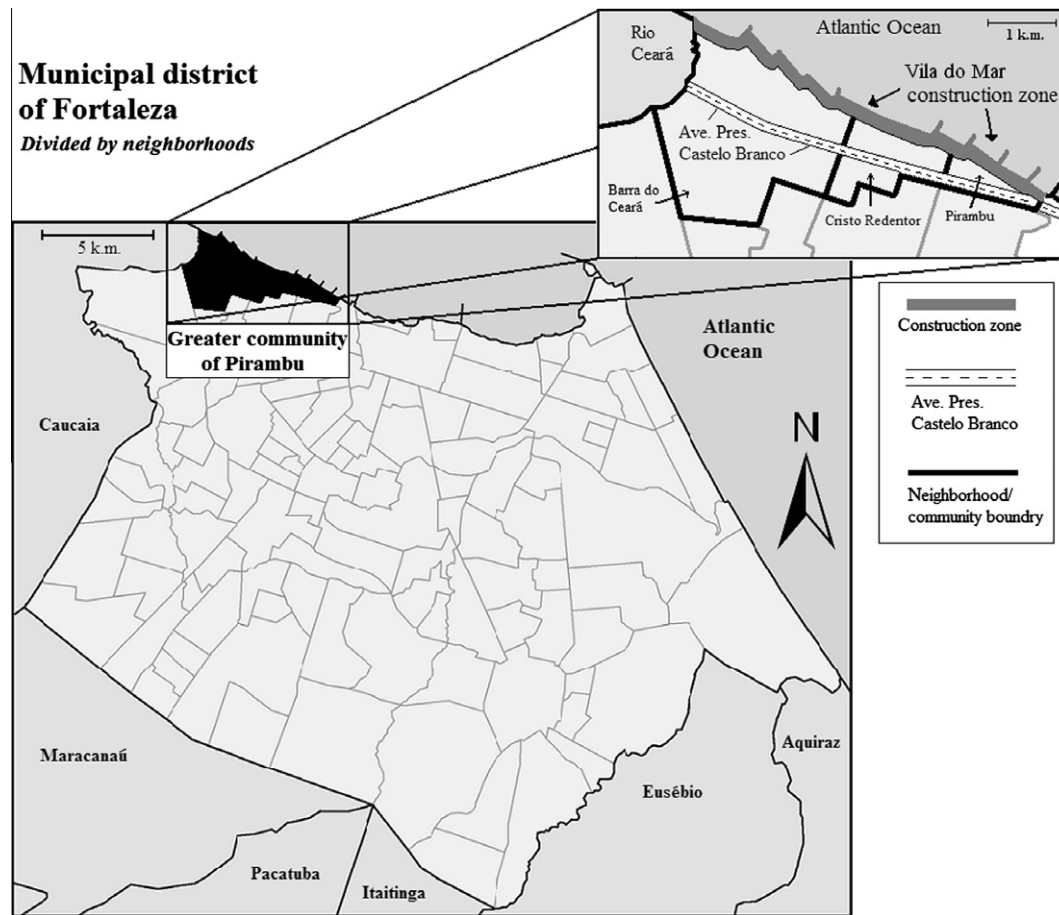


Fig. 1. Map of Fortaleza highlighting Pirambu and Vila do Mar construction zone.

the final and only option in Brazil for those with limited financial resources. Research conducted in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and other cities to the south of Fortaleza has consistently drawn attention to these divisions, showing how different stakeholders rarely see equal benefits from urban development projects. So voluminous, in fact, are such accounts that an important question for urban researchers concerned with Latin America is whether Fortaleza and, more specifically, Pirambu, *can* and *should be* analyzed within the same contextual frameworks as other cities throughout Brazil. More pointedly, *how* different is Fortaleza from other cities, and what might the ramifications of these differences be for understandings of favela growth and development in Brazil?

To answer this, I consider a host of historical, spatial, political economic and geographic attributes within the context of urban development in Fortaleza. The Northeast is like no other region in Brazil or, for that matter, in Latin America. Poverty is chronic, more acute, and made particularly severe by frequent cycles of draught (which are endemic to Ceará). As such, while similar in certain respects to other urban areas in the country, Fortaleza is, I suggest, somewhat of an outlier to patterns of development and urban poverty in Brazil.

My research on this topic began during the summer of 2006 when I lived in Pirambu in order to investigate the effects of Vila do Mar upon local residents. I returned to Pirambu during the summer of 2007, and then again for 6 months in 2009 in order to question processes of local governance within the community (see Garmany, 2009). In this paper, I focus primarily upon data collected from bibliographic research conducted at the Federal University of Ceará in Fortaleza (UFC – Pici) and the Instituto Brasil-Estados Uni-

dos no Ceará (IBEU-CE). All primary data (e.g., un-cited observations and statements regarding Pirambu and/or Fortaleza) come from semi and unstructured interviews ($n = 130$), focus group gatherings ($n = 8$), and personal observations gathered as part of my personal field notes.

Beginning with an overview of the literature on Brazilian favelas and urban growth in Latin America more generally, I situate Pirambu and the city of Fortaleza within ongoing debates concerning the major structural forces of poverty and acts of daily resistance that characterize much of the literature on urban slums. Paying careful attention to the course of (under)development in and around Ceará, I illustrate how, while the issues at stake in Pirambu regarding Vila do Mar's construction may closely resemble the same struggles faced by city dwellers elsewhere, important differences underlie many comparisons that might be made. Ultimately, my purpose in this paper is to caution analyses that overly generalize the nature of favelas, particularly if and when the (indeed exceptional) contexts of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo are conflated with other cities in Brazil.

Squalor and shantytowns: accounts of urban poverty in Brazil and Latin America

Long known for exceptionally high levels of income disparity since colonial times, urban poverty and socio-economic inequality in Latin American cities became increasingly obvious during the latter half of the 20th century. As levels of industrialization finally began to make significant gains in the 1940s, urban areas ex-

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1008714>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1008714>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)