

The Ecological Favela: Sustainable Development and the Right to Housing in Rio de Janeiro

Jennifer Chisholm

Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge

jc811@cam.ac.uk

Abstract

- Background: this project examines the strategies that Rio de Janeiro's favelas (informal settlements) located in nature reserves use to resist eviction. I have found that state-backed environmentalist projects in the city are ostensibly about conservation but are in truth concerned with re-territorializing spaces (Fernandes 2005), like favelas, that have fallen outside of government control. For favelas in nature reserves, the primary goal of governmental forces is to take back control of public land through eviction.
- Objective: This project seeks to explain how community activists within the housing rights movement have responded by shifting their strategies to align themselves with the environmental movement.
- Primary strategy: favelas rebranding themselves as "ecological favelas" (Moraes 2013, 2014) by implementing re-forestation projects, clean energy projects, and eco-tourism.

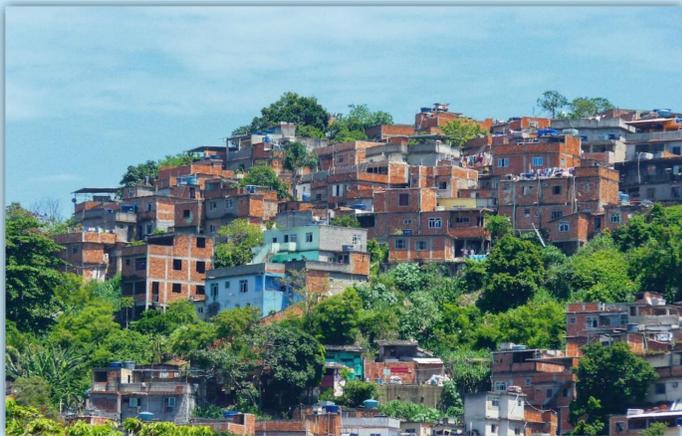


Photo: Babilônia

Methods

- Twelve months of participant-observation, interviews and "deeply hang[ing] out" (Geertz 1998) in Rio de Janeiro.
- In the movement, there is a network of key actors, therefore necessitating multi-sited research (Marcus 1995).
- Participated in the community assemblies of three favelas on public land; attended rallies, meetings in City Hall and the Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro and other governmental entities; as well as attended meetings in the Pastoral de Favelas (a social justice branch of the Catholic Church) and relevant events held by local nonprofits and universities.
- Conducted loosely structured interviews to avoid the pitfalls of leading questions.
- Also conducted many interviews in groups to make residents more comfortable and for the chance to discuss topics that might only arise when speaking with other community members.
- Used thematic analysis to analyze interview data (Braun and Clark 2006).



Photo: Favela Orgânica

Discussion

- Benefits of using environmentalism as political strategy to avoid eviction:
 1. Improves the environmental and economic conditions of communities
 2. Subverts the elite narrative of favelas as antagonistic to the environment
 3. Lessens favela stigma
 4. Creates opportunities for NGOs to finance environmental projects in favelas
- Potential downsides:
 1. Relying on finance from NGOs could impede on the autonomy and self-sufficiency of favela communities.
 2. Gentrification
- Future considerations:
 - Can the ecological favela model truly help favelas avoid eviction?
 - What is the extent to which other favelas can replicate the model?
 - Can potential social costs like gentrification can be mitigated or avoided?



Photos: Vale Encantado

References

- Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clark. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2: 77-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>.
- Fernandes, Bernardo Mançano. 2005. "Movimentos socioterritoriais e movimentos socioespaciais: contribuição teórica para uma leitura geográfica dos movimentos sociais." *Revista NERA* 8(6): 14-34.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1998. "Deep Hanging Out." *The New York Review of Books*, October 22. Accessed November 10, 2017. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1998/oct/22/deep-hanging-out/>.
- Marcus, George E. 1995. "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 95-117. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.24.100195.000523>.
- Moraes, Camila Maria dos Santos. 2014. "A elaboração de favela ecológica: interseções entre turismo e meio em ambiente em favelas cariocas." Paper presented at XII Seminário da Associação Nacional Pesquisa e Pós-graduação em Turismo, Fortaleza, Brazil, September 24-26:1-18. <https://www.anptur.org.br/anais/anais/v.10/Anais/DTP4/137.pdf>.
- . 2013. "A invenção da favela ecológica: um olhar sobre turismo e meio ambiente no Morro Babilônia." *Revista Estudos da Sociologia* 18(35) (July-Dec.): 459-474. <http://seer.fclar.unesp.br/estudos/article/view/6464>.

Acknowledgements

This project is supported by funding from the Royal Geographical Society.