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NAMING NAMES: AN ESSAY ON NATIVE CATEGORIES AND THEIR POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

This article has emerged from an initial concern centered around the naming of peripheral territories and their political and/or depoliticizing dimensions inherent in this process, which is intrinsically tied to the repertoire and categories (both theoretical and political) used to comprehend them. Building on this premise, we explore and elaborate on the implications of adopting the term "occupation" to describe peripheral territories in São Paulo. Our analysis engages with the complex interplay of political, ideological, and economic disputes involving different actors, including the State – expressed through institutional presence, police power, legislators, and laws, which generate diverse impacts on these territories – as well as distinct religious organizations, groups engaged in illicit markets, social movements, non-governmental organizations, private sector companies, residents, and academic institutions at both national and international levels. Drawing on empirical research conducted in the district of Grajaú, in the southern zone of the city of São Paulo, Brazil, this study challenges the uncritical adoption of seemingly native categories. Specifically, in the particular case studied, we advocate for the use of the category "favela" from a dissensual perspective, one that disrupts the sensory landscape, assigning it alternative denominations, and contesting meanings that have been instrumentalized by purportedly virtuous actions.

Keywords

Inequality and Socio-Spatial Segregation; Socio-Spatial Segregation; Territory and Territorialities; Urban Occupations; Favelas; Native Categories; Violence.

DAR NOME AOS BOIS: UM ENSAIO SOBRE CATEGORIAS NATIVAS E SUAS IMPLICAÇÕES POLÍTICAS

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Resumo

O presente artigo parte de inquietação inicial centrada na nomeação dos territórios periféricos e suas dimensões políticas e/ou despolitizantes, em um processo diretamente ligado ao repertório e às categorias (teóricas e políticas) mobilizados para sua compreensão. A partir disso, buscamos elaborar e desdobrar algumas consequências da adoção da categoria "ocupação" para identificar territórios periféricos em São Paulo, considerando o contexto de disputa política, ideológica e econômica entre diferentes atores, como Estado – presente sob a forma de institucionalidade, poder de polícia, parlamentares e leis, o que produz diferentes efeitos nos territórios –, matrizes religiosas distintas, grupos que operam mercados ilícitos, movimentos sociais, organizações não governamentais, empresas privadas do mercado formal, moradores e universidades nacionais e internacionais, entre outros. A partir de pesquisa empírica realizada no distrito do Grajaú, zona sul da cidade de São Paulo, interessa-nos sobretudo pôr em xeque as formas de adoção acrítica de categorias à primeira vista nativas; defendemos, no caso estudado, o uso da categoria "favela" a partir de uma perspectiva dissensual, incidindo sobre o sensível, conferindo-lhe outras nomeações e disputando sentidos instrumentalizados por uma suposta ação virtuosa.

Palavras-chave

Desigualdade e segregação socioespacial; Segregação socioespacial; Território e territorialidades; Ocupações urbanas; Favelas; Categorias Nativas; Violência.

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1. Introduction

This article aims to challenge the categories used to name peripheral territories, recognizing that they have direct implications on how these territories are perceived and analyzed, as well as the political and moral consequences for their residents and leaders. Drawing on elements from empirical research conducted as part of a master's degree between 2021 and 2023 in a district located in the southern zone of São Paulo, this article focuses on questioning categories, taking as its central object both the way in which these categories are used and the role of language. Problematizing words and reflecting on the role of language begins from viewing language as a means of comprehension, one that contrasts with violence, while also serving as a space where the relationship between empirical phenomena (things) and their designations can be problematized and politicized (Rancière, 1996; Benjamin, 1986). In other words, categories embody a regime of truth, whose political and conflictual dimensions can be critically examined and mobilized.

The master's degree research that gave rise to the present discussion initially sought to examine the intersections between violence and the evolving dynamics of accumulation processes in their urban impacts. However, the emergence of new questions and perspectives during the fieldwork led to a reconfiguration of interpretations, hypotheses and foundational premises, thereby necessitating a significant analytical shift. Taking into account the conditions observed in the

field, the research aimed to identify and analyze the interplay between the forms of symbolic and material forms of violence, directly and/or indirectly linked to the production and reproduction of peripheral spaces. Based on ethnographic incursions, a concept defined by Rizek (2022)[1], conducted in a favela located in Grajaú, a district in the southern zone of São Paulo, we set out to analyze the constellations of processes and actors (Rizek, 2007) that contest hegemony over peripheral spaces. These include the State, traditional social movements in the struggle for housing, churches, organized crime, property owners, civil society organizations – particularly those involved in the (re)production of urban space – and the favela residents themselves, who, to varying degrees, are engaged with all these various dimensions.

From within this fragment of the city of São Paulo, it was possible to identify both significant transformations and continuities in the dynamics and resulting conditions of the production of peripheral spaces, shaped by the interactions between new and established actors. This is particularly evident in the singular case of the Luiz Gonzaga favela (a fictitious name), whose occupation emerged within the broader context of mobilizations and movements that unfolded after 2013. This period witnessed new land occupations throughout the municipality, giving rise to unprecedented practices of spatial organization and protests, at least in terms of the scale of the phenomenon.[2] Within this context, the very meanings of violence and the regimes of justice operating within these territories have been reshaped, steeped in the political, social, legislative, moral, and normative transformations that characterize the new modulations of contemporary neoliberalism in Brazil.

Thus, understanding – and naming, with all the accompanying political consequences – the forms of organization and management of this territory by both local and external agents was a crucial part involved in the process of understanding it. This approach enabled a break from the organizational, moral, and political assumptions associated with the native category of "occupation", used by residents, technicians, and leaders across the territory. Freed from these

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1. The concept of ethnographic incursions was defined by Rizek in a 2022 entry on ethnography: "I have named these practices and field visits as ethnographic incursions. This is because, while ethnography implies contact with the field, which leads to the continuous problematization of the researcher, negotiations with their own perceptual frameworks, and modes of description, the observation and recording of these ethnographic incursions do not always fully adhere to the classical parameters of immersion in the field. They are often of a different nature and are ultimately labeled – by the need for updating or the pursuit of legitimacy – as ethnographies" (Rizek, 2022, p. 141).

2. As an example, occupations may be highlighted such as *Copa do Povo* [The People's Cup], mobilizations around the areas that would be affected by the works related to the 2014 FIFA World Cup, and the growth and repression of the *Movimento Passe Livre* [Free Fare Movement] (MPL), among others.

assumptions, it became possible to analyze the local dynamics and power disputes that did not align with the contours of this category. It is important to highlight that the *Movimento de Defesa das Favelas* (Favela Defense Movement) has a long political history rooted in the struggles for Brazil's redemocratization. Hence, the favela has historically been an object of politicization and struggle without necessarily being referred to as an occupation. The politicization through the category "occupation" is more recent, and emerged as a counterpoint to the term "invasion", a dynamic that will be further explored throughout this article. In this regard, defending the use of the category "favela" does not imply perceiving the territory as being devoid of political organization. Instead, it acknowledges that the political, typological, and categorical dimensions of these terms underscore the urgent need to establish a critical lens on the naming processes, especially those stemming from the uncritical adoption of native categories.

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Abolishing the term "subnormal agglomerate" within the context of the Census conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in September 2023 marked an important milestone in understanding peripheral territories. This shift aimed to break with both symbolic and concrete practices of the criminalization and marginalization of these areas and their residents. According to Rolnik (2023):

> Even in the 1970s, the IBGE undertook efforts to include these territories in the Census in a differentiated manner, recognizing their specificities in relation to the broader urban context. In the 1980 Census, these areas were initially referred to as "special agglomerates", and in the 1991 study, the term "subnormal agglomerates" appeared for the first time. However, calling them "subnormal agglomerates" is not merely a matter of choosing a name … it is a term that defines the place of these territories within the city in a very negative manner: "subnormal", as less than normal, and "agglomerate", as not quite part of the city, and plays an important role in the urban political economy.[3]

This advancement marked a significant step in countering both negative interpretations of these territories and their homogenization – an endeavor pursued in the academic sphere by various authors, with Valladares (2005) being

3. This and all other non-English citations hereafter have been translated by the authors.

particularly prominent.[4] However, our approach extends beyond this. We aim to identify and comprehend the political markers (rather than typological ones) that define a given territory either as a favela or a land occupation and to consider the practical implications of adopting each of these categories. This analysis, as previously mentioned, considers the ways in which the category of favela has been politicized, whether through movements such as the Movimento em Defesa das Favelas in São Paulo, by academic discourse, or by local initiatives and organizations in other Brazilian cities, particularly Rio de Janeiro (Valladares, 2005).

This discussion draws on elements identified through ethnographic research conducted in a territory located in Grajaú, in the southern zone of São Paulo. Self-identified as an "occupation", the territory exhibited characteristics that challenged the applicability of this category, prompting us to question its naming processes through such classifications, as well as their assumptions, alignments, ramifications, and meanings. These inquiries were particularly examined in light of the pervasive presence of various forms of violence, with the analysis anchored in the theoretical contributions of Walter Benjamin (1986). Benjemin's work has served as a foundational framework, particularly in understanding the denial of rights as a mechanism that establishes criteria for distinction and defines the boundaries separating violence from nonviolence. From his perspective, it is possible to conceive the denial of rights as a regulating device that determines what is, or is not, framed as violence.

2. The categories

Capital do homicídio, a selva de pedra
[The capital of homicide, the concrete jungle]
Eu num tô falando de concreto
[I'm not talking of cement]
Outro tipo de brita
[Another type of gravel]
'Cê levanta alicerce pra seis casa
[You lay the foundations for six houses]
Com três quilo, esse tipo de brita
[With three kilos, this type of gravel]

4. There is a rich body of discussions and analyses regarding the phenomenon of favelas in the city of São Paulo, the expansion of which has been much more recent than those in Rio de Janeiro. Beyond the specificities of São Paulo's favelas and their heterogeneity, they have been characterized by authors such as Kowarick (2009) and Pasternak (2016). PASTERNAK, S.; D'OTTAVIANO, C. Favelas no Brasil e em São Paulo: avanços nas análises a partir da leitura territorial do Censo de 2010 [Favelas in Brazil and in São Paulo: advances in analyses based on the territorial reading of the 2010 Census]. *Cadernos Metrópole*, v. 18, n. 35, p. 75-99, Jan.-Apr. 2016.

Sempre armado com três chapa
[Always backed up with three heavies]
Esse tipo de vida
[This kind of life]
Verso Livre Nº 1 (Giramundo)

Don L[5]

In *Critique of Violence*, Walter Benjamin (1986) argued that the task of critiquing violence must be approached through an analysis of its relationship with two spheres: justice and law. This is because the interpretation of violence and its varying intensities involves ethical dimensions. In other words, acts of violence are only recognized as violent insofar as they violate ethical norms, socially constructed through legal and moral systems. The argument developed by Benjamin – and revisited by Misse (2016) and Grillo (2019) –[6] is that the law itself cannot be the parameter that serves as the basis for critiquing violence, since it is founded on violence, and repeatedly mobilizes it to ensure its own preservation.[7]

This circumscription of violence, linking it to normative and ethical regimes, broadens when we consider the new practices and forms of governance (Foucault, 1999) of populations and territories on the peripheries of São Paulo, especially with the entry, consolidation, and entrenchment of the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* [The Capital's First Command] (PCC)[8] in the metropolis (and throughout the state and country as a whole) over the past 30 years. What Benjamin does, according to Misse (2016, p. 46), in a pioneering manner, is to draw attention to the "movement that conceals the violence that establishes the law, mythical violence, through the violence that the law seeks to control and punish".

In the contemporary context of the peripheries, particularly in São Paulo, where territorial control is contested – at times successfully – by the PCC, as both an organizer and operator of crime, and the dynamics of everyday life on the capital's peripheries, it is possible to conceive the coexistence of normative regimes, as elaborated by Feltran (2020), Telles and Hirata (2007), and Rizek (2019), and other authors.

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5. Gabriel Linhares da Rocha, better known by his stage name Don L, is a Brazilian rapper and songwriter, regarded as one of the most influential figures in contemporary Brazilian rap.

6. According to Benjamin (1986, p. 160-161), natural law presupposes the contract and, through it, the abdication of any prior individual power, while positive law recognizes and affirms that power is historically constructed.

7. The perspective of law as an unfeasible parameter for critiquing violence was developed by Misse (2016) and Grillo (2019), among others, who sought to mobilize Benjamin's propositions within the discussion on violence in the Brazilian context.

8. Founded in 1993 at the Taubaté penitentiary (SP), the PCC is a criminal organization primarily involved in drug trafficking. Over the course of these 30 years, it has expanded its activities beyond the prisons, exercising territorial control in the state of São Paulo and in other states across Brazil.

Feltran (2020, p. 4)[9] maintains that "[a]ll these practices, however, can be equally legitimized, depending on the justice regime to which they refer". This implies that any practice can be deemed acceptable within the framework of the justice regime it adheres to, as there may always be ways to legitimize actions through the justice regimes operating in a given context. This signifies that, even under the justice regime of the Brazilian State, for example, expulsions, murders, or the popular "court" instituted by the PCC (known as the *ideias*) are, within that context, legitimized by the justice regime contested in the territories: that of the PCC itself. The legitimacy of the PCC's power over the territories of São Paulo is underpinned by a dual mechanism of control: the coercive power of force and military strength (manifested with varying regimes of visibility) and the implementation of what has become known as "peace in the *quebrada*".[10] This refers to the "pacification" of the peripheries through the homogenization of the PCC as the "sole" [11] organized crime faction operating in São Paulo.

Returning to Benjamin's proposition on the critique of violence, we highlight a passage where, by reflecting on the production of consensus within legal normativity through non-violent relations and agreements among individuals, the author asserts:

> The sphere of nonviolent means opens up in the realm of human conflicts relating to goods. For this reason, technique in the broadest sense of the word is their most particular area. Its profoundest example is perhaps the conference, considered as a technique of civil agreement. For in it not only is nonviolent agreement possible, but also the exclusion of violence in principle is quite explicitly demonstrable by one significant factor: there is no sanction for lying. *Probably no legislation on earth originally stipulated such a sanction. This makes clear that there is a sphere of human agreement that is nonviolent to the extent that it is wholly inaccessible to violence: the proper sphere of "understanding", language.* (Benjamin, 1986, p. 168. Our emphasis)[12]

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9. Through WHYTE, W. F. *Street Corner Society*. University of Chicago Press, 1943; DAS, V. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006.

10. A common informal term used in São Paulo to refer to a place, neighborhood, or community – particularly on the periphery.

11. There are other organized crime groups in São Paulo, such as the *Pés de Pato* [Webbed Feet], for example, a group that operates primarily with clandestine internet networks (known as "gatonet"). However, as far as we know, none of them pose a threat to the power of the PCC in this state.

12. N.B. For direct citations the English version was used of: BENJAMIN W. *Critique of Violence*. In Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926. The Belknap Press of Harvard University. Cambridge Massachusetts (1996, pp. 244-245).

When considering language as a sphere of human understanding, the choice of words used to describe and name research objects becomes particularly significant, highlighting the need to problematize language as a domain of human comprehension, even though it may also be employed as a form of symbolic violence in its multiple facets (Bourdieu, 1989). From this perspective, we seek to question the use of the native category "occupation". This term was created and championed primarily by social movements fighting for housing rights, in opposition to the legal category "invasion", and subsequently adopted as a means of political differentiation by technical advisors and academia to analyze territories such as the one studied herein, which belong to the most recent cycle of land occupations within the context of the June 2013 social mobilizations.

We argue that defining these territories as occupations – understood in their political, rather than legal, sense – has political and theoretical implications that differ significantly from what was observed in the field. This creates a disconnection between the expectations surrounding political practices in these territories and the reality shaped by their forms of sociability and the multiple webs of relationships that often erode the common sphere of understanding constructed through language. Therefore, the choice of categories carries consequences in terms of the symbolic violence exerted upon these territories, while also potentially creating a field of indeterminacy (Oliveira; Rizek, 2007) regarding political, social, and market practices in these spaces, which could strip the categories of part of their political significance. We argue, therefore, that these *territories*, which may or may not originate with the involvement of organized social movements, exhibit multiple organizational configurations that generally differ significantly from the organizational forms of occupations carried out by housing rights social movements, particularly since the 1990s. This shift involves the emergence of new actors operating in these territories and is intrinsically tied to the consolidation and significant entrenchment of the PCC on the peripheries of São Paulo. This development has influenced the social and political organization of these territories (Adorno, 2016; Manso; Dias, 2018; Feltran, 2007; 2020).

With a history that dates back to the mobilizations of the 1990s[13] concerning buildings in central areas,[14] the category "occupation" emerged as a tool for

13. The first building occupations in São Paulo occurred in 1997, whereas land occupations in the peripheral areas date back to the 1980s. Nevertheless, the act of occupation as a practice for demanding housing provision gained greater prominence through vertical occupations in the city center, at least until the rise of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto* [Homeless Workers' Movement] (MTST), in the city.

14. We distinguish between the use of the category "occupation" in urban and rural contexts, as it represents a political category widely employed in rural areas, particularly by the *Movimento dos*

protest and a claim to legitimacy, particularly in relation to the takeover of vacant properties in the city that had failed to fulfill the so-called "social function of property". This was juxtaposed with the realities of a mass of people living in precarious housing conditions, such as in tenements, on the streets, in favelas, and in irregular subdivisions far from their workplaces, who were demanding the provision of decent housing. Initially, vertical occupations were less about establishing permanent residence in the occupied buildings and more about drawing attention to the housing crisis and its systemic failures. These occupations also carried a dual purpose: to legitimize and publicize these housing demands. Properties in areas of real estate valorization were often selected, especially when occupations were coordinated and led by social movements.

A distinction emerges here between the criminalization of poverty and the housing movements. The former has a long-standing trajectory rooted in class relations in Brazil and globally. However, particularly from 2018 onward, the criminalization of housing movements and their occupations in the city of São Paulo, whose practices include the homogenization of the forms of *occupation* in the central area, gained heightened momentum and legitimacy after the fire and collapse of the Wilton Paes de Almeida Building – the *Torre de Vidro* [Glass Tower] – in Largo do Paissandu and a series of actions that ensued (Chalhoub, 1996; 2011; 2012; Coimbra, 2001; Wacquant, 2001; 2007; Santos; Guerreiro, 2020).[15]

> What are now referred to as housing occupations encompass a wide range of trajectories, forms, and arrangements. A visit to just two occupations in the central area of São Paulo is enough to observe how distinct one is from the other. This diversity arises from various factors rooted in historical, social, political, economic, and urban dynamics and processes, which have shaped and contributed to the formation and consolidation of different movements, political repertoires, actors, trajectories, and methods of occupying and maintaining these spaces. Above all, these occupations are grounded in the popular production and appropriation of urban space, a process whose political significance can be channeled into various ways over time by actors with varying degrees of commitment to popular struggles – yet whose presence remains central (Santos, Guerreiro, 2020, p. 289)

Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra [Landless Rural Workers' Movement] (MST), which has been occupying unproductive land as a form of protest and demand for agrarian reform since its founding in 1984.

15. For context, the collapse of the Torre de Vidro was a tragedy that occurred in Largo do Paissandu, central São Paulo, on May 1, 2018, leaving many dead and creating a new dynamic between public power and opinion on one side and housing movements on the other. The occupations in the city center are not the focus of this study, and there is an extensive bibliography available for those wishing to delve deeper into this discussion (Santos; Guerreiro, 2020).

Focusing on the occupations in São Paulo's central area, Santos and Guerreiro (2020, p. 291) stress that criminalization has historically played a decisive role in shaping the political strategies adopted by social movements, "insofar as they stem from a public confrontation over the very meanings of social order itself, encapsulated in the question: is the act of occupying – legally classified as "possessory usurpation" – the crime, or is it the lack of housing and the abandonment of properties?".[16]

From this new cycle of criminalizing occupations, movements have begun adopting practices to differentiate themselves, constructing and contesting notions of occupations organized or not by social movements, invasions, and tenements, among others, as a means of legitimizing their actions as forms of struggle and political advocacy. Moral and conduct codes – such as prohibiting the use and sale of illicit drugs, the inadmissibility of bringing stolen goods into occupations, the requirement of grassroots work to join occupations, and the prohibition of selling or subletting housing units – within occupations organized by "traditional" social movements, while not entirely new, have increasingly been mobilized in public discourses by leaders and supporters. These codes serve as markers to differentiate the so-called occupations from invasions, aiming to disrupt the indistinction imposed by public opinion and authorities, in an evident effort to shield themselves from a police presence. At the same time, this involves instituting multiple forms of governmentality, with diverse codes constituting methods of managing illegal practices within occupations. This process contrasts with the historical dynamic of dissociating occupations (of land and buildings), with or without organized social movements, from the notion of invasion, considered an illegitimate and illegal form of appropriation.

When analyzing peripheral occupations, however, the transformations observed since at least the 2010s have taken on a different character, marked by organizational structures of another nature. Beyond the presence and/or strengthening of new actors, such as criminal organizations and evangelical churches, the imposition of moral and conduct codes differs significantly from that of the building occupations, which typically involve a much larger number of people. Access control in these peripheral spaces cannot follow the same parameters, and the modes of coexistence and sociability tend to be less governed or subject to governmentality.

16. It is important to emphasize that the process of criminalizing poverty did not begin in the 2010s; it has been a recurring element in the history of urban conflicts and struggles throughout the history of Brazil. The process described herein represents just another layer of the criminalization of poverty.

Tracing back to a debate that has been extensively developed since at least the 1970s, the notion of *favela* has historically been linked to territories of poverty. As Valladares (2005, p. 158) elaborates,

> [...] the distinction between favela and nonfavela is much harder to make in the poor parts of the periphery. If we are to speak of a hypothesis of the favelas' identity, we should prefer a version more limited to their violent contrast with the middle– and upper-class neighborhoods that are nearby or even adjacent, rather than other characteristics. What stands out, then, is physical proximity alongside social distance.[17]

Drawing from Maricato (1997), Kowarick (2009), and Camargo et al. (1976), it is possible to relate the concept of a favela to practices of self-construction on previously vacant land, carried out by small groups of workers who have been forced to live in distant areas due to the costs of social reproduction in wealthier parts of the city. Favelas differ from irregular land subdivisions in that their origin is marked by the presence of residents seeking housing, not by the commercialization of houses and shacks. However, there is no precise definition of what constitutes a favela, nor are there typological, political, or organizational characteristics that could account for the plurality of forms and meanings these spaces embody. In *São Paulo 1975: crescimento e pobreza* [São Paulo 1975: Growth and Poverty], based on pioneering research, Camargo et al. (1976) illustrated how, during 1975, the growth of São Paulo was directly linked to the expansion of urban poverty and the increasing prevalence of favelas as a form of housing for the poor. However, reducing the understanding of favelas to a mere geographical location or viewing them solely as territories of poverty is, once again, a homogenizing and overly simplistic approach.

We argue that the categories "favela" and "occupation", when viewed as descriptive, locational, and/or native categories, correspond to different historical moments, although, as analytical categories, they do not. It is important to emphasize, however, that the goal here is in no way to question the political power and significance of the native category "occupation" as a means of legitimizing the residents' claims to territory and to dignified housing. On the contrary, the proposed effort is to theoretically problematize the meanings of this category and

17. N.B. For direct citations, the English version was used of VALLADARES, L. do P. *The Invention of the Favela*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. (2019, p. 149). Translated by Robert N. Anderson.

its displacement, given that "occupation" becomes a native category through the involvement of social movements, technical advisory services, and universities, and, in this process, it gradually loses its role as an analytical category.

3. Luiz Gonzaga

Luiz Gonzaga, located in the Grajaú district and the focus of this study, was initiated in 2013, reportedly as a process organized by a social housing movement that no longer operates there.[18] However, other resident narratives suggest that the occupation began spontaneously, with an unorganized group of homeless people occupying the area and building the first shacks. This attracted more people, and the occupation gradually became consolidated. Now, ten years later, there are more than one thousand families living on this land. The phantasmagorical presence of the movement, now deeply rooted in the housing struggles of the city of São Paulo, may still be perceived in the practices and discourses of the community, as residents describe it as an occupation, although they frequently slip into calling it an "invasion" – a practice strongly condemned by movements, leaders, and the socio-technical network that supports Luiz Gonzaga activities. However, the movement is no longer active in the daily life of the community. The residents' association declares itself independent, although supported by the movement, and reaffirms its local role, focusing on the inhabitants of Luiz Gonzaga.

The ethnographic incursions revealed certain elements that prompted us to question the use of the term "occupation" in order to refer to the reality of Luiz Gonzaga. In addition, practices such as the commercialization of lots and family registration, often with the consent of the residents' association, compliance with pressure from the landowner to slow down the community's consolidation process, and the involvement of NGOs, social enterprises, and extralegal markets, among other actors, have all contributed to ensuring that this questioning was taken seriously throughout the research. Furthermore, another element, previously discussed in this article, is particularly outstanding in the case under analysis. Beyond public legislation, the moral and behavioral codes influencing the residents are, according to field observations, much closer to the behavioral logics, notions of justice, and social practices of the so-called "world of crime" than to the rules and codes of conduct of occupations organized by social movements, whether in the city center or on its periphery. Even the struggle for permanence is more closely

18. The narratives of the older residents vary somewhat, and it is impossible to say with any certainty how Luiz Gonzaga began, since the movement that supposedly initiated it has no current connection with the community, which is uncommon in the occupations it has organized.

linked to individual needs and urgencies, which are articulated and legitimized by a form of neoliberal universalization, as it adapts to and merges with Brazilian specificities, thereby suggesting that these demands may be moving away from collective struggles for housing as a right.

To understand the constellation of subjects who undertake the management of the territory and population of Luiz Gonzaga, we propose that the existence of shared forms of governance among the different actors competing for the territory be taken seriously, not in a search for absolute control over the space, but with a view toward maintaining more or less tacit, more or less shared agreements regarding these forms. In other words, it is not a *war* in which one power holder seeks to subjugate another, but rather a tense balance within a field of forces surrounding power and shared forms of governance of life.[19] The conflicts that arise in the territory

> [...] stem from the relationships and tensions between crime (the ethics of the *Command* and the financial stability of *thieves*), churches (the governance of moralities and disputes between Catholics and Evangelicals), land regularization (operated by technical consultancies and private companies navigating between evictions and the sale of land commodities), and residents' associations (in their political practices concerning the social production of urban space and its reduction to assistentialism or a facade for crime, political parties, NGOs, or companies). This constellation of subjects/groups/institutions produces, through coercion and consensus – provisional and entangled with conflicts and shared hegemonies – new layers of dispute for order, which materialize in different socio-spatial practices and processes of spatial production. (Prieto; Verdi, 2023, p. 5)

Although the notion of shared hegemony served as a significant catalyst for our reflections, the argument put forward is not grounded in the Gramscian understanding of hegemony, which is defined as the cultural, political, and moral direction of society by a class. Instead, drawing on a Foucauldian framework, we interpret the ongoing processes in the peripheral territories of São Paulo as struggles for order and for the governance of bodies, markets, and territories. This perspective suggests, albeit tentatively, that, in contrast to what is claimed in

19. Similar reflections were made in the project *Conflitos e violências nos territórios populares: mercantilização, gestão de precariedades e desafios para o engajamento cívico* [Conflicts and violence in low-income territories: commodification, management of precariousness, and challenges for civic engagement", funded by the Ford Foundation and coordinated by Gustavo Prieto and Giovanna Milano, based on the analysis of territories in the eastern zone of the city of São Paulo.

occupations organized by social movements for housing struggles in central areas, peripheral occupations lack cohesive forms of political and social organization, as well as singular ethical, moral, and legal regimes, which would justify categorizing them as occupations in their political and, moreover, analytical sense.

We have therefore chosen to use the category of "favela". In *A invenção da favela* [The invention of the favela], Valladares (2005) offers a sociology of favelas based on the city of Rio de Janeiro. While this analysis is rooted in Rio de Janeiro, it extends beyond the city's borders – exploring the myth surrounding the origin of the favela, which traces back to the occupation of the Morro da Favella by soldiers who were former combatants in the War of Canudos, thus making the first instance of this morphological and social category – to the spectacularized favelas that define contemporary Rio de Janeiro. Valladares also examines the transformation of the space occupied by favelas within social science studies, particularly the shift from viewing this category as a perceived problem to a potential solution.

In a sharp critique of the field of studies and interventions in favelas, especially in Rio de Janeiro, Valladares emphasizes that, despite some conceptual advancements, both academic studies and state actions regarding these territories remain heavily permeated by three "dogmas' that determine how they are approached. The first is the specificity of the favela, which views these territories as singular, unique spaces. The second is the perception of the favela as the locus of poverty, an urban territory defined by the presence of the poor. The third is the tendency to regard the favela as a unified entity – the favela in the singular. According to Valladares, "Even if we recognize it as a multifaceted reality, we get swept up in the habit of reducing a plural universe to a single category. The dominant social representation recognizes or treats the favela as a singular type and not in its diversity"[20] (Valladares, 2005, p. 151).

Valladares further argues that the persistence of these dogmas in urban studies and among policymakers legitimizes the existence of a broad array of technical instruments, measures, and alternative solutions and targeted policies for favelas, still imbued with a problem-solving perspective. This is directly related to the dogma that views the favela as a specific territory of poverty. Thus, the author makes a crucial observation, albeit with a focus on the reality of Rio de Janeiro and referring to a different historical moment:

> Despite a long history that has alternated between opposition to and cooperation with government, residents' associations have used the same argument of specificity. In order to qualify the collection

20. N.B. For direct citations, the English version was used of VALLADARES, L. do P. (2019, p. 143).

> of residents that they represent, the directors of these associations use the term "community," which shows the desire to replace the term "favela" – considered pejorative – with a positive idea. *The use of "community" legitimates their own status as representatives invested by the collection of residents, but it also hides all the differences and conflicts among diverse spaces and inhabitants.* The notion of community presupposes the idea of unity, which has not always been a feature of these associations or of the territories they represent. Thus it masks the diversity of social situations and the multiplicity of interests present in a structure more often atomized than communal.[21] (Valladares, 2005, p. 159. Our emphasis.)

Resuming the argument concerning occupations in the central areas of the city, we contend that a similar process also unfolds in São Paulo's peripheries, progressing though two distinct stages. First, the category of "favela" is deemed pejorative, prompting a shift toward the term "community," as described by Valladares. Concurrently, with the intensification of changes in the forms of criminalizing precarious settlements, the notion of community comes into question, increasingly perceived as being devoid of political significance. In parallel, the term "occupations" emerges as a deliberate counterpoint to the notion of invasion. This distinction operates both in legal and social terms, as an attempt to dissociate occupations from practices of land grabbing and irregular subdivisions, which are perceived as acts linked to organized crime or private individuals pursuing personal interests.

We propose, however, a reconsideration of the category "favela" when referring to this specific territory. Rather than advocating for the homogenization of precarious territories under this category, we acknowledge that the conditions of origin, organizational structures, and political practices observed in Luíz Gonzaga render it unsuitable to classify it as either an occupation or a community. Furthermore, we stress the importance of using this term with caution, avoiding the dogmas identified by Valladares and refraining from romanticizing the favela solely as a space of resistance and potential, thereby overshadowing its precarities and contradictions – be they social, political, ethical, or otherwise.

Our proposal is to categorize Luíz Gonzaga as a favela, precisely due to the multiplicity of meanings, forms, dimensions, and socio-political arrangements the term encompasses. Classifying it as an occupation, even though this is the native category adopted by its residents, creates a misalignment between the organizational and political practices expected of the leadership of the residents' association, such as their participation in spaces of deliberation and resistance,

21. N.B. For direct citations, the English version was used of VALLADARES, L. do P. (2019, p. 150).

and the actual daily dynamics of the *community*. These dynamics are characterized by forms of *viração*[22] (Telles, 2009) and shared governance, which are central to the arrangements that shape the production of space.

We understand that converting the notion of occupation into a native category occurs through the process that Tsing (2004) defines as friction. Friction, developed from the Gramscian notion of articulation, holds that, in global processes, contact produces effects, frictions, which transform objects, bodies, people, and social groups. Thus, we can understand the category "occupation" not as native, but as nativized, converted into a native category through the contact, the friction, between residents of peripheral territories and organized social movements, technical advisors, and universities. As a result, its moral and organizational significance, as well as part of its political dimensions, is lost.

If, as Feltran (2020) argues, the normative regimes, including those of an ethical and moral nature, of course, of the peripheral territories of São Paulo are in dispute, it is therefore crucial to consider who the agents are in this dispute, as it certainly does not only occur between the State and "crime".

Castro (2002, p. 114) also provides valuable insights for thinking about the figure of the native in relation to the discourse:

> What defines the native as a native is the anthropologist's assumption that the native's relationship with his/her culture is natural, that is to say, intrinsic, spontaneous, and, ideally, non-reflective; even better if it is unconscious. Natives express their culture in their discourse, as does the anthropologist, but if they intend to be anything other than natives, they must be able to express their culture culturally, i.e., reflectively, conditionally, and consciously. Their culture is contained, in both senses of the word, in relation to the meaning that their discourse establishes with the discourse of the native. In contrast, the natives' discourse is univocally contained, enclosed within their own culture. The anthropologist, by necessity, uses his/her own culture, while the native is sufficiently used by theirs.

Castro suggests breaking with the rules of this discursive game, in a process known as the ontological turn in anthropology. What interests us here is understanding how this nativization of a category, adopted by residents of peripheral territories, became a process with significant political ramifications and interactions. However, in its implementation, it has gradually obscured the political, organizational, and even categorical contours of the category itself.

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22. There is no direct equivalent in English that captures all the nuances of *viração*. However, terms like "resourcefulness", "improvisation", "survival strategies" or "making do" could all convey aspects of its meaning, especially in the context of navigating precarious conditions.

4. Final considerations

This article has sought to contribute to the discussion on the use of native categories and the political and symbolic consequences they carry. Far from reducing the political significance of the struggles and disputes within the favelas and peripheral occupations in the city of São Paulo, we argue that practices such as the commercialization of occupied land plots, the various dynamics of managing illegalities, and the diverse manifestations of coercion within the process that we call shared forms of government, stand in contrast with the supposed political cohesion of land occupations organized by social movements. As a result, different regimes of justice and multiple forms of symbolic and direct violence coexist in these territories, where the presence of social movements fighting for housing no longer symbolizes social or political cohesion. We have also highlighted the dilemmas and complexities involved in the processes of naming, as well as the political aspects that these naming practices ultimately engender in the tense and complex relations between words and things.

Thus, the decision to adopt the category "favela" in this specific case is not intended in a universalizing sense. We do not argue that "favela" should necessarily be the category adopted in all spaces that resemble the one studied. On the contrary, the focus has been much more concerned with questioning the uncritical adoption of native categories. Our defense lies in the act of questioning, rather than advocating for one category over another.

By drawing on discussions from the fields of anthropology and sociology, informed by authors such as Viveiros de Castro, Tsing, Benjamin, Rancière, Bourdieu, Oliveira, and Rizek, and integrating debates from urban studies with contributions from Valladares, Kowarick, Pasternak, and Maricato, we have aimed to explore the political implications tied to the adoption of native categories. Beginning with a concrete case, which not only prompted the initial concerns of this essay but also embodied the discussions proposed herein, we have sought, through ethnographic incursions, to "name names" as a step preceding the analyses of the territory. In this process, the category "favela", with its entire history of discussion and dispute, has emerged as a possible denomination for this territory of multiplicity, whose forms of governance are shared in an ongoing dispute among the various actors involved.

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