

Territory, sociability, and conflict in a squatter settlement: the case of Poço da Draga, Fortaleza-Brazil

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The article discusses narratives that express territoriality and borders, mediated by relations of sociability and conflict in Poço da Draga, a squatter settlement located in Fortaleza, capital of Ceará, in Northeast Brazil. Data were collected through intensive field work in progress since 2014. In the settlement - called "favela" in technical studies and "community" by the locals - live about two thousand people, most descended from fishermen and workers in the old port area of Fortaleza. There, embarkation and disembarkation of passengers and goods were done through a dock, called Ponte Metálica, up to mid-1940s, when Mucuripe harbor was built in another part of the coast. The community has been affected by several interventions of the government, especially since the 1990s: construction of a waterfront, the Dragão do Mar Center of Art and Culture and, more recently, the Acquario Ceará - not counting projects of city and the State government that were not carried forward, such as the 24 Hours Street and a Convention Center (OLIVEIRA, 2006; GONDIM, 2008). In all these cases, Poço da Draga dwellers were threatened to be evicted, either by providing for their direct removal, or by expulsion as a result of real estate speculation. Thus, this dwelling place appears as a territory in the sense that it is the subject of disputes for political, social and economic control (Raffestin, 1993); but it is also a place full of symbolism and mediator of personal relations, involving the making and remaking of borders and territoriality. This last category refers not just to a fixed product as a territory, but to an ability to create internal spatial differences in the community. Different territorialities point for both feelings of belonging and acceptance, and feelings of fear and prohibition, referring to some sites of Poço da Draga as "hazardous". The sense of belonging and the memory of places are emphasized

during guided tours promoted during celebrations of Poço da Draga anniversaries. Although there are no historical records to confirm it, in recent years groups of dwellers have chosen the year of the Ponte Metálica inauguration as the date of the beginning of the settlement. The beach near the bridge is the starting point to explain the origin of the fishing and port community. Guides usually point out places that were "stolen" by the government or the private shipyard that was established in the neighborhood in 1969. In the 1970s, many families were moved to a housing project in the outskirts of Fortaleza. The community also lost to the shipyard land where there was a soccer field. The Municipality, in turn, took over several houses that were built on the bridge after the move of the harbor. Today, there are in Poço da Draga territorial divisions that constitute and are constituted by identity markers, creating borders and bans on and the interactions of the residents. There is a local classified as "dangerous" or "violent": "Pocinho", located in mangrove area, formed at the meeting of Pajeú Creek (which runs through the community) to the sea. Occupation of this area increased in the 1990s, by relatives of the residents on the main streets and people coming from the interior of Ceará or from other squatter settlements of Fortaleza. The "Pocinho", which is liable to floods, presents substandard housing, located in a maze of narrow alleys and streets of difficult access. It is referred to as the focus of both physical and social impurities, locus of violence, drug trafficking and crime. In contrast, in older areas of occupation brick houses were built, sometimes with garage, gates and barred windows. In the community's main entrance, there is the Atlantic Pavilion, a building with a large hall, which used to be a cafe and restaurant serving travelers in the first half of the twentieth century, and was rebuilt by the City government in 2012. Today, its occupation is managed by the Dragão do Mar Center of Art and Culture and the non-governmental organization Velaumar, consisting of a group of dwellers. Other groups, such as the Pro-Poço Movement, dispute the use of the equipment, to carry out events like capoeira classes, sewing courses, meetings, parties etc. There are also residents' initiatives, such as a cine-club, which are presented in outdoors places within the community. Microterritorial classifications are related to the identities assumed or assigned to residents: when a group defines itself, it says who its members are, but especially who are not (OLIVEIRA, 1976; CUNHA, 1985). The notion of another group

as inferior is collectively elaborated, through moral rebukes repeated again and again, until introjected and reproduced by the very opposing group. Guided tours occurring in Poço da Draga anniversary festivities do not include Pocinho: the guide claims that there is no danger, but the narrow alleys only give way to one person at a time, so it would take a long time to pass there. A stop is made at the mangrove shore, where the same guide draws attention to the environmental degradation of Pajeú Creek, polluted with waste. The place is a border, which one can cross by a crude way of cattails entering the swamp and reaching Pocinho. Children used to play there not long ago, but not anymore. In general, residents of other areas avoid going to Pocinho. However, there seems to be a tacit agreement of mutual tolerance: the traffickers do business without interfering in the daily lives of residents, and these make a "blind eye" to illicit activities. Occasionally episodes of violence happen: gun battle between rival drug gangs, police raids, and armed robberies in the community outskirts. Locals refer with some nostalgia to the loss of security they once had, some even expressing desire to move away.

References

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