**Governance Through Security: The Contested Remaking of Rio de Janeiro**

**Julia Tierney**

The panoramic vista from atop Morro da Providência is Rio de Janeiro at its beautiful and beguiling best, the marvelous but divided city from its oldest *favela*. Providência was founded in the late 19th century by soldiers denied the promise of government housing who constructed their homes out of makeshift materials on a hill they named favela after a coarse, untamed plant. Since their first construction to today when they surpass 1,000, the favelas symbolize the contestations between Rio de Janeiro’s quest for modernity and its ongoing inequalities. Providência is not only iconic of the inequality for which Rio de Janeiro is historically renowned but also symbolic of the contestations over rights to the city. From their pacification by the police to their integration through infrastructure, once marginalized favelas are now crucial to Rio de Janeiro’s urban remaking. As part of its plan to upgrade all favelas by 2020, the city government is building a cable car from the central train station to the top of Providência, purportedly to ease access for residents, but many fear that it is the beginning of their displacement. Last year, they returned home to find the initials of the municipal housing secretary spray-painted to their doors to indicate the destruction of their homes and their imminent removal. In the words of one resident, “They want to put an end to our history.”

The city of Rio de Janeiro is being pacified in anticipation of the upcoming mega-events. The Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora (UPP) have saturated almost all favelas in the prosperous south zone and northwards on the road to the Maracanã Stadium where the final game of the World Cup will be played in 2014. Pacification connotes both war and peace, war in the sense of repression, peace by means of submission. The pacification police aspire to bring peace through metaphors of war. Their detractors argue that where once drug traffickers dominated favelas such as Providência, they have been replaced by police occupation. Their defenders assert that in restoring peace they pave the path for integrating the favelas with the rest of the city. Security is inculcated into the remaking of Rio de Janeiro, the security of the pacification police inseparable from the upgrading of the favelas; yet governance by security is infused with insecurities for the poor, from ongoing police repression to the urbanization projects that threaten their displacement.

An advertisement shows the pacification police climbing the hillside favelas in a car from which emerge engineers, doctors, and professors, the implication being that social development is inseparable from public security. Governance by security puts pacification at the center of broader urban transformations remaking Rio de Janeiro, the police making the pacified favelas more visible, their infrastructure deficits more pressing. The city government promised to urbanize all favelas by 2020 in the MorarCarioca program. Urbanization is the installation of basic urban infrastructure, but it is not without its contestations. The Instituto Pereira Passos for urban development reduced the number of favelas from 1,020 to 582 by defining the criteria making a favela no longer a favela the equivalence of services between informal and formal parts of the city: public lighting, piped water and sanitation; trash collection; streets that permit vehicle passage; conformity with land-use laws; provision of healthcare and education (O Globo 2011). The residents of ex-favelas disputed this definition by pointing to the ongoing deficits in the most basic infrastructures that delineate their differences from the rest of the city. In the words of a community leader, “The streets have potholes; water only comes through the pipes once a week; sewage flows through open canals that haven’t been cleaned in years, and they overflow every time there is a strong rain. We want complete security, not just the police invasion, but also a social invasion.”

Where official discourse celebrates the pacification of the favelas and their infrastructural integration into the city, many residents, and not only those slated for removal, understand the pacification police as making Rio de Janeiro safer for capital and threatening to remove them to the periphery. The collective movement of favela dwellers, Favela Não Se Cala (Favela Don’t Be Quiet), protests the *remoção branca* (white removal) that results from the formalization of public services since the bills are too expensive for many residents, a subtler removal compared to when the favelas were bulldozed and their residents displaced during Brazil’s military dictatorship. In the words of a resident whose community is threatened by removal, “The state is not preoccupied by dignified housing, nor in security for the people, but with the valorization of the real estate market.”

The pacification of Rio de Janeiro is securing its neoliberal remaking as the pacified favelas with their magnificent views are discovered as valuable real estate investments. Their pacification permitted the favelas to become tourist attractions, those traversing the extensive Complexo do Alemão on cable cars similar to those being built in Providência can stare down at the favela without really perceiving it. They can recognize its density, perhaps notice its precarious water supply in the blue tanks on almost every roof, but they cannot see its deficits in sanitation and deficiencies in garbage collection, which went unnoticed in the building of the R$210 million cable cars. They see the pacification police station without knowing that in 2007 the police massacred 19 civilians as part of their assault on drug traffickers. Pacified urbanism is producing visibilities and deepening invisibilities, pacification that enhances security in terms of statistics of violence but results in new insecurities as the upgrading of the built environment entrenches the inequalities that have long segregated the favelas from the rest of the city. And the very visibility of the pacified favelas, disguise the invisibility of the vast numbers of the poor who reside in the periphery, off the tourist path, beyond the gaze of the media, even the attention of the public authorities.

Meetings over Morar Carioca are infused with tensions of ongoing, unmet demands. Those in Providência contest the removal of 671 families — about one-third of the community — to make way for the cable car. Their protests caught the attention of the public defender and halted urbanization works until problems with public participation could be resolved. In the aftermath of massive protests that gripped all Brazilian cities this past summer, some protestors spray painted the acronym of the municipal housing secretary to the governor’s home as a reminder of the thousands of families threatened with displacement by these very infrastructure improvements. Providência’s resistances are symbolic since they are struggling to preserve their history as Rio de Janeiro prepares for the future, or as local activists warned, “If Rio succeeds in disfiguring and dismantling its most historic favela, the path will be open to further destruction of the city’s hundreds of others.” In the words of one, “We’re at a pivotal moment in our history. While we’re not against improvements and development of our city, we’re concerned that the authorities have not included our concerns in their plans.” In protesting their removal, the residents of Providência are demanding their rights to the city: their right to remain in the community their forefathers built with their own hands and to have a voice in its remaking.

It is not that public security and urbanization are unimportant — and much remains to be done — but along with the pacification of the favelas, amid their upgrading against the backdrop of the broader remaking of Rio de Janeiro, the poor are struggling for their rights to their city. There are no conclusions to be told about the history of the present. In the midst of Rio de Janeiro’s urban transformation it is difficult to determine whether rights to the city constitute a rupture with the violence of the past, but in contrast to all the aforementioned criticisms there are also glimmers that something more complicated is underway. Manuel Castells, a former professor in Berkeley’s Department of City and Regional Planning, argued that Latin American squatter settlements were incomplete social movements because in their struggle for urban services they subordinated themselves to the political system, the “dependent city… produced by its dwellers as if they were not the producers of such a space, but the temporary builders of their master’s *hacienda*” (Castells 1983, 212). But are the resistances of favela dwellers in Rio de Janeiro calling this subordination into question? Brazil’s very democratization resulted from social movements among the poor, their participants realizing that political organization was the only way that they could force the state to recognize the legitimacy of their informality and extend essential services to their neighborhoods. The protests this summer reflect these popular mobilizations. As Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie tells of the danger of the single story, it dangerous to see anything simplistically, and although there is much to criticize in the contested contemporary remaking of Rio de Janeiro, there are small but significant ways in which it is simultaneously reimagining rights to the city among those whose rights have long been denied.