# On urban studies in Brazil: The favela, uneven urbanisation and beyond

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## Abstract
This essay discusses some key ideas and debates about urban studies in Brazil, considered historiographically, from the mid-1900s to the present. It presents the main components and particularities of what emerges as the Brazilian matrix of urban studies, interrogating the most influential work in the field with the country's own experiences of industrialisation and urbanisation. It discusses some key urban debates of the 21st century, namely new planning models associated with globalisation, global mega-events, public–private partnerships, inner-city gentrification, housing and city financialisation, rising forms of urban warfare and social control in slums (favelas), and new activisms and urban insurgencies. Through this analysis, we point to contradictions and tensions in relation to European and North American urban theory, calling for the need to formulate new categories and hypotheses to better understand the unequal and extreme processes resulting from violent expansion of capitalist relations over the entire planet, and comment on the new practices and forms of social mobilisation emerging from turbulent contexts.

## Keywords
Brazil, favelas, Global South, Latin America, slums, spatial theory, urban studies

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## 摘要

本文从历史学的角度探讨从20世纪中期到现在巴西城市研究的一些关键观点和争论。我们展现了巴西城市研究领域的主要组成部分和特殊性，用巴西自身的工业化和城市化经验来探究该领域最具影响力的工作。我们探讨了21世纪的一些关键城市辩论，即与全球化相关的新规划模式、全球大型活动、公私伙伴关系、市中心绅士化、住房和城市金融化、贫民窟 (favelas) 城市战争和社会控制的新形式、以及新的激进主义和城市骚乱。通过这一分析，我们指出了相对欧洲和北美城市理论而言的矛盾和张力，呼吁制定新的类别和假设，以更好地理解资本主义关系在全球暴力扩张所导致的不平等和极端过程，并对动荡背景下出现的新的社会动员实践和形式进行评论

## 关键词

巴西、贫民窟 (favelas)、全球南方、拉丁美洲、贫民窟、空间理论、城市研究

## Introduction

This essay seeks to reflect on and interrogate some key ideas and debates about Brazilian urban studies. We discuss how Brazilian urban studies related urban issues to the more general problems of uneven development in a post-colonial and imperialist context. We examine theoretical developments and their contribution to innovative and provocative conceptual categories of contemporary urban scholarship, some of which can stimulate North–South (or Centre–Periphery) debate on the challenges of global urbanisation.

Anyone who visits São Paulo, Caracas or Mexico City finds contrasting fragments in each neighbourhood. This seemingly chaotic mosaic in Latin American cities is not random but a result of the ways in which capitalism has transformed such territories. Apparently indecipherable, the cities' landscapes and their history reveal how capitalism unfolds and develops on our continent. Behind this superficial chaos lies systemic inequity in the distribution of the benefits of urbanisation and of the social reproduction of labour. These disparities are not merely a reflection of social inequalities, but are accentuated by spatial segregation, social control and strategies aimed at the appreciation of real estate values, as we shall consider below.

This article discusses the emergence of Brazilian urban studies, using a historical approach to understand how and when urban questions became a concern for Brazilian academics, with its Latin American and global connections; indicates the main Brazilian contributions that formed a theoretical body of work for the systematic understanding of the urban context; and finally, considers some of the new urban issues of the 21st century.[1]

The first two sections are based on a literature review, focusing on intellectual and scholarly production from the 1960s to the 1980s. Within this study of critical theory, we identified more than 60 books in the field of urban studies in Brazil that, despite being influential at the time, are not easily available today. Additionally, we researched the archive of specialised journals, such as *Espaços & Debates*, from 1980, and *Debates Urbanos*, from 1981. From this, we present our findings in two parts: the first analyses the context of theoretical production up to its consolidation as an established and productive academic system known as Urban Studies. The second is organised in the form

of short entries, focusing specifically on some of the formulations, topics and concepts that influence this theory and field of research to the present. The third section is based on a review of current literature and the analysis of national interdisciplinary congress annals highlighting some debates and challenges. Finally, analytical engagement throughout the sections considers connections between theoretical production in Brazil and elsewhere, recognising how Brazilian intellectuals and scholars have formulated original theories to explain the country's urbanisation processes and how these theories expose contradictions and tensions in urban theory from Europe and North America. As a result, this contradictory and complex urbanisation requires new categories and hypotheses to be formulated to understand the unequal and extreme processes that are derivative of a violent expansion of capitalist social relations across the globe. This critical interrogation is ultimately paired with comments on the new practices and forms of social mobilisation and resistance that also emerge from these turbulent contexts.

As Alan Mabin suggests, initiatives such as this essay should be considered part of an effort to present theories from the 'southern city', not as a 'pure "southern take"' but as new research and writing on 'transnational' urban theory (Mabin, 2014). The theoretical production that the article presents can undoubtedly be considered as one of the relevant sources of what has been called Epistemologies of the South, to take a phrase from Boaventura Santos (2011), or even part of Post-Colonial, Subaltern or Decolonial Studies. However, it should be noted that Brazil and Latin America have a long critical tradition of their own and prior to these more recent denominations. There are, at least, 100 years of research and critical theory in problematising the relations of subordination and dependence within global

capitalism, from the colonial to the contemporary period, examining their implications for national formations and internal patterns of conflict, inequality and domination. Expanding the visibility of Southern theories is not only a means of defending epistemological diversity (against the 'epistemicide', evoking again the work of Santos) but, above all, contributing to a broad critical field since 'events and ideas in the south are powerful for understanding the world as a whole, not only the south' (Mabin, 2014: 24). The combination and dissonance between modernity and backwardness, liberalism and slavery, cordiality and violence, arbitrariness and favour, evident on the periphery of capitalism (and in its cities) are 'a sore spot of the world-historical process and for this reason a valuable clue to it', from the work of Brazilian sociologist Schwarz (1992), in his famous essay, *Misplaced Ideas* (p. 29).

If we do not make a 'southern theory' defence against a 'purely north one' (Mabin, 2014), this does not mean failing to recognise the existence of unequal and hierarchical relationships that permeate the systems of research and production of high academic institutions' knowledge, within an international division of intellectual labour, that establishes visibility and validation regimes in favour of the dominant Anglo-American pole. On the other hand, the Portuguese language is an obstacle to the international circulation of Brazilian research, which is still mostly carried out in that language, having thus constituted a plural academic system, productive and innovative. This article is an opportunity to expand Brazilian interlocutions in the ongoing collective and transnational effort to produce a renewed global and radical critical theory.

## Formation of the field

In this section, we briefly describe the historical and political context of urban studies in Brazil and its different stages of

development. The field of urban studies,[2] understood as systematic academic reflection on the process of urbanisation in a condition of 'underdevelopment', emerged in Brazil in the 1960s. At that time, the young Brazilian university environment began to look at the 'urban question' or at 'the study of urbanisation', establishing the first links in a network that would become ever denser in terms of themes, authors and centres of research and teaching. The very intensity of Brazilian urbanisation – accelerated and uneven, surrounded by conflicts and paradoxes, from which emerged new urban subjects, practices and imaginaries – propelled the field of urban studies and gave the topic a sense of urgency. This overwhelming process of internal migrations, urban growth and the production of new cities – including a bold new modernist capital, Brasília – was responsible for shaking up the university, drawing its attention to the topic. During the next decades, urban studies became one of the most promising and interdisciplinary strains of the humanities.[3]

The questions that guided and propelled the formation of the field emerged, from the start, in the attempt to identify what is specific to the formation of modern urban Brazil and its internal conflicts, while at the same time accounting for the influence of external forces of capital expansion that reinforce the subordinate condition of the country, from the colonial era to the present.

In 1965, the country experienced the turning point at which more than half of the population was living in cities (at a global scale, this only happened in 2007): the urban population went from 18 million in 1950 to 82 million by 1980. While this urbanisation mimics – in its wealthy part – European or North American cities, it also incorporates a variety of forms of precarious encampments built by impoverished migrants from rural areas, who had not found a place in official settlements nor in the modern salaried workforce. Hence, the foundational impasse or riddle faced by the field: how to explain an intense migratory process and urban growth without the corresponding modernisation of productive forces that had accompanied the first phenomena in countries at the centre of global capitalism. Were we going through an urban revolution without its corresponding industrial revolution? What would be the consequences of the arrival of such vast numbers of dispossessed peoples in cities that could not offer them the same number of paid jobs? What kind of urban and social forms would arise from this gap?

In São Paulo, the main centre of Brazilian industrialisation, these issues were intensely present, given the spatial evidence of these gaps that could be seen in the cityscape itself: the production of wealth took place side by side with the growth of poverty; and the fastest-growing class was not an industrial proletariat but rather an apparently superfluous mass of marginalised and underemployed people, living in self-built houses in the immense peripheries, suburbs, favelas and floodplains. The first and strongest report about the condition of the subaltern classes in mid-20th century urban and industrialised Brazil was not written by an intellectual who descended to the 'basements' of society, as Engels did in England; the person who started urban studies *avant la lettre* in Brazil, as a personal journal, was De Jesus (1962). A Black woman living in a favela located in the floodplains of the Tietê River in São Paulo, she made notes in a diary during the 1950s and then, in 1961, she published *Child of the Dark: The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus* (English edition), an international best-seller translated into 14 languages which became the most sold Brazilian book until that time. In the midst

of São Paulo's industrial boom, she was already pointing out that growth and poverty were inseparable pairs. The Brazilian university system started approaching urban studies in a more organised and systematic way during the 1960s, in order to understand the relationships between wealth and poverty, modernity and backwardness, migration and employment, inclusion and marginalisation, and private property and clandestine access to land in the country's rapid urbanisation. The impasse at the root of the first research projects and theoretical formulations in the field was, in sum, to understand the clash between *hyper*urbanisation and *under*development.

At the same time, Brasília was also the most emblematic representation of the clash between the desire to modernise the country and join the centre of global capitalism, and the reiteration of underdevelopment and the forces of backwardness. The labour conditions in the construction sites of Brasília were among the harshest in the world in the 20th century, with numerous deaths and all kinds of violence, exploitation and deceit. The 'Plano Piloto' (Brasília original urban design) had not made room for affordable housing for the working classes; there was only housing for the upper echelons and public servants of government bureaucracy. The workers who built the capital had to live in workers' camps and precarious settlements – known as 'satellite cities' – far removed from the centre of the city. The disconnect between the modern façade of the city, the daring palaces designed by Oscar Niemeyer and the cruel reality of the construction process and the urban apartheid produced by Brasília exposed the nature of the new capital and of peripheral modernisation as a whole. This paradoxical emblem became even clearer when, four years after the new capital had been inaugurated, Brazil suffered a military coup and Brasília was turned into a citadel for this entrenched

regime, away from the masses, for 20 years (see, Ferro, 2006; Paviani, 1985).

During the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964–1985), there was a proliferation of studies, groups, academic research centres and publications. This flourishing occurred precisely during the military dictatorship when university professors and students were being banned and exiled (as well as imprisoned, tortured and disappeared), and when government censors monitored university classes. While it is easy to understand the increased production of normative documents, planning studies and large-scale projects at a time of authoritarian centralisation, what made it possible for critical studies to flourish at the same time?

After 1968, when the dictatorship entered its harshest phase, political persecution in universities and the banning of professors gave impulse to the creation of independent research centres in the field of social sciences (with special attention to urban studies), such as CEBRAP (Brazilian Centre for Analysis and Planning) and CEDEC (Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies) in São Paulo and IUPERJ (Rio de Janeiro University Research Institute) in Rio de Janeiro – all of them funded by the Ford Foundation. These research centres were less controlled by the dictatorship; they were also more internationally connected, and more flexible and nimble to carry out and promote research. The forced exile and the international diaspora of researchers and professors connected them to networks that were already more advanced in the field, in particular in Eduardo Frei's and Salvador Allende's Chile (the main destination for Brazilian intellectual exiles), France and the USA. These three global centres of research were also connected by the prolific and indefatigable Marxist sociologist Manuel Castells, who became internationally the main intellectual and urban studies agitprop, forging a new kind of urban critical matrix.

Castells' influence in Brazil was enormous in the 1970s, as a result of his book, *The Urban Question*, a mandatory reference introducing a structuralist Marxist theory on urbanisation, and the collection of essays he organised on *Imperialismo y Urbanización en América Latina* in addition to his connections with the research group, Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento (CEBRAP).

The indirect effect of forced exile was the internationalisation of humanities and urban studies research, allowing the emergence of new questions, references and methods. In Chile, the most important centre for Latin American urban studies was formed – the CIDU (Centro de Investigación en Desarrollo Urbano) – at the Catholic University, which publishes the journal *EURE*, the first meeting point for Latin American production in the field. France was also a destination for exiled intellectuals and, from 1973, it became home to Brazilians who had to leave Chile as a result of Augusto Pinochet's military coup. In the field of urban studies, Brazilian geographer Milton Santos was gaining recognition in France. Besides Henri Lefebvre, whose books had been translated in Brazil since 1969, the new French school of urban sociology, including Jean Lojkine, Alain Lipietz, Edmond Preteceille and Christian Topalov, influenced Brazilian scholars during the 1980s and 1990s.

Even before the coup, the North American university system attracted Brazilian urban scholars to postgraduate programmes or as researchers and lecturers, and this intensified in the dictatorship period, for example: Elza Berquó (Columbia), Juarez Brandão Lopes (Chicago), Roberto da Matta (Harvard), Vilmar Faria (Harvard), Flávio Villaça (Georgia Tech), Manoel Tosta Berlinck (Cornell), Paul Singer (Princeton), Milton Santos (MIT), Maurício de Almeida Abreu (Ohio), Luis Antonio Machado (Rutgers), Benício Viero Schmidt (Stanford), Martin Smolka (Pennsylvania), Pedro Jacobi (Harvard), Raquel Rolnik (NYU) and Teresa Caldeira (Berkeley).

The internationalisation of research also occurred thanks to important works by North American Brazilianists. The first 'urban biography' to follow the critical tone of the new social history was by Richard Morse at Columbia University in *From Community to Metropolis: A Biography of São Paulo* (1958), followed by a history of São Paulo's industrialisation by Warren Dean in 1969. North American researchers have also pioneered innovative studies on favelas since the end of the 1960s: Paul Silberstein (Chicago), Janice Perlman (MIT), Anthony and Elisabeth Leeds (Columbia), the latter, with an important book that proposed theoretical schemes and methods for an urban sociology in Brazil (Leeds and Leeds, 1978). Marvin Harris (Columbia) studied small towns in the countryside, and James Holston (Berkeley) the modernist new capital, Brasília and São Paulo grassroots' 'insurgent citizenship' to address institutional and urban inequalities.

Because of the two decades of dictatorship (1964–1985), the decoupling of the Brazilian university system (especially in the humanities) from state power allowed for a critical approach to theory to gain autonomy, radicalness and legitimacy. For two decades, critical research was focused on interpreting urban problems without commitments to formulate government policies, although many urban planners were involved at that time in policymaking, legislation, city planning and urban projects.

Urban studies scholars began to encounter in their fieldwork the urban poor and to strengthen relationships with their grassroots organisations (Brant and Singer, 1982; Boschi, 1983; Moisés, 1982; Sader, 1988). The articulation between theory and practice intensified as praxis at the moment when, on

the one hand, urban social movements became important subjects and allies in the struggle for rights and against the dictatorship and, on the other hand, researchers became increasingly engaged in popular causes. Research began to venture outside of the walls of academia, with help from the progressive Brazilian Catholic church, especially when São Paulo Archbishop Paulo Evaristo Arns, a critic of the dictatorship who was close to the Liberation Theology movement, commissioned CEBRAP to produce an urban studies trilogy led by Brant et al. (Brant, 1989; Brant and Singer, 1982; Brant et al., 1976). The three books, in particular Brant et al. (*São Paulo: Growth and Poverty*, 1976), became best sellers and brought together intellectuals and grassroots activists. The books' success resulted in retaliation by the dictatorship and its supporters, including a bomb that detonated in CEBRAP in 1976.

At the end of the 1970s, the debates among professors, researchers, urban social movements and basic ecclesial communities were so intense that something new was bound to emerge. At the same time, large industrial strikes took place in the Greater Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, with the formation of a new union movement independent from the military regime, and with the appearance of a new popular leader, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who would later become president of Brazil (2003–2010). In 1979, the government declared amnesty for political prisoners, welcoming forced exiled citizens back. São Paulo became a powerful meeting point for urban social movements, new working-class unions, basic ecclesial communities, prolific universities and research centres.

The creation of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) in 1980 was also a crucial point for urban studies since, with the progressive re-democratisation of the country, the party – which elected many city mayors – implemented a radical municipal approach to urban governing that became known as the 'PT way of governing' (Bittar, 1992). The party's mayors reversed investment priorities in order to help the poorest sectors of the population, recognising social movements and urban peripheries as subjects; it also set in motion processes of radical democracy, such as thematic councils and participatory budgets. It promoted public policies of a new type, some of them including self-management and participation by their beneficiaries. The presence of the PT in urban governments, which had started in Diadema, São Paulo and Porto Alegre – a city that became known worldwide through its pioneering Participatory Budgeting Project (Genro and Souza, 1997; Wampler, 2007) – expanded throughout the country, fostering and multiplying national connections among urban researchers and social movements. In 1983, the National Association of Graduate Programmes and Research in Urban and Regional Planning (ANPUR) was founded and soon became one of the main nexuses for interdisciplinary academic exchanges in urban studies, inspiring the creation of several doctoral and masters programmes in the field throughout the country, beyond the then-hegemonic centres of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (Fernandes et al., 2015; Limonad, 2017). ANPUR also became a centre for international articulation, affiliated to the Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN).

From 1986 to 1988, as part of the social mobilisation towards writing the new Federal Constitution of the post-dictatorship republic, the Urban Reform Movement and its National Forum were founded, joining grassroots movements and scholars (Ribeiro, 1994). For more than a decade, this movement fought for the approval of the federal law called the Cities Statute (*Estatuto das Cidades*), which was enacted in 2001 and regulated the Federal Constitution's section

on urban policy, achieving both international recognition in addition to stimulating intense debate about its limits and contradictions (Carvalho and Rossbach, 2010).

This period also saw the emergence of important movements for social housing and the right to the city; the foundation of NGOs of national relevance, which also focused on basic rights, public policies and urban programmes; and, in São Paulo, the creation of more than 20 technical groups on social housing, which worked alongside social movements in self-managed projects, known as *mutirões* (Amaral, 2001; Bonduki, 2000).

The field of urban studies, therefore, changed its political standing starting in the 1980s thanks to this progressive connection between theory and practice, research and public policies, and teaching and political activism. This intense articulation also occurred in other countries of the Global South, as acknowledged by Mabin's (2014) 'theory from the southern city' as also 'an agenda for action, built in a long tradition of engaged scholarship' (p. 29). As a result, Brazil gradually became a major urban policy laboratory and also a place for innovative theory.

## The Brazilian urban studies matrix

In this section we present a glossary of some of the main topics and concepts in Brazilian urban studies. We do not inventory the numerous investigative and theoretical developments in the field. Rather, we highlight a key set of themes and focal areas of Brazilian urban studies, to introduce non-Brazilian readers to a crucial body of critical thinking that we call the Brazilian matrix of urban studies. These entries are not necessarily sequential but they are connected to our previous historiographical approach. The

categories below also indicate how urban theory from the Global North has influenced Brazilian urban studies but, above all, how Brazilians have raised their critiques of these concepts and their own formulation of the discipline. Collectively, the entries can be considered a matrix of thought on land, labour, capital and power, which connects urban issues to critical theory, as it relates to legacies of colonialism and slavery, social inequality and structural racism, segregation and dispossession, as well as the condition of Brazilian (and indeed, Latin American) underdevelopment and dependency. The vast majority of the authors cited dialogue with each other and with common foreign theoretical schools, forming a system of academic production with a high degree of organicity.

### The colonial and slavery urban life and legacy

Before the academics that pioneered urban studies in Brazil in the 1960s, scholars such as Gilberto Freyre and Lucio Costa had published important texts on Brazilian urban life during the era of colonialism and slavery. Freyre (1936), the founder of modern sociology in Brazil, published *Sobrados e Mucambos* (translated as *The Mansions and the Shanties*) to understand the relations between class, race and power and how they shaped everyday life and urban forms in colonial Brazil. Lucio Costa, the urban planner who designed Brasília, borrowed Le Corbusier's concept of 'the machine for living', but reverting its meaning: in the periphery of capitalism, this machine works backwards; instead of relying on industrial rationality, it relies on the unfettered exploitation of captive labour. Cities in colonial and enslaved Brazil were thus explained as rudimentary physical structures dependent on the labour of enslaved Africans and

Black Brazilians to function: they were the lever, the engine and the flow so that the urban and house machine could attend the comfort and hygiene of the dominant, white classes (Costa, 2018). Paradoxically, the 19th century hygienist discourse, buttressing and anchoring urban planning and sanitation in Brazil, adopted racist and eugenicist logics, specifically when considering Black and African-descended urban residents as vectors of urban (medical, as well as social) diseases, hence the arguments that arose favouring 'necessary' modernisation, segregation and whitening of cities (Chalhoub, 1996; Needell, 1987).

### Free labour and the 'captivity of the land'

Land in pre-Columbian America was a communal good. With the colonial enterprise, large plantations became the property of European crowns. Urban land as private property is a recent phenomenon in Brazil and its transition occurred at a crucial moment, coinciding with the laws that resulted in the end of the slavery regime. In the transition from slavery to waged labour, men became 'free' at the same time as the access to urban land, until then free to whoever moved there, became restricted through a new property system. In 1850, two weeks after the official end to the slave trade, the new so-called Land Law was passed, inaugurating a new property regime in which ownership depended not only on someone's status as a free man but also on the purchase of land. Freed former slaves or poor working-class immigrants had no alternative other than 'working in someone else's estate so that, one day, he could also become master of his own land' (Martins, 1979). This law established land as a commodity and drove the transition from the asset value of the private ownership of slaves to the private ownership of land. In these circumstances, the land – delimited and 'captured', bought and sold – became inaccessible to the majority of free human beings. The 'solution' was clandestine urbanisation, the formation of slums and the occupation of public or environmentally fragile areas (Maricato, 1979, 1996; Valladares, 1983).

### Urbanisation in underdevelopment

From the 1960s, the field of urban studies took on a 'systematic investigation of the structural and dynamic relationships of economic (under)development with the formation and growth of cities in Brazil', according to Florestan Fernandes in the preface of Singer's book (1968: 1). The field began to look at underdevelopment not as a mere stage to be overcome by the march of progress, but rather as a socio-economic formation that was concurrent with, and structural to, the uneven development of globally expanding capitalism, from the colonial-mercantile period to the imperialist-monopolist era. This subaltern relationship to the world order, in turn, determined the disparities between cities in central and peripheral countries and, in the latter, the regional disparities that stemmed from the way these cities were connected (Lopes, 1972; Pereira, 1973; Santos, 1965; Singer, 1968). Wealthier classes concentrated the benefits of urbanisation in the few neighbourhoods they inhabited, to the detriment of the immense majority of the population, condemned to live in informal and destitute conditions. Many modernising and beautifying projects were carried out by the elites, following the French Belle Époque style or the British Garden City movement, while at the same time creating vast numbers of landless workers, lacking the most basic living conditions (Needell, 1987; Rolnik, 1997).

## Unequal and combined urbanisation: Critique of the dualism of marginality theory

The UN ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean) and its main author in the area of urban studies, Peruvian Anibal Quijano, proposed in the 1960s the thesis that 'marginality' is a key concept in urbanisation in Latin America and that marginality is directly associated with the new phase of imperialist and monopolistic domination in the region, where accelerated and concentrated urbanisation would not match an equivalent productive base (Quijano, 1975). Brazilian authors discussed the 'marginal pole' theory, especially Oliveira (1972), Singer (1973), Paoli (1974), Kowarick (1975), Berlinck (1975) and the American Brazilianist Perlman (1976). With variations considered, these authors argued that the division of the economy into two sectors cannot be understood in a dualistic way since the circuits of accumulation and social reproduction of the labour force permanently recombine advanced and backward sectors, growth and poverty, drawing from the forces of industrialisation with low wages and reducing public expenditures with the process of urbanisation and the social reproduction of the workers.

## The urban economy as a 'shared space'

In the 1970s, Milton Santos, one of the most influential geographers from Latin America, formulated his spatial theory on urbanisation in underdeveloped countries. With prolific production, Santos consolidated his main theoretical hypothesis in *The Shared Space: The Two Circuits of the Urban Economy in Underdeveloped Countries*, published in Brazil in 1978 and in England in 1979. During his exile in France (1964–1971) due to Brazil's military dictatorship, Santos published *Le métier du géographe en pays*

*sous-développés* in 1971, criticising the empiricism and Eurocentrism of traditional French geography. Santos was involved with Third-Worldism and the new Critical Geography movements (along with authors such as Yves Lacoste, Michel Rochefort and Bernard Kayser, among others). Also critical of the urban dualism, Santos proposed an interconnected system of two circuits as a framework of interpretation, which keeps their specificities but combines them in a spatial dialectics. In his analytical structure, the superior economic circuit (of finance, large industry, modern commerce and monopolies) connects cities and regions with global capitalism and its monopolies; and the lower circuit, rooted locally, maintains activities that animate and provide subsistence for the poor. Each circuit constitutes a subsystem, with its rules and zones of influence, but both are part of the same urban system, which is intermediated by the State and therefore needs to be understood as a whole. Capital and labour force 'rise' and 'descend' between circuits through financial, productive and political channels. However, the relationship between the two circuits is not in balance. The modern circuit dominates and seeks to capture more and more income and wealth, favoured by the state, while penalising the lower circuit.

## Labour, capital and production in the cities' sites

Since the 1960s, Brazilian researchers have been pioneers in formulating a critical theory to understand the social production of urban space. Led by Sérgio Ferro, a group of professors from the University of São Paulo carried out innovative research on the relationships between technique, labour and capital in the production of the city, evaluating working conditions in construction sites, encompassing a wide range of subjects from market-based production to self-

construction and from structure to infrastructure – Ermínia Maricato, Yvonne Mautner, Jorge Oseki, Paulo César Xavier Pereira and Maria Lúcia Gitahy. The architect Sérgio Ferro was internationally the frontrunner and main author of a radical and systematic critical theory on the relationships of production and domination between design and the construction site, as well as between capital and labour, from a historical, empirical and semiological perspective, helping create a tradition of studies in this area (Ferro, 2006). Ferro acknowledged similarities between the backwardness he described in the construction site and the country's underdevelopment and, thus, produced a provocative analogy when comparing the position of builders in the national economy and the role of the countries of the Global South. Underdevelopment and backwardness in construction techniques, therefore, should not be understood as anomalies nor as steps to be overcome, but as co-extensive parts of the very unequal and combined development of capitalism. Construction workers are commonly proscribed and erased from the authorship of the architectural works, from the literature on cities and the right to share their benefits.

## Logic in urban disorder

A quick glance and common sense confirm the chaos of Brazilian cities (and of the Global South, in general), a veritable 'urban disorder'. However, researchers in urban studies have begun to discern the rules of such disorder, their agents and interests, and finally, their logics and reason. The expression, 'The logic of disorder', was the title of a chapter in a book by CEBRAP, which became a landmark of urban studies in Brazil in the 1970s: *São Paulo: Growth and Poverty* (Brant et al., 1976). The book

described how the disorganised and disjointed landscape of cities in Brazil conceals the continuous movement of unequal transfer of benefits and losses between different social classes and materialises in the disputes over location and appropriation of accumulation. Oliveira (1977), also a researcher at CEBRAP, uses a provocative variation of the logic of disorder expression: 'There is reason in this urban madness'. Oliveira refutes, for instance, the view of tertiary sector growth in Brazilian cities as a mere anomaly in the process of economic growth. The appearance of a 'swelling' sector (*inchaço do terciário*) hides a fundamental mechanism of accumulation: services performed purely on the basis of a very badly remunerated labour force permanently transfer a fraction of their value to capitalist economic activities, in short, 'surplus value', intensifying exploitation (Oliveira, 2003: 38). The Brazilian cities' growth process can only be understood within a theoretical framework where the needs of accumulation impose a horizontal growth in services, whose apparent form is the chaos of cities (Oliveira, 2003: 39).

## Sub-urbanisation and peripheral patterns of urban growth

The enormous expansion of suburbs (in Rio de Janeiro) and peripheries (in São Paulo) required researchers to understand their spatial modes of production. The term 'suburb', which originates in Rio de Janeiro from the stations of the 'suburban train', has nothing to do with the suburb of the North American cities. In Rio, the suburb is, in fact, 'sub-urbanisation', following Da Matta (1987). In São Paulo, these areas are simply called 'peripheries' (Bonduki and Rolnik, 1979). Without income and with very little savings, migrants could access land only

through illegal means, either through direct occupation (generally in public or environmentally fragile areas, such as environmentally protected areas, hillsides, mangroves and wetlands) or the purchase and sale of land without an official title from swindlers, probably also illegally. The construction of houses was done by self-help, mutual aid, using small family savings and other strategies of income and survival in the city (Maricato, 1979; Taschner and Mautner, 1982; Valladares, 1983). People's free time was then occupied with self-construction of their houses and even their neighbourhoods, perpetuating a model of industrialisation/urbanisation with low wages (Oliveira, 2006). Finally, a third factor that allowed urban sprawl was transportation based on buses, which were able to reach faraway areas. As suburbs and peripheries consolidated, studies on these areas expanded enormously in the 1980s, with a theoretical shift in favour of a more bottom-up and dialogical approach involving 'participant research' (Brandão, 1981). This turn was led particularly by a new generation of urban anthropologists: Gilberto Velho, Carlos Nelson dos Santos, Arno Vogel, Teresa Caldeira, José Guilherme Magnani, Alba Zaluar, Roberto Da Matta, during the transition from dictatorship to democracy and, internationally, coinciding with the emergence of postmodernism and poststructuralism. Since then, studies have multiplied, addressing the conditions and ways of life in the urban outskirts; organisation and popular solidarity; forms of command and political patronage; the informal housing market (and informal everything else); crime and its organisations; festivals, rituals, popular traditions and forms of entertainment and religious expression; and, finally, on how inhabitants recognised their 'corner' (*quebradas*) of the city, and how they saw and represented themselves as 'peripheral subjects'.

## 'Urban spoliation' and impoverishment

The term, 'urban spoliation' characterises forms of dispossession of the lower classes, resulting from the combination of economic growth and urban destitution, which is intrinsic to the process of urbanisation in the periphery of capitalism. In Kowarick's (1979) definition, urban spoliation is 'the sum of extortions that operate through the absence or precariousness of urban amenities and services, that is presented as socially necessary in relation to prevailing subsistence levels, and which further aggravate the relationships of production and exploitation of labour' (p. 62). The urban in this sense is the denial of the reproduction of the labour force at acceptable levels and is therefore its permanent squandering. The role of the state is still fundamental in this process, in order to carry out a model of growth that has worsened the deterioration of living standards, acting to dismantle and repress the initiatives of numerous groups that have been sidelined from the benefits of development. Urban spoliation has become a central concept and widely used in Brazilian literature as a synonym for dispossession and deprivation defining vulnerable territories that suffer constant violations of rights. Other authors who also adopt the concept are Krischke et al. (1984).

## The selective application of urban law

Illegality and disorder socially promoted and allowed by the State are interpreted as an intrinsic part of Brazilian formation by Gilberto Freyre, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Raymundo Faoro, Roberto Schwarz and Roberto Da Matta. Ruling classes manoeuvre norms and laws and the system of personal, family and patriarchal relations to replace the Western idea of a public sphere, based on the modern and republican ideals of the individual, under the

rule of law. Patterns of oppression, segregation and violence prevail, hinder and atrophy the formation of a public sphere. In the urbanisation process, the 'legal city', highly regulated (even if 'made flexible' by market interests), became the exception in Brazil, in the face of the immense urbanisation resulting from citizens' direct actions, outside official planning law (Maricato, 1996; Ribeiro, 1996; Rolnik, 1997). Once the norm has been swallowed up by the exception, the whole effort of normative rationality and the crux of the ideas of modern urbanism became questionable. However, 'systematic law breaking' is the rule for both the legal and the illegal city, from the ruling class to the poor.

## Theorising new urban social movements

Parallel to studies on urban poverty, spoliation and forms of survival in the peripheries and favelas, the researchers' journey to the popular neighbourhoods allowed them to recognise the new grassroots organisations and their political strength. The questions that guided Brazilian research on urban movements were similar to those of urban studies authors of the Global North: would the popular classes in the new cities become political subjects? The Brazilian context brings novelty and specificity to these questions, arising from dictatorship, dependence and underdevelopment. Paradoxically, it was the authoritarian and repressive context in which civil rights were withdrawn and party representation was severely limited, that indirectly stimulated practices of solidarity and civil disobedience. In this way, more radical community organisations emerged than the more centralised and pyramidal structures of trade unions and parties, because they were bottom-up and networked, with collectivist and fraternal relationships. Some pioneering authors and editors who mapped the emergence of urban

movements as important political actors were José Álvaro Moisés, Carlos Nelson dos Santos, Vinícius Caldeira Brant and Paul Singer, Renato Boschi and Lícia Valladares, Pedro Jacobi, Eder Sader and Aldo Paviani. Starting from practical claims, popular movements gradually broadened their scope, adding to initial demands for better living conditions and urban services, and embracing other causes such as feminism, racial equality, minority rights, religious freedom, environmental issues and, of course, the struggle for democracy, which connects with the theoretical and epistemological turn in the social sciences generally and urban studies more specifically.

## Favelas within the Brazilian urban question

Favelas are the emblematic expression of urbanisation in an underdeveloped country such as Brazil. They sum up contradictions and conflicts and simultaneously embody forms of resistance and urban imagination. They have been extensively studied in Brazil, especially the most significant cases of hill and mangrove occupations in Rio de Janeiro, highlighted by the research of Janice Perlman, Guida Nunes, Lícia Valladares, Carlos Nelson dos Santos and Alba Zaluar, among others. Favelas were initially treated in the dualistic framework of the divided city that saw the favela as a marginal refuge, as 'social pathology', a sanitary and a police problem – a danger to be eradicated. However, critical scholarly production from the 1970s, with innovative research strategies, demonstrated the ineffectiveness and inhumanity of slum clearing processes and also how favelas are integrated into the whole of the city and its economic, social and symbolic circuits. Unlike the suburbs and peripheries, favelas are mostly located in central areas, side by side with rich neighbourhoods, which embody the direct contrast inherent within Brazilian

society and represent the fear and the otherness in the relationships of contiguity of the favela with the official city. The favela is the cradle of urban popular culture, samba, carnival, and more recently, rap and funk. From a symbolic and political point of view, it is therefore one of the decisive focuses of urban struggle. Favelas were subject to removals until the mid-1970s, when local and international agendas began to recommend their permanence, with urban upgrading and security of tenure. Academic research was important in proving the failure of forced eviction practices, such as the significant work of Valladares (1980) on the 26 slums partially evicted for a large housing complex in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro called 'City of God', because of the inability of households to adapt, the lack of public services, increased time and transportation costs, unemployment and vulnerability. Subsequently, the field research coordinated by Alba Zaluar in Cidade de Deus would give rise to the novel by Paulo Lins (1997), which, in turn, motivated the film by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund with the same title. Besides scholarly research, the struggles of resistance of the *favelados* themselves were crucial. They had important support from the Catholic Church and the Pastoral of Favelas, as well as the first experiences of urbanisation with citizen participation and assistance from engaged architects, such as Carlos Nelson dos Santos. With re-democratisation, favelas gained power, elected politicians (or brought down those who attacked them) and gained new legal instruments to protect land tenure security. Rio de Janeiro has also become a world reference laboratory for slum upgrading, in particular through the Favela-Bairro programme in the 1990s (Fiori et al., 2001; Ribeiro et al., 1997). Mega sporting events in Rio, such as the Pan American Games (2007), Confederation Cup (2013), FIFA World Cup (2014) and Olympics (2016)

revived favela removal projects in the last decade (Faulhaber and Azevedo, 2015; Oliveira, 2015).

The twelve urban entries above are a sample of the main theoretical hypotheses formulated by urban studies scholars in Brazil, mostly between the 1970s and the 1990s. Current research will be introduced in the next section. Far from exhausting the innovative formulations of the Brazilian matrix, these entries serve as a possible initial presentation to this academic production.

## Urban studies in contemporary Brazil: Notes on the challenges

In this section, we focus on some key contemporary debates, namely new planning models associated with globalisation, global mega-events, public–private partnerships, inner-city gentrification, housing and city financialisation, rising forms of urban warfare and social control in favelas, and urban insurgencies. Building from this, we look at a shifting field that deals with changes in Brazilian economy and society, trying to identify some of the phenomena scholars seek to understand, as well as emerging concepts and the tensions and challenges that arise.

### Globalisation and urban neoliberalism: Dismantling consensus

We start with the debate on globalisation and global cities because of its relevance in the 1990s within the field of urban studies. In Brazil, the relationship between globalisation and cities became one of the most studied topics, notably by scholars including Milton Santos. The debate gained momentum in urban studies with the publication of the book, *Global Cities* by the US-based sociologist, Saskia Sassen (1991). This book was, however, transformed into a kind of prescription of what cities should do to

become global, despite the original and analytical character of the author's works. In Brazil, this was often associated with the influential text, *Local and Global* by Spanish authors, Manuel Castells and Jordi Borja (Borja and Castells, 1997). Unlike what happened with Sassen's work, however, in this case the ideas were immediately disseminated in the normative version by the authors themselves, taking Barcelona as a model to formulate and disseminate what they called, 'Strategic City Planning'.

In the early 1990s, the new planning model, which included other references, influences and ingredients, as we will see later, entered the political agenda of right- and left-wing governments alike, in the context of the state's fiscal crisis. At the same time, however, a critical reading of the theory of globalisation was developing in Brazil, summarised in expressions such as, 'brand-new dependency' by José Luis Fiori, 'neocolonial reversion' by Plínio de Arruda Sampaio Jr and 'financial servitude' by Leda Paulani, in attempts to update the debate on the centre–periphery relationships and the international division of labour. The defence of economic liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation and the dismantling of the developmental state, so in vogue in the neoliberal discourse, were criticised and analysed as part of the conditionalities required in the negotiation of the return to the international financial system. Both the neoliberal discourse and the critiques to it reverberated in urban studies.

The most striking answer in Brazilian urban studies came with a book entitled, *A Cidade do Pensamento Único: Desmanchando Consensos* by Arantes et al. (2000). The authors confronted urban models of urban entrepreneurship, particularly the so-called 'strategic planning of cities'. Vainer questioned the aggressive marketing that systematically propels the Barcelona case and the dissemination of this model to many cities,

including the city of Rio de Janeiro, through a combined action of multilateral institutions and international consultants, such as Borja, inspired by concepts and techniques from business planning (Arantes et al., 2000: 76–77).

The strategy of Public–Private Partnerships (PPP), a central ingredient of 'urban entrepreneurship' in several countries, was implemented in Brazil mainly in the form of Urban Consortium Operations (UCOs). This strategy emerged in the early 1990s as a local creation, albeit influenced by the French Zones d'Aménagement Concerté. Initially, UCOs generated an unusual consensus amongst conservative politicians, left-wing city governments and planners and real estate agents, thanks to the promise of financing urban improvements with private resources. Studies on its application initially in São Paulo, however, revealed a great distance between the rhetoric and the practice. In São Paulo, UCOs contributed to the concentration of public resources in already privileged regions of the city, generating a vicious circle of reinvestment in these regions (Fix, 2001).

Inner-city 'revitalisation' projects (also called 'urban regeneration' in other parts of the world) have been critically analysed in many Brazilian cities with findings that refer to processes discussed in the international critical literature by authors such as Neil Smith, Sharon Zukin and Mike Davis. Since many 'revitalisation' projects were inspired by US cases, these authors helped Brazilian scholars and activists to better understand consequences that took place in North America, such as gentrification, and to formulate research hypotheses as a result. However, the mechanical application of influential concepts formulated in the Global North with no reference to the theoretical mediations and careful empirical research done outside of that space can contribute little and even obscure the understanding of

what happened in Brazilian cities. Hence, the importance of research projects conducted by Brazilian researchers in many cities remained – and remains – essential.

The national and international application of Curitiba as a model of 'the sustainable city', leveraged by multilateral agencies as the main Brazilian export case based on city marketing and decontextualised from the local experience, has also been questioned. Beneath the plan's technical appearance and the promotion of the 'genius' urban planner, Jaime Lerner, lie the relationships and interests of economic power groups (Sánchez, 2010).

The Large Urban Projects (GPUs) were criticised as the 'practical and concrete face of the adoption of competitive notions, market oriented and market friendly that are typical of the strategic planning' (Cuenya et al., 2013: 11). These debates occurred in the context of critical mobilisation against real estate developments, such as the New Belo Horizonte Project, the Estelita Pier in Recife and the mega events, especially the World Cup of 2014 and the Olympic Games of 2016.

Many studies on those topics were more than academic papers with authors entering the public debate and were conducted in dialogue with social movements. In São Paulo, for instance, pro-housing movements in the central area and students, together with theatre groups, human rights organisations and street workers, joined forces in 2000 to create the Centro Vivo Fórum. Vivo, in Portuguese, means alive, and at the same time, aware (self-conscious). The title of the Fórum had a dual purpose: first, to expose the ideological nature of the term 'revitalisation' by showing that there was life in the city centre, although mostly consisting of working-class citizens, different from what real estate investors envisioned; and second, that those dwellers were alive and aware of the threats posed by the hegemonic

'revitalisation' project which was based on a model mostly influenced by North American experiences. Another example is the nationwide World Cup Popular Committees. In the Vila Autódromo community in Rio de Janeiro, dwellers and research groups allied to formulate an Alternative Popular Plan as part of their resistance against being expelled from their living areas to allow the construction of the Olympic Village. At the same time, comprehensive research was produced on the subject (see Oliveira, 2015). These cases show that urban studies are not solely confined to academia.

## Beyond the intra-urban space: The urban networks multiscale

The changes in the urbanisation process, in a country of continental dimensions, heterogeneous and uneven, with a complex network of cities which includes metropolises, medium-sized cities and hundreds of small municipalities, motivated the formation of national networks of researchers on medium-sized cities and metropolises, such as ReCime and the Metropolis Observatorium. They also stimulated the formulation of concepts such as 'extensive urbanisation' (Monte-Mór, 1994), in reference to metropolisation not only in itself but also in relation to urbanised spaces. The idea is derived from Lefebvre's work, although designed for the semi-periphery of capitalism, in dialogue with Oliveira (1978), in addition to work by American authors such as Alan Scott, Edward Soja and Mike Davis, to understand the new logics of settlement 'throughout the national territory, from the Rio–São Paulo axis to the agromineral frontier of the Amazon' (Monte-Mór, 1994: 172). The concept also serves to examine the impact of various types of urbanisation on the environment, observing the conservation of the appropriate ecological

conditions to different communities, with an emphasis on their relationship with social and biological diversity (Monte-Mór, 1994). The concept of 'diffuse urbanisation' is proposed to think about the modernisation of territory in the Amazon, in dialogue with concepts proposed by authors including Becker (1995) and Trindade (2015).

The impacts of agricultural and mineral activities on the country's urban–regional dynamics were examined in the context of the external insertion of the Brazilian economy centred on low added-value commodities, which required territorial adaptations to guarantee the global circulation of commodities (Macedo and Junior, 2019). Similar to other countries in Latin America, several regions of the country were starting to 'depend more on the productive processes linked to the production of the field (such as soybeans and corn) and mineral extraction (oil, gas and iron ore), modifying the urban-industrial capitalist development' (Macedo and Junior, 2019: 5). In the expanding agricultural frontier, small cities gained importance (Nascimento, 2012), several of them in the Amazonian region (Marques, 2018), motivating debates about deindustrialisation, return to producing primary commodities and neoextractivism, and its consequential pressure to reduce areas of conservation units and the relaxation of laws protecting Indigenous lands (Acselrad, 2018). The advance of the urban–rural frontiers of valuation was characterised as a 'huge complex or arrangement of appropriation/expropriation and commercial promotion, which permanently uses diverse forms of primitive accumulation' (Brandão, 2010: 39), highlighting its predatory character.

## Finance capital and urban space

Real estate activity has also been the subject of a number of studies. After a cycle of examining the living and citizenship conditions of workers, scholars have sought to advance in understanding the fractions of capital specialised in the production of the built environment and its strategies. Several of them deal with the circuit constituted by landowners, developers, builders, financial capital and the state, including the so-called 'informal market'.

Many researchers inserted the study of the real estate market within a more general picture of the transformations in the economy. In doing so, they sought to relate changes identified in the 'real estate circuit' with the more general debate about financialisation of the economy that had reached Brazil in different ways and spread mainly through sharp criticism of the concept of globalisation. 'Financial globalisation', 'finance-led globalisation' and 'financialisation' were some of the terms that came to be used to counter elements that several authors considered false or ideological in the hegemonic thesis of globalisation by foreign authors such as François Chesnais and Brazilians such as Leda Paulani and José Carlos Braga. In addition to the more general theoretical controversies about the relevance of these approaches, there are theoretical and empirical challenges specific to urban studies that trigger ongoing debates on the origin of the capital invested in the urban environment; its main valorisation frontiers; the role of the state and public funds; the different links between production, distribution and consumption in the housing market; as well as to debates including land rent and fictitious capital.

In general, there is recognition that the transformations observed involve state-mediated land speculation through urban redevelopment projects and PPPs, and capture of public funds (through the provision of public land, construction of new infrastructure, credit with subsidised interest, use of budget resources, etc.), in some cases associated with new layers of financial speculation, although without the same

interconnection between real estate and finance that characterised the housing bubble in countries such as the USA and Spain.

## The housing programme, Minha Casa, Minha Vida

One of the most discussed topics in Brazilian urban studies in the last decades has been the housing programme, *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* (My House, My Life – MCMV), which began in 2009 with the goal of building 1 million houses, exceeded in the following phases. MCMV was recognised as the first major programme after the extinction of the housing production machine of the military dictatorship, the National Housing Bank (BNH), in 1986. It was emblematic of the period when the Workers' Party was in charge of the national government in responding to historic mobilisations in favour of the right to the city, made by popular movements, at the same time that it forged alliances with the real estate sector, producing several contradictions that were identified and discussed in several dimensions: political, financial, spatial, economic, social and environmental.

Evaniza Rodrigues, a main leader of the struggle for housing, considers that the programme ended the cycle of urban reform in Brazil, imposing on the social movements and their cooperatives the dispute over urban land with the construction companies in an unprecedented race through vacant lots in Brazilian cities (Rodrigues, 2013).

Much of the scholarly criticism was made in an effort to influence the Workers' Party governments to modify it, without much success in this regard. Others saw evidence in MCMV that the People's Democratic programme not only did not do what it promised but in fact did the opposite, an Anti-Reformation, or a growing privatisation/commercialisation of cities, treated as another branch of business. 'The social face of the democratic-popular Urban Reform was being repressed in favour of market solutions, public–private partnerships and focused poverty management' (Arantes, 2014: 44).

## Brazilian urban warfare

The maintenance of the Brazilian pattern of strong urban social inequality has always depended on strategies of physical, legal or symbolic segregation between classes, races and territories (Villaça, 1998). The elites and the middle class use self-defence systems: walls, railings, guardhouses, private surveillance, cameras, biometric reading, laser beams, armoured cars, etc., with the production of fortified enclaves (Caldeira, 2000). Scholars identified old and new mechanisms of repression, mass incarceration and extermination of the young, Black, peripheral and/or slum populations, characterised as the potential enemies of the white middle classes, that keep the other part of the population under control (Gomes and Laborne, 2018; Silvestre and Melo, 2017). The 'racial socio-spatial segregation' that can be seen as a 'spatial demarcation of racialisation of the social relations' (Santos, 2012: 31) finds new configurations within the current model of urban warfare, defined by Stephen Graham as a growing colonisation of urban space and the everyday life of cities by a military rationality: practices, procedures and assemblies governed by the notion of urban warfare.

More recently, the so-called 'urban insurgency' has also become a target, equally mapped and repressed. In Telles' (2015) hypothesis, in dialogue with Ananya Roy, while the territories of urban poverty sometimes appear as an opportunity to expand the frontiers of the market and financial capital, at other times these must be contained by police repression and forced evictions in their

informal practices and unlawful acts. This dialectic between precarious inclusion and containment of 'governable spaces' establishes a pattern of dispossession and repression that is calibrated by the state-capital as a continuous and low intensity urban war.

The views of the armed administration of social life in Rio de Janeiro are the subject of other studies (see Brito and Oliveira, 2013). The Police Pacification Units (UPPs in their Portuguese acronym) in Rio's favelas are presented by the state with the slogan, 'Security is the gateway to citizenship'. However, what we see is quite the contrary. 'In the absence of social integration due to the depletion of our incomplete modernisation, part of the population is now being violently controlled by the most advanced military logistics and, at the limit, can be considered eliminable' (Barreira and Botelho, 2013: 128). It is not by chance, to use the words of a colonel, that at each occupation and operation urban militarisation proves to be 'the best social insecticide' (Oliveira, 2013: 28).

A young Black woman, resident of the Maré favela, activist and city councillor in Rio de Janeiro, also studied the UPPs in her masters thesis. She became world famous after being brutally murdered in 2018 by the paramilitary militias. Marielle Franco, in the research she conducted four years before her murder, saw the social consequences of the semantic and political slide of the War on Drugs as a 'war on popular spaces ... as a way to justify military occupations permanently' (Franco, 2014). This represents, according to her, the strengthening of the police state, with 'the goal of maintaining the unsatisfied or excluded from the development process, increasingly concentrated in city ghettoes' (Franco, 2014: 27).

Within this police state, militias also operate. The militias, made up of retired military police officers who allegedly provide private urban security services, have internal connections with active police, politicians, arms and drug trafficking, increasingly becoming powerful agents within the state. Their connections go beyond the repression or perpetuation of crime; they increasingly assume control of entire communities and territories, especially in Rio de Janeiro, getting involved in the provision of public services, urban utilities, land grabbing and real estate promotion.

Such a system of communicating links between crime, militia and urban development became nationally public in 2019, with the tragic collapse of two eight-storey buildings and the deaths of 24 people in the Muzema neighbourhood in the west of Rio de Janeiro. The irregular buildings were built in a public area of environmental protection by the real estate arm of the same Office of Crime, with members indicted for the murder of Franco (G1, 2019 News).

## Conclusion

Responding to Brazil's rapid urbanisation in the 20th century and the current challenges that derive from the deindustrialisation process, the young Brazilian university and research system has defined urban studies as one of its most promising and interdisciplinary fields of study, with the emergence of a critical theory with many hypotheses and propositions. In Brazil, urban studies is rarely confined within university walls. It has almost always been related to subjects and issues that have mobilised social organisations, grassroots communities, liberation theology, the church, NGOs and progressive governments. Whether the context is favourable or not, Brazilian urban studies has combined theory and practice in many ways, with a *research–action* praxis that aims to transform the dynamics of uneven and dependent urban development in favour of cities and territories with increased equity, inclusiveness, solidarity and sustainability.

The field of Brazilian urban studies has grown dramatically since the 1980s. In less than 50 years since the first systematic studies, it has become a widely recognised inter-disciplinary academic field, nowadays with around 75 postgraduate programmes affiliated with ANPUR. The production of theses, dissertations, books and articles in urban studies has been intense, forming a highly specialised, diverse and productive system in this research field. This progressive fragmentation of the intellectual work into numerous topics and subtopics – a phenomenon that has affected almost all areas of knowledge – has now been questioned since it can lead to a historical blindness typical of over-fragmented and over-specialised studies.

The conditions of knowledge production are also in dispute. Some researchers have encouraged the deepening of the debate between countries and regions of the Global South, in the field of Decolonisation of Urban Thought and Urban Planning (Vainer, 2014), mobilising authors such as Quijano (2000), Roy (2016), Watson (2009), Lugones (2014), among others. Some scholars and activists have argued that urban studies and the struggle for urban reform should refocus on critical, interdisciplinary hypotheses and political agendas related to a broader project for understanding the problems that affect Brazil, Latin America and the Global South in the 21st century (Brandão et al., 2018). In other words, they advocate the revival of urban theory as a *spatial theory on social transformation*. Today, the partial defeat of progressive politics in Brazil can allow a political and academic shift in urban studies and urban activism in order to update theories and practices for a new historical cycle.

The trajectory of urban studies in Brazil, in its articulation between its urgencies and agencies, mixing social struggle, political debates, empirical research, analytical categories and practical developments, certainly has important contributions to the broad effort to jointly formulate a critical and radical theory on global uneven urbanisation and what it reveals about our permanent challenges about social and urban justice in the new world that lies ahead after the pandemic.

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## Notes

1. This essay presents a point of view and makes analytical choices inescapably, not covering all Brazilian literature and all its regional schools of thought. We have chosen authors

who dialogue with one another, elaborating on the critical theoretical aspects of their work, pertaining to the political economy of underdevelopment and dependence. Broader research is underway and intends to collect the contribution made by scholars in other places and with other theoretical references.

2. In Brazil, we usually adopt other denominations when referring to urban studies, such as 'history and theory of urbanisation' (*história e teoria da urbanização*), 'urban and regional planning' (*planejamento urbano e regional*), 'urbanism' (*urbanismo*); or more disciplinary-focused, such as 'urban sociology', 'urban economy', 'urban geography', etc. But, for the purposes of this article, we will be using the term 'urban studies' to refer to the interdisciplinary field.

3. The field of urban studies grew significantly in the last decades, in both the quantity and variety of postgraduate programmes dedicated to the topic, including architecture and urban planning, demography, geography, history, economy, social sciences and law, among others, making it impractical to cover this wide spectrum of thought. The interdisciplinarity of the field is demonstrated by academic journals and the biannual conference of the National Association of Graduate Programmes and Research in Urban and Regional Planning (ANPUR), which brings together more than 70 postgraduate programmes.

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