

Running Header: Favela Life

Favela Life: Rio's city within a city

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Introduction

According to a Census generated in 2010, about six percent of Brazil's population lives in favelas. According to most homes in Rio's favelas are made from brick and cement and a majority of them having running water and about 99% have electricity (BBC Latin America & Caribbean, 2014). Rio de Janeiro is also home to the largest and most dense favela. There is a very large problem with sanitation in the favelas. Sewage is often mixed with trash and is then poured into the oceans, leading to an even bigger problem. The heavily polluted waters are a problem especially because the Guanabara Bay is one of the venues for sailing in the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Many athletes are concerned for their health and safety because of the pollution in the Bay.

History

Favelas, also known as the "slums" of Brazil, are usually located within or on the outskirts of the country's large cities such as Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo. In general, favelas emerged out of the need for survival of a certain population with very limited resources. The development of Rio's favelas is linked to the late 19th century end of slavery. Jobless and with no place to call home, many of the freed slaves ventured to Rio de Janeiro, which was at the time Brazil's capital. Because there were a large number of families searching for housing and employment, areas that had very little value, were difficult to access, and lacked urban infrastructure, suddenly became desired. The expansion of favelas continued to increase to meet the needs of the poorer population. However, because the favelas were located on the hills, they provoked fear and curiosity, which in turn created ignorance. In 1927, a French architect proposed an idea to make

Rio de Janeiro more beautiful, which involved transferring and removing favela residents. So, by 1972, 20% of Rio de Janeiro's favelas had been vanished. But, that did not stop the growth of others. Over time, favelas began to improve; the flimsy housing was replaced with brick and concrete construction along with tile roofing. The Government realized that eradicating favelas was not a solution because such projects demanded high financial investments and often resulted with destroyed social and economics relationships of residents. On a positive note, eventually, a real estate market developed and the certain favelas were favored over other depending on their location and available services (*The Origins of Favelas*, 2015).

In 1993, the Executive Group for Low Income Settlements was founded. This organization started many housing policies; which included integration to the city which meant that the society had to provide them with the necessary housing infrastructure, including utilities, transportation, education, health, culture, and leisure. A few years later, Rio's City Administration in partnership with private companies launched a project called the Favela Barirro. This \$180 million US dollar project was aimed to create a "slum to neighborhood" effect. The Favela Barirro improved over 150 communities and has been responsible for urbanizing some areas, creating access roads, and basic sewage services. It was also one of the first programs that was able to voice the opinions of the favela population and really identify the needs of the residents. Due to the program's success, many other favelas came about.

Drug trafficking

As a plethora of new favelas sprouted during the early 1980s, Rio began to experience changes in the international drug trade. Due to the US war on drugs, many South American traffickers began seeking new supply routes and markets to distribute drugs. Brazil began a major trade point for drugs that would eventually be transported to places like Europe and the United States. Because the favelas lacked government support, drug gangs were able to easily work their way up to ruling the favelas.

Electricity in favelas

Many times, because residents of the favelas lack basic services, they are forced to resort to unusual solutions to get those services. In the case of electricity, many people steal it from the overhead cables, often times risking electrocution in the process. “Light” is Rio de Janeiro’s local electric company, which distributes electricity to four million people, which makes it the fourth largest Brazilian power company in terms of client base. However, because energy theft is so common in the favelas, Light needed to develop a new solution. The relationship between the power company and the residents of the favelas was based on a lack of trust. Many people were willing to risk their lives to steal electricity but did not take into consideration the consumption levels. The first step taken by the company was to make energy bills affordable. The federal government developed a program in which they helped low income populations by forcing local companies to invest 0.5% of their operating income into “energy efficiency programs”. They made initiatives that would substitute older appliances such as light bulbs or refrigerators for more efficient models. They also educated people on how to manage

their consumption patterns in such a way that would make their electricity bill affordable. Light also decided to invest in new equipment that would avoid future theft but would also monitor the system more efficiently. Light decided to take this opportunity to not only provide a high quality power service, but to also rebuild and regain a strong relationship with its customers. In return, not only did the clients begin to pay for electricity regularly, they also benefitted from new and more efficient home appliances. (The Guardian, 2014)

Sanitation

There is a very strong lack of investment in the favelas, and Rio in general. “Sanitation is seen as a cost, rather than an investment.” According to the Ministry of Cities, thirty percent of Rio de Janeiro’s population is not connected to a proper sanitation system. Even in areas that have a connection, only about half of the sewage waste is entered, untreated, into various waterways. Also, many times cities have “sanitation systems” that are not in proper working condition. Every year, 217,000 Brazilians miss work due to gastrointestinal problems that are linked to poor sanitation. Children also suffer from this problem; studies show that children with access to proper sanitation have an 18% higher education attainment than those without access.

The problem of sewage is worsened by the insufficient trash removal. Often, sewage runoff mixes with trash, which is then washed away into the oceans.

Although more residents are starting to see the severity of this issue, there is still a lack of education of the problem so it continues to act as a major barrier. In fact, a survey was conducted interviewing one thousand and eight Brazilians from 26 major cities

around the country. These individuals were asked which areas they thought were most problematic in their city, sewerage only came in as the sixth most serious problem, falling behind health, security, drugs, education, and transportation.

There have been many unfulfilled promises regarding the improved access to sanitation. A study done on the federal Growth Acceleration Program also known as the PAC, revealed that out of the one hundred and 14 major sanitation projects promised, only seven percent were completed as over December 2011. About 60% of those projects were held off, delayed, or not started. The Brazilian population should not allow for sanitation to be pushed off at the expense of other investments such as stadiums. Stadiums for one are not beneficial to the entire population, as sanitation has been proven to be (Hosek, 2013).

World Cup and Olympic preparation

Brazil's 1.1 million murders over the last thirty years make it the world's seventh most violent country. This same country has been chosen to host the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics. However, unfortunately for Brazil, this means it is almost impossible to hide from the world the deprivation that characterizes much of the favela life. For the duration of these special events, "pacification" and Pacifying Police Units or UPPs are under effect. The term pacification occurs when government officials give drug traffickers that inhabit the favelas a few days to vacate before military police units specializing in urban welfare are sent in. Next, these security forces reclaim the territory, and street-by-street they search the houses, cars, and any suspicious individuals for drugs and weapons. Once drug gangs are no longer a problem, the police are joined by urban

planers, social workers, and other officials that will begin to implement programs dealing with social and economic development. This pacification program is meant to restore order in a city where about 6,000 are killed each year. Also, because the UPPs have established a continuous presence within the favelas, there has been a significant decrease of violent shootouts with the drug gangs (Holtzman, 2014).

Many favela residents report feeling safer and are happy to finally be getting attention for the government. However, many of the pacified favelas are located by wealthier neighborhoods that are in close proximity to tourist locations. The vast majority of favelas remain ignored.

The Guanabara Bay is one of the venues for sailing in the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Many athletes are concerned for their health and safety because of the pollution in the Bay (News, 2015). Because the Olympic sailing competitions will occur in those waters, many people fear that the garbage and pollution will affect the sailing.

Guanabara Bay

About 84% of trash and untreated sewage in the metropolitan area of Rio flows directly into Guanabara Bay, which is set to host a series of Olympic Events in 2016. This leaves many athletes concerned for their health and safety. The Guanabara Bay is heavily polluted with things such as televisions, plastic bags, floating bed frames, and dead animals. Starting the effort are ten “eco-boats” that scoop up trash from the bay’s waters. The cities surrounding the bay heavily contribute to the polluted waters. 18,000 liters of sewage per second are put into the bay because only 34% of Rio’s sewage is treated; the rest is just dumped into the waters. The level of fecal matter in the bay is 189

times higher than the legal limit that is set in the United States! Rio's Environment Institute assesses the beaches weekly and most of them across the bay are not suitable for swimming. Because the Olympic sailing competitions will occur in those waters, many people fear that the garbage and pollution will affect the sailing. The most recent set of governmental promises relating to sanitation is called the Olympic Legacy plan, this is part of Rio's Olympic bid, which was a promise to clean up the Bay. By the start of the Olympic games in 2016, it is the Legacy's goal to have 80% of the sewage treated. Although the size of the problem is very large, the authorities seem to be taking their time implementing measures that have already been approved. As of 2014, only one of the seven river treatment units planned has been build thus far.

The scale of the cleanup operation the Brazilian authorities must accomplish is extremely large. The Guanabara Bay, once a body of water boasting with biodiversity, is now filled with rubbish and sewage that flow into the bay through its 55 rivers. However, most of these rivers are now dead and are heaps of trash. Such piles of trash that are close to Rio's International Airport are known for giving off a foul smell that welcomes people arriving to the city (Carneiro, 2014).

Rocinha

Rocinha, located in Rio de Janeiro, is one of the most famous and most densely populated favela. The community is home to anywhere between two hundred and two hundred and fifty thousand people who are cramped in a landscape of only 0.80 square miles. This community consists of residents residing in small shacks stacked one on top of another, sometimes ranging anywhere from seven to eleven stories tall. Most houses in

Rocinha have basic sanitation, which includes plumbing and electricity. In 2000, Rocinha ranked sixth worst out of one hundred and 26 regions within Rio de Janeiro on the city's Human Development Index. That same year it was determined that a minimum of 6,000 residents of Rocinha suffer from at least one health related disability. This is surprising considering Rocinha is located between two of Brazil's wealthiest neighborhoods, Sao Conrado and Gavea. The educational status of Rocinha's residents is also very low. On average, residents have only 4.1 years of formal education, with less than one percent of the adult population having earned a degree above high school. Jobs in Brazil that pay a livable wage are strictly for citizens that have higher levels of formal education (*About Rocinha*, 2015).

Rocinha began taking shape when poor black migrants began to occupy a sugar cane and coffee plantation on the outskirts of Rio. As surrounding neighborhoods began to grow, there was a high demand for cheap labor to build houses, apartments, buildings, schools, etc. Eventually, this led to the rapid growth of favelas in Rio because there was a lack of affordable housing options. The 1980s marked a time period in which Rocinha along with other favelas located in Rio de Janeiro began to change drastically. In terms of infrastructure, there were two big changes for Rocinha. Rocinha began to expand mainly upwards because horizontal expansion was not an option. Secondly, as residents felt less threatened by forced eviction they started to invest more into their property, which meant houses, and businesses in Rio's favelas went from being constructed of wood to being built with bricks and mortar (Andrade 2002, pg. 75; Leitao 2010).

The 1980s were a crucial time for Rocinha and Rio de Janeiro in general. During this time, organized crime began to power most of Rio's favela communities. Violence

also increased and many favela residents became influenced by the local gangs.

Rocinha's largest residential association became very compliant to drug traffickers on one side and police and corrupt politicians on the other. This created many problems because they had to please local drug gangs for fear of their lives but at the same time wanted to win over the likes of the police and politicians. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Rocinha became famous for the largest and rowdiest parties in the city that many middle class Brazilians frequently attended. The rapid expansion of Rio's favela drug trade was largely due to growing Colombian drug trafficking. Because the traffickers needed new routes and markets, the abandoned favelas were perfect locations for Rio's new and expanding drug trade.

Due to Rocinha's enormous size, it is sub-divided into separate neighborhoods. In one neighborhood there is a wide range of stores and services, as well as better quality residential living areas. On the other hand, in areas such as Vila Macega, communities live in wooden shacks in extreme poverty. In September 2006, Rocinha became an official tourist attraction of Rio. Becoming a tourist's attraction will increase social integration between the city and the community because it will help dissipate the myth that Rocinha is an exclusively violent place, and therefore allow bigger investments from the public as well as private sectors. Today, Rocinha has many luxuries that regular cities have. The growing favela has fast food restaurants, cable TV, radio and internet signals, cyber cafes, nightclubs, gyms, health clinics, post offices, banks, public schools, and community daycare centers. The community also has their own television and radio station. Rocinha is home to an eleven-story building with fifty-six apartments called the

Empire State. The demand to live in that building is so high that there is a waiting list to rent an apartment. (*The Origins of the Favelas*, 2015)

The Brazilian government is attempting to improve the quality of life in the favela with the Growth Acceleration Program. This 1.7 million dollar project has funded a variety of different projects all aimed to improve the favela. Some projects included painting the apartments in bright pastels and surrounding them by parks and playgrounds, a sports complex, and a cultural center and library. The government wants people to think that they did it for the good of the people living in the favela, however, some think it was aimed more for tourists. Another project was done by a French company that consists of a steel track that winds around the top of the favela. It could cost the state more than three hundred million dollars and would provide visitors with panoramic views of the favela. The community is divided between businessmen and the overwhelming majority of residents who do not see a need for it. Brazil's government is known for giving attention and cash to poor communities when it is politically beneficial for them then abandoning them.

Tourism

For decades, many of Rio's favelas were off limits, but today, some are safe and welcome tourists, offering them a unique view of the city. Tours offer people a glimpse of another side of Brazilian life. "We want to show that the favela is not a place where only criminals live. Most people there are decent and work hard...and most important of all, they have this happiness, this warmth that enchants the tourists." (Phillips, 2013).

Conclusion

While many favelas may be perceived as strictly violent with nothing to offer, these vibrant cities really are “cities within cities.” The unique favela culture along with the vibe and energy is one of a kind. Although there are many downsides to favela living such as the amount of pollution it contributes to society and the amount of violence that occurs, favelas have come a long way. There is still a tremendous amount of work to be done in and around the Rio de Janeiro. The Government and the citizens both need to focus on improving their country both efficiently and effectively.

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