



INSTITUTO
JOÃO E MARIA
ALEIXO

A LETTER FROM MARÉ, RIO DE JANEIRO
- A MANIFESTO FROM THE PERIPHERIES:

THE PERIPHERIES AND THEIR PLACE IN THE CITY

On March 2017, the International of Peripheries held its first International Seminar, at Maré, Rio de Janeiro. The Seminar's major goal was to build a convergent outlook - opened to adherences and contributions from organizations, social movements, collectives and those who took part on this event - over the peripheries and their place in the contemporary society.

To build such convergent outlook, is no trivial effort. We live in a social world, as it is widely known, dominated by representations from the peripheries - and from their residents - based on stigmas that hinder a global and comprehensive understanding of the social, economic, political, environmental and cultural realities from these territories. Since the imaginary is a fundamental element for the institution of the real, stereotyped representations from where the city's most impoverished social groups live - the peripheries - sway, very frequently, public policies and private social investments. Such policies and investments, apart from not meeting the residents' real demands, contribute to reinforce processes of material expropriation and symbolic appropriation, which undermine collective strategies built by groups from peripheral territories, meant to perform their right to the city.

The stigmatization dynamic takes place in both dominant countries (hegemonic) and subordinate countries (non-hegemonic), as part of the prevailing economic and sociopolitical order. Their assumptions are sociocentric: the standards used for qualifying the peripheries are, by and large, referred to at urban theories and by cultural/aesthetic assumptions, which are entailed to specific classes and hegemonic social groups (dominants). They consecrate what a healthy, pleasant and adequate environment is, so as to fulfil the functions a city must perform within the scope of the civilizatory model in progress. They likewise define a specific concept of order and the so-called adequate forms of social behavior and acting in the world.

In so doing, notions of absence, lack and homogeneity are strengthened as elements of reductionist perceptions and hierarchical classifications of the peripheries in relation to the other spaces of the city. It is taken for granted what the periphery would not be, as opposed to an idealized model of city. This assumption is based on cultural and colonizer educative standards, which are, generally built, by the most enriched parts of the population. From this standpoint, peripheries are designed as precarious spaces, whose individuals have their historicity denied, territories are not acknowledged as legitimate, and residents are, not rarely, treated with an exotic way (the non-civilization, quintessential).



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However, peripheries exist as part of the relations with institutions from the social world, especially the State and the formal Market. Bearing this tension in mind, peripheries are largely composed of types of occupation that either do not follow the hegemonic standards defined by the State or the Market, or, when built by these entities, peripheries are materialized as from a perspective of subalternity and precariousness - that oust identities, practical inventiveness and savvies that are built in peripheries.

As a result - over the years and over the process of the social life regulation, which is established by the State - settlements found in peripheries, have been considered, due to their morphological characteristics and social composition, as expressions of illegality and/or nonconformity to the moral and aesthetics references, claimed by the hegemonic groups that hold the political and economic power in the cities.

The proponents of this letter refuse the reductionist, stereotyped and disqualifying view of peripheral territories. In effect, the plurality of social, economic and cultural dynamics and forms, challenges the comprehension of what a periphery is, and therefore challenges the definition of broad parameters designed to orient further readings.

In spite of being aware of the heterogeneous condition and the distinct form-functions peripheries worldwide speak for, we can sustain several elements that commonly prevail among them. We assert that every periphery comprises an inhabitancy in the urban space, by building its urban tissue and being, therefore, integrated to the city. Accordingly, peripheries are central elements of the city - they give the city - identity, meaning and humanity.

For this reason, the definition of periphery must not be built upon what would not be found there, as opposed to the dominant model of the social and territorial dynamic, nor from the physical distance in relation to a hegemonic center. A periphery must be acknowledged for the set of day-to-day practices that materialize a genuine organization of the social tissue, which has its own inventive potentials, differentiated forms of occupying spaces, and counter-hegemonic communicative arrangements - which are a living part of every territory.

It is, therefore - as from the tenacity of the periphery's morphology; the acknowledgment of the practices established by its residents and by the objective conditions of its social life - that attainable references of a fair inhabitation that comprises the necessary conditions for the well-being - must be established.

A periphery is a full and complex place, where groups come together because of values, practices, experiences, memories and social position - sustaining their identity as a strength for accomplishing their lives.



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The proponents of this Letter consider, as an outcome, that Peripheries are territories part of the city, partly or totally characterized by the following challenges that their residents have been facing:

- The employment of male/female workers in subordinate professional functions of the market;
- High unemployment, underemployment and informality levels in work relations, specially among male and female youth;
- A high concentration of groups living in exploitation and oppression conditions - namely black, indigenous and gypsy people; refugees; religious and ethnic minorities, and other discriminated groups. These groups seek to preserve, in varying degrees, their practices of cultural identity. Frequent occurrence of situations of violence in public spaces - partly resulting from strategies on a war on drugs, waged by the State, which arose out of warlike operations carried out both by the State's security forces and criminal groups;
- Unequal gender relations that reveal daily different types of violence against women;
- Widespread occurrence of rights violation and prejudice against the LGBT population - specially against transgenders - culminating in cases of murder of this segment;
- High levels of lethal violence against youths, with a strong ethnical and racial profile;
- Male and female residents' formal education levels below the average, as opposed to the urban space;
- Territories that are subjected to processes of degradation and environmental expropriation, which are imposed by actions emanated by public and private institutions.

We also sustain that these territories feature a set of potentials, like:

- Youth and child population as a source of inventiveness, thus broadening references of demands and public actions towards granting rights;
- Neighborhood and kinship relations influenced by an intense sociability, along with solidarity and reciprocity ties. Such relations give strong importance to common spaces as a place of sociocultural experiences;
- Multiplicity of forms, means and approaches for cultural, artistic and performing arts, which invent, renovate and update urban aesthetic narratives;
- Meaningful and frequent domestic, solidary and popular economic actions;
- Alternative forms of providing services and urban, educational, economic, real estate and other urban infra-structure, brought about as an answer against the insufficiency, absence and/or inadequacy of the State's and formal market investments in such areas;



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- High self-regulation level of the public space, carried out by both male and female residents. It asserts experiences and struggle for autonomy;
- Creative proposals for solidary urban solutions regarding inhabitation matters, and undertaking of public services and urban infra-structure of common use. Such actions must be considered as a reference to the urban space; Meaningful life experiences shared among groups from different nationalities, ethnicities and religiosities - thus making peripheries, a place of resource and shelter for sharing multicultural and multiethnic practices - without taking for granted the existing intolerance and situations of conflict;
- Strong female protagonism over fundamental matters, like propagating ancient savvies and developing educational, political, cultural and economic actions;
- Territories of knowledge inventiveness, whose complexity must be broadly acknowledged and be given the due value by the society as a whole;
- Presence of participative models, collectives, social movements and organizations struggling for the assertion and invention of rights, which altogether broaden references of demands and public actions for democratizing the city.

To understand the city, taking into account its plurality, is to acknowledge every territory's specificity, and, likewise, is to sustain the citizenly condition and the protagonism of each male and female dwellers. To this end, it is essential to acknowledge that - residents - are the preeminent individuals capable of narrating their social and cultural practices, which are a symbol of resistance, reinvention and concrete forms of assertion and invention of rights - which must be, in turn, largely guaranteed by means of public policies. It is a principle of fully validating the social life, making it democratically oriented and built in accordance with the legitimate uses of these territories by popular groups.

Such principle can only be guaranteed as from a construction of a radical democratic experience towards the Right to the City.