
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Disrupting the Old Periphery: Alternative Media, Inequality and Counter-Mapping in Brazil

Helton Levy

City University, London, GB
heltonvlevy@gmail.com

Media discourse on the *periphery* in Brazil has historically mirrored the country's socioeconomic divides. The periphery used to be where precarious dwellings predominate: a way of 'behaviour' of the poor, their social class, or an aspect of one's appearance. Semi-structured interviews conducted with alternative media producers based across the country have produced insights into many attempts to change a derogatory sense of the periphery through counter-mapping initiatives. Producers have geotagged their presence at the city's centre, contested the neutrality of maps, and appropriated surveillance images in semi-public spaces. While not an exhaustive exercise, this paper sees counter-mapping used to explore four distinct communicative strategies around the ethnic/racial divide, the cultural divide, the discourse of mobility, and the raising of awareness about emerging intersectional issues.

Keywords: Brazil; alternative media; counter-mapping; international development; periphery; digital media; decolonial

In Brazil, the word *periphery* derives from colonial tradition, an epitome of the country's under-urbanised, violent city outskirts (Russell-Wood, 1998). The boundaries of the periphery are those of the country's inequality; it is where opportunities are lacking, a place of poor public services (Marques & Bichir, 2001) and where the local population is subject to threats from the police (Abramovay, 1999, 46; Souza & Sinder, 2007). The periphery has mirrored the idea of social debt that emerges not only between the centre and the suburbs of major metropolises, as represented by the *favelas*, but between the affluent south and impoverished north of the country (Navarro, 1994; Henriques, 2000; Pedrozo, 2013, Gohn, 1985). This paper invests in understanding the use of counter-mapping strategies as a way of disrupting some of the derogatory ideas that stem from the commonsense notion of the periphery. By interviewing alternative media producers, I verified the extent to which they could map locations and attitudes with the specific intention of challenging the boundary-setting that has embedded ideas of class, race, and culture that were harmful and stereotypical toward the periphery.

To be fair, mainstream media organisations have deliberately started to criticise such inferior stereotypes, with soap operas increasingly depicting new realities and dimensions of life in distant neighbourhoods and *favelas* (Kamel, 2004). Even though this ‘renovation’ clashes with the absence of new forms of framing, authorship here appears incipient but incomplete (Bentes, 2009). In public discourse, the periphery has maintained the stigma of embodying ‘joy and sadness’ for the rest of the city (Souza & Barbosa, 2005) or is marginalised, at worst a place criminalised (Benglase, 2007; Jaguaribe, 2014). Drawing on Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), the transformation of Brazil’s periphery has largely depended on groups of dwellers, media producers, and activists ultimately to forge a discourse or become a model of bottom-up political participation (Gay, 2010; Fleury, 2014). Indeed, there are incomplete episodes of a politicised discourse that briefly populated Brazil’s communicational ecology from below (Kucinski, 1991; Woitowicz, 2009), which forms a foundation for a reconfiguration of this ecology in which counter-mapping is a less-explored possibility.

In a time of growing internet access among impoverished communities (Davis et al, 2017; Nemer, 2017), this paper advances the hypothesis of having the population that resides in this stigmatised periphery, pinpointing a shift through new spatial appropriations. It is not the case of analysing their *use* of technology, but the repertoire that emerges from it, which serves here as elements that can attest to such a change. I place this repertoire in contrast to the past of an external ‘gaze’ at the periphery, so as to reinforce the case for a critical counter-mapping. The context of past interactions between the centre (namely, sectors based in cities such as Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo) and the periphery helps ground this paper’s approach away from subjective impressions. A set of persistent vocabulary, images, and descriptions have stemmed from the media, but also from writers, and from state representatives. The final reversal in this hierarchy of versions of the periphery presented through communications depends for sure on a major overhaul of the regulatory architecture of Brazil’s media environment (Paiva et al, 2015). However, this brief sample enables an alternative reading of producers’ interventions, as this paper later argues, one that places this new repertoire as reconstellating the periphery around new themes.

Past ways of looking at the periphery

One of the earliest mentions of a geographic periphery in Brazil appears in *Os Sertões* (*The Hinterlands*), a mix of reportage and chronicle written by author and journalist Euclides da Cunha (1866–1909). Cunha decided to travel and tell a story of social tragedy in *Canudos*, a remote village in northeast Brazil. The 1903 ‘report’ describes some of Brazil’s most isolated areas, which have lived entirely in isolation for centuries. The narrative focuses on the year-long war against the Brazilian State that ended in the massacre of 25,000 people (Ventura, 2012). Arguably, Cunha has contributed to a limited perception of the *sertanejo*, the dweller of this sparse and arid country, as a ‘wild’, ‘underdeveloped’ individual, when compared to the modern, ‘civilised’ man from the coast (Lima, 2009). Cunha’s narrative appeared eventually to be a significant achievement (Bernucci, 2002: 53).

The village of *Canudos* has continued as a metaphor for all sorts of social tragedies in Brazil’s periphery, some of which echo again in the 2000s as a reproducible discourse (Bernucci, 2002: 113). Optimistically, Žižek (2004) argued that *Canudos* serves an archetype for visualising contemporary *favelas* in the sense of anticipating a ‘model of emancipation’, in which such communities end up refusing to accept ‘the existing space of the state’, therefore, resisting it thanks to the isolation and inequality of the community that ultimately is the government’s responsibility. Laclau (2014: 178) strongly disagrees, attacking Žižek’s argument as ‘pure delirium’. For Laclau, *favelas* are ‘shanty towns of passive poverty submitted to the action of non-political criminal gangs’.

This duality of what the periphery means has more nuanced observations in Brazilian novels of the twentieth century. Lima Barreto (1881–1922), another early Brazilian writer, penned detailed descriptions of Rio de Janeiro, based on the life of the poor in suburbia, those out of ‘the Carioca society’ radar. Barreto, a writer of African descent, showed much sensitivity in highlighting Rio de Janeiro’s periphery, already subject to violence and poverty (Neto & Grande, 2011: 233). Many of his short stories had titles that suggest a familiarity with periphery-based classes, those people who go to the centre to sell their products. An example is the case of the *muambeiro*, the individual who sells cheap clothes on the streets, a traditional class-marker to the present day. In a way, these stories and characters mirror the extent to which the periphery proved to be an ‘impediment’ to the development of cities such as Rio de Janeiro. Rio fulfilled an early expectation of becoming a ‘glorious capital’ by the carioca elite seeking inspiration from France (Needell, 1987: 176), just as *favelas* prevented the city from becoming the ‘hyper-civilised metropolis’ (Fischer, 2008: 214).

On the one hand, this gaze directed at the ‘periphery’ has been the witness to the evils of concentrated poverty in the urban landscape; on the other, it has led to the repetition of a stereotype among dwellers and outside communities. The problem in this process is not at having social issues define the periphery, but the degree to which this image has prevented any form of ownership or public recognition of peripheral voices (whoever one conceives they are) raising questions about a deficit in democracy that this broken interlocution between periphery and centre causes (Navarro, 1994; Martins, 2015). Since the 1970s, there has been a series of mediators, but these people or groups have barely inhabited the periphery or suffered its constraints. The Catholic Church, for instance, had its bishops and priests brokering dialogue between the periphery and mainstream society. The late bishop Dom Hélder Câmara went under the name of the so-called ‘bishop of the favela’ (Pino, 1997).

Where the periphery has been central to society’s dubious comfort with inequality, channelling ideological values ‘strategically’ sold to local populations (Souza, 2009: 9), discussions on ‘access’ to such communities must change as the internet becomes popular among periphery dwellers (Pedrozo, 2013). Just as mass media representations have not been able to advance any model of citizenship besides the foregrounding of social issues and the cry for public services (Alde, 2004), residents in the periphery have refused an image of their community solely based on shortcomings (Marques & Bichir, 2001). In fact, the periphery has appeared as the locus of genuine belonging for many (Reis, 2000; Telles, 2004; Spink & Spink, 2006; Silva, 2011). The main question remaining is the degree to which mediatised boundaries could query this list of paradigms; it could reverse, for instance, one’s conception that the *favela* dweller is the *natural* police target or the invader of the ‘public’ space (Penglase, 2007, 2014). The periphery could reverse simplistic media portraits judged as too harsh or too soft in comparison to ‘reality’, portraits that invariably results in little self-identification from spectators (La Pastina et al., 2014). Alternatives to this binary perspective emerged from recent political and economic transformation, as I shall discuss next.

Present ways of looking at the periphery

In the current decade, scholars started to contemplate the peripheries as cultural ‘factories’ (Bentes, 2009; Nascimento, 2012); locations that could attract sufficient interest to receive ‘visitors’ and host media production initiatives (Martins, 2015; Davis, 2015). As unprecedented images started to emerge on social media directly from the streets of distant neighbourhoods (Freitas, 2008; Freitas & Espírito Santo, 2015), the real challenge remained, when considering the hierarchical framing limiting the potential of these images. For instance, instead of showing the ‘centre’ first, the periphery would appear at the beginning of TV shows, but in a screed of reports displaying graphic violence broadcast nationally (Becker, 2009: 50).

Equally, there lies a risk of 'generalisation' in the conception of these communities, as Licia Valladares has warned, that the media have 'constructed' imagined *favelas* without addressing complexity and difference of otherwise separated localities (Valladares, 1978, 2000). For example, feature films depicting violence such as the *City of God*, which shows drug dealing and crime in *favelas*, have arguably exchanged the indifference of the twentieth century with fear and voyeurism (Penglase, 2007; Jaguaribe & Hetherington, 2004; Perlman, 2010; Jaguaribe, 2014; Larkins, 2015). Current ways of looking at the periphery are, in sum, based on new binaries of dehumanisation and combat.

By 2010, reports of an 'emerging middle class', or 'Class C' folded into news of economic improvements, as the press strove for a fresh image of the periphery (Pinheiro, 2012). In some respects, the 'culture of the periphery' could, deceptively, appear simplified or sanitised (Freitas, 2010); instead of voyeurs or victims from mainstream society or the government, dwellers were clearly shown as 'protagonists' (Grijó, 2014). No matter how temporary that image of a Class C could be – boosted during a time of excessive consumerism – it changed the status quo of having only good or bad media representations (Rêgo, 2014).

Hence, the search for responsive approaches to the issue of representation of the periphery found in *counter-mapping* is not returning to the path of considering what are fair or unfair media representations. It is, rather, about flagging up new locations and challenging the perception of stagnation and the remoteness of the periphery (as in Osório, 2013; Grohmann, 2014); to what extent could producers relocate their struggles and transfer the specificity of social issues to channels with greater visibility? In the face of debates on twenty-first-century city life taking place in them (Sassen, 2006; Jacobs, 2002), to what degree could the periphery actively engage in new agendas that were removed from its past political constructions?

Following what Martín-Barbero (1998) argued about the importance of vigilant South American grassroots media, I sought out producers that could attest to this process of the 'externalisation' of the periphery, to the point in which they intended to 'move discourses out of subjects' (Adams, 2009: 154), leveraging their stories and narratives up to central locations. The expectation of this kind of shift sums up my take on 'counter-mapping' as a transcendence beyond a physical or computerised cartography, creating or publicising locations based on new viewpoints, on reassessments (as in Wainwright & Bryan, 2009; Roth, 2009). 'Counter-mapping' here emerges as a practice that stems from collaborative efforts among media producers based in the periphery, who share 'tacit' knowledge and a familiar context (Lawson & Laurenz, 1999).

To locate media producers¹ that were able to mobilise these narratives and transmit them to their communities, I first created a purposive sampling of media producers based on seven Brazilian states.² They were dwellers of suburbia that fitted the criteria mentioned in the introduction. Then, I selected testimonials from the same number of men and women (n = 20), later collecting examples of their productions so I could better illustrate their outputs and discourse. These semi-structured interviews had as first scripted questions issues relating to past representations of the periphery, and the extent to which producers accepted or refuted these images. Conducting a discourse analysis, I followed Wetherell and Potter (1988) by collecting the producers' 'repertoire' and by dividing their responses into acceptances and rebuttals of these images, then interpreting, separately which other images they introduce.

While I did not fully brief interviewees on the theoretical framework that informs my understanding of the history of Brazil's periphery, my questions sought to learn if they thought of their neighbourhoods as 'the periphery' and what was the significance of it in the media. I mentioned in these conversations notions of 'periphery' and 'centre' and left them to identify the potential 'boundaries' of their practice and life. My discourse analysis captures as 'cases'

these stories, whether as responses to mass media controversies or as media coverage in its own right, and in both cases I applied an idea 'counter-mapping' according to Jacobs' (2002) notion of 'de-colonial' mapping, to the extent of unmaking hegemonic discursive constructions. I have selected and analysed passages that corresponded to any attempt to strategize 'cultural, economic, and racial reassessments', that, to my purpose, could actualise the image of the periphery. Moreover, I have placed this repertoire in contrast to similar notions of the periphery found in previous literature. In brief, my analysis and interpretation has sought to extract conclusions to the extent that these findings contradicted (or did not) the representation of the periphery according to the mainstream, understanding as additions those that related to the problem of locations, connected to the use of new media. I understood these propositions as a form of 'counter-mapping'. I discuss the results next, across the range found, as revealed in the interviews.

Dislocating the periphery to the centre

Working with a relatively young cohort, with 57.4% of 20–30 year olds and 36.2% of 30–40 year old, I found that 48% of them were only producing 'online' media, while working with other platforms (print, radio, conferences). Most producers worked on a voluntary basis (55.6%), representative of sixteen Brazilian states, with most of them having migrated from poorer zones into big metropolises such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Those who were migrants argued that their relocation helped them create a straightforward identification with the margins of the cities they came to adopt. In that sense, there was no 'native' prejudice in them, so they felt free to visit and engage with the periphery. Furthermore, all of them agreed that they lived 'in the periphery'. Fewer preferred to frame that as 'taking part in the periphery'. When asked to locate the 'periphery', producers mentioned the territory of 'poor suburbia' as an example, but their repertoire also comprised of a periphery that is part of an 'occupied' centre, as I shall discuss.

The *Ocupe Estelita* movement has encapsulated much of this ambiguity between 'living in', 'representing', or 'taking part' in the periphery. Their protest started when a group of real estate developers had received authorisation to demolish a group of historic warehouses in Recife's historical centre to build a new set of skyscrapers that would destroy the city's century-old vistas. Such approval would jeopardise the geographical 'centre' that occupying demonstrators had (from such postcodes) made their temporary homes. They reversed not only the traditional 'position' of the periphery, but also pushed for further awakening of mainstream commentators to the degradation of the centre. One of the groups had positioned itself as member of a 'peripheral' state in the Brazilian federation. As most of the country's largest media organisations are based and focused around the southeast, the periphery there was no longer the suburb, nor only the north or the northeast, they wanted to transfer the movement into a feeling that related to a range of local issues, as this producer explained:³

The Ocupe Estelita was a fantastic experience. We had national-level artists denouncing it in a more comprehensive way than the 'independent' media [from São Paulo]. Of course, they would not have a representative in Recife or someone who would produce quality material over there. Overall, I thought that their participation was minimal during the Ocupe Estelita. (Producer 13)⁴

This 'coverage' appears in finely edited videos, coupled with rap or hip-hop tracks. This joint 'claim' of ownership of the city centre appeared to be strategic for the many cultural collectives from the periphery. When asked why that specific part of the town, they pointed to the centre as an 'obvious' location for them to meet, as many of them were living in distant

neighbourhoods. My question to producers, then, was how did they intend to fight the threat from predatory real estate development, especially if that problem was reaching out to city's outskirts as well (as appeared to be the case during the country's recent economic boom).

Those directly involved with the *Ocupe Estelita* mentioned other stories involving 'gentrification.' Those who were not involved showed less familiarity with these issues. In short, the concept of 'gentrifying' is, for them, yet to settle in peoples' minds. As a phenomenon in Brazil, it is not really a big agenda,⁵ so the definition of gentrification available amid producers supported their 'counter-mapping'. Many of such ideas stemmed from stories heard during social movement meetings or from YouTube videos. All producers were said to use such videos as 'benchmarking' so they could focus on issues beyond the 'acquisition' of property as a solution.

The widespread 'eviction' that affects low-income families has also explained the recent relocation of periphery-based producers to the centre of big metropolises. 'Counter-mapping' here has consisted in assessing central areas according to a risk of eviction, bringing them to prominence. From 'non-newsworthy' areas, producers started to campaign to make the name of these locations stick in the public's minds. To that purpose, they created labels and tagged places using other well-known names to title their stories. During the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, they mentioned 'golden medal' places, 'bronze medal' places, depending on forced evictions that had already happened. A producer from the city of Fortaleza mentioned one case involving the city's beachfront neighbourhoods, which has, for decades, housed large apartments, and which became a traditional symbol of wealth in coastal cities. These areas appeared as the top priority for these groups acting in the northeast, as this producer explained their tactics:

The city hall had a project for a certain area. It was a gentrifying project because it wanted to raise the [land] value. After realising that they [local dwellers] could come to face eviction, we started recording [a film]. When we got this grant, then we realised we had a lot of material about the beachfront [homeless] people, then those were things that we did with no need of people giving us money too, and this kind of idea was intertwining with other things. (Producer 12)

To that purpose, a large share of producers have sourced their counter-maps from administrative proceedings. City hall inspections in downtown estates, for example, helped them to create assessments to raise the awareness of both legalised and undocumented residents. A smaller part of them has taken another creative approach. They invested in producing dwellers' photographs, in which they documented the real conditions of living in blogs and described what the current pressures were, published alongside interviews. These kinds of content also illustrated customised 'maps', with the aim of organising against gentrification. Their final goal was to stop all other 'legal' proceedings that could jeopardise these dwellers' tranquillity.

Mídia Periférica is a blog based on the outskirts of Salvador. Authors have appeared particularly vocal against revoked authorisations for events to happen downtown. For the periphery, the ban on cultural practices taking place at the city's centre was especially harmful. The ban included music such as hip-hop, rap concerts, but also those tied to Afro-Brazilian religious rituals. When drawing the boundaries of these prohibitions, they exposed the fear of mainstream society of certain personal attitudes and wardrobes, frequently likened to those of criminals whenever youth of the locale mingled with other classes in semi-public or public spaces. In Belo Horizonte, further south, these same producers reported on the prohibition of the so-called Duel of MCs:

BELO HORIZONTE MUNICIPALITY CHARGES 33 THOUSAND REALS PER YEAR FOR HOSTING THE MCS' DUEL, EVEN [WHEN] IT [IS] TAKING PLACE IN PUBLIC SPACE: An arbitrary development comes boycotting important events for urban culture and hip-hop in Belo Horizonte. Since 2007, the *Família de Rua* collective was 'de boa' [in good will] promoting its beautiful weekly gatherings, the MCs' duel and the *Família de Rua* of Skate, under the Santa Tereza Viaduct, with no trouble or damage [to] the city. (*Mídia Periférica*, 30/03/2014)

The extent to which gentrification and prohibitions have become part of producers' repertoire shows how the interests and images of the periphery have shifted from isolation to the conquest of formerly 'abandoned' city centres. Producers claimed that these central areas are also 'for the periphery,' as they sought for City Hall's data to focus on periodic updates and inform society of what they saw as 'expulsions' of the poor from the centre to the 'margins' of the city. They argued that relocation to the 'periphery' should no longer be accepted as an inevitable fate. It was not because they refused suburbia, but because they started to interpret their movements as a 'confinement', as a political gesture to reduce their contesting power, moving voices and actors away from an embellished centre. In the next section, I discuss other attempts to relocate the periphery *to* the centre, focusing on the inclusion of cultural traits and art.

Forging a new repertoire

For many producers, counter-mapping demonstrates the 'presence' of the periphery in the centre and also relates to the preservation of arts and crafts. For them, it is necessary to place peripheral expression at locations where social classes mingle, and the broader public can really see them. For this reason, they have created routes, maps and geotags for artistic practices seen as 'marginal', such as graffiti. These resources can approximate to the criminalised *pichação*, or illegal tagging of public buildings, or to other practices that received no acceptance in the past, such as hip-hop, skateboarding and certain music genres. They argue for the need to forge a mutually understandable language, between the periphery and the centre, which is vital to the extent that these arts can 'soften social divides', as this producer claimed in respect for their keen eye for culture:

We are concerned with marginalised stories, both in the mainstream media and in society. We look at social movements, marginalised culture, or the issue of housing. We seek to portray issues that are not visible in the mainstream media. Our truest need is for a narrative. The one used [in the mainstream] is not the one with which we can feel represented. We think that these people are agents and they have no voice in the mainstream media. (Producer 07)

This critique of the mainstream's inability to deal with 'the voice of the periphery' dwells on its inability to 'soften' as opposed to 'reinforce' divides. I would separate this issue into two levels. First, the periphery notes the lack of 'fairer' frames, that is, to show dwellers at their favourite spots, neighbourhoods or activities and ambitions, and to prioritise transcendence over stories of hardship. These readings could finally 'show' who they are to broader populations. Secondly, stories of racial prejudice, gentrification, concentrated wealth, and inadequate public services in the periphery has not received appropriate attention insofar as they sounded as being a natural state of affairs in the periphery, therefore 'no news'. Counter-mapping consequently is aimed at stopping the naturalization of vocabulary that glamourizes extreme wealth, such as *mansão* (mansion) or of images reinforcing geographical barriers that still exist for many

of the dwellers, such as the *centro*, the popular expression *bairro de rico*, which is literally, the 'neighbourhood of the rich'.

Their idea is to sensitise the audience by challenging such terms, while working up an identity that derives from such ironies and slangs, subverting its prior derogatory meaning. In other examples, geographical references (terms such as the *morro*, or hill get a completely different use) to articulate a permanent escalation through politicised vocabularies. A few producers have coupled their *favela* condition to other statements (such as where they are from or what they are doing). The same is true for terms such as *baixada*, the lowlands; from signalling exclusion and detachment, it now becomes used as a new adjective. This usage is common to many media outlets, as this producer relates:

The city is built and rebuilt during all times; whether by the hands of politicians, by the hand of real estate developers, or by builders, one rebuilds the city all the time. The people in these [peripheral] environments also go on rebuilding things. They come down from the hill; they live in the *baixada*, but they want to have their space; they want to show they are there. They do this in many ways, they do it in tattoos, skating, and these are urban things, and this is what is drawing us to them. (Producer 13)

In this way, expressions such as hill or *morro* have both left the field of poverty and marginality to express a deeper intent to disclose someone's origins and politicise someone's viewpoint point, their legitimacy. Most producers have resorted to this emphasis in vocabulary so they could avoid mentioning 'the periphery' as a matter of geography only, in order to convey other subjective limitations, as this producer sees them, those preventing access to the job market:

One of the most interesting things in our coverage and our involvement over the years is to understand why many of them [inhabitants of the periphery] are out of [the] job market, totally out. Why? Because the fact that they live where they do, makes it unfeasible for someone to trust them. Therefore, they are not only marginalised, but at the margins of the job market, and of any possibility of aspiring to a job that is dignifying and not an exploitative one. (Producer 42)

The *Rio on Watch* website has produced the Map of Racial Segregation of Rio de Janeiro (**Figure 1**). This image was another effort to sharpen the perception of inequality in the city,



Figure 1: Map of Racial Segregation in Rio de Janeiro, as it appeared on the Rio on Watch website (screenshot).

in which maps of wealthy neighbourhoods appeared in order to denounce what producers saw as the 'excessive whiteness' of these locations. While coupling maps with notorious cases of class-based racism that happens on the streets, the so-called 'disproportional' number of white dwellers in upper-class areas led producers to frame this divide as *segregation*, another strategy to call more attention to the issue. Even though this term has sometimes meant the state-led division of communities, (as in United States or South Africa for example), no state-sponsored racial segregation has ever existed in Brazil.

The visualisation of the Rio de Janeiro map according to the lines of this so-called segregation seeks to blur what is the government-led perception of normality; this framing seen as the 'refusal' of these neighbourhoods to house non-White, periphery-like dwellers. These conclusions appear alongside the 'data', but confirms an alternative interpretation to that of the original survey. In short, this new map assumes that the role of 'delimiting' the areas of the centre demonstrates the racial economics of Rio de Janeiro.

Similar to this design, other crowdsourced maps flag up a series of on-going issues, such as inexistent sewage treatment, poor litter collection, the lack of water and power outages, what happens and where it happens. The producers said that they expect to contribute towards much greater awareness of the selective character of inequality. Concerning the matter of real estate affordability, producers, instead, have redrawn areas of squatting and living without paying taxes as where people 'do have the right to exist', instead of what previously appeared there as an illegal zone designated by the state and the development sector (De Souza, 2006).

This discursive strategy based on creating maps, tagging places according to issues, some of those in real time, has worked very well, according to the producers. Many of them cited mobile applications notifying users of sudden shootings as another successful experiment of the same kind. Amongst the apps that have made users aware of sudden shootings affecting Rio de Janeiro, a popular one was the *Fogo Cruzado* app. This kind of counter-mapping based on risk assessment of public security has historically interested dwellers in *favelas* more, but as some problems encroach on the central urbanised city, there arises the opportunity to migrate practices from the periphery. Next, I look at other attempts to renovate the meaning of the periphery.

Testing new boundaries

When asked about the reason for their focus on places, producers have said that they sought a 'correct kind of publicity.' But how does their idea of mapping differ from other maps or textual references current in the mainstream media? For the producers, the latter relates to the periphery in a straightforward manner, one 'gives interviews, picks up the phone, writes emails, has pictures of oneself; in brief, shares a story'. Here, the 'correct' kind of publicity' means to 'remove any degree of incommunicability' about their chosen spaces. Counter-mapping consists not only in generating new data or imagery about locations that the public knows well but in developing a deeper takeaway, one that revitalises affective references to such locations. It is about resisting the 'direct' nature of the 'data', as producers explain:

If we are discussing groups of historically oppressed people, the so-called 'minorities', it is not worth going to them, writing a story, then offering a written analysis by another producer or by me, and then describing their issues. We understand we are there to listen, to give voice; the video has no departure from their narration, it is all about people speaking, interviews, that is what we look for. (Producer 49)

We used to say we don't want to be the guitar; we want to be the amplifier; it is goes something like this. (Producer 07)

Another young member of a collective disputed the usual type of report on joblessness, for example. This producer regretted the fact that the mainstream media tends to consider 'formal' (full contract) jobs as the only possible occupation for the 'life improvement' of the periphery. By taking on jobs that the mainstream cannot see as 'proper' (in the sense of respectable), producers defended a realistic understanding of the folk who populate the streets of any Brazilian city: 'What would the world be if everybody could have the right to recognition? What are you going to publicise? 'I am the guy who sells water in the streets. I am the traffic light performer; this is what I want to be and to show off.' (Producer 41)

In this case, naming individuals' locations according to the extent of each person's 'margin-ality' is also another way of leaving it open for definition, if locals choose to do so. The issue of homelessness inspires the *SP Invisível* webpage. It started as a Tumblr blog that wrote profiles of a few of São Paulo's thousands of homeless individuals. They produced geotagged stories of individuals that lived on the streets, illustrating them with professional photographic essays. *SP Invisível* – which translates as 'Invisible São Paulo' – has also set up an Instagram account boasting more than 40,000 followers. The home page reads: 'My name is Julio, I am forty years old'. These homeless individuals appeared with their meals, caring for their stray dogs, and pulling trolleys, most of them filled with recyclable materials collected in the streets and later sold to cooperatives.

Another similar example occurring simultaneously to this research happened with the so-called *rolezinhos*, or hangouts. These events caused much controversy in 2013 and 2014⁶ raising anxieties about itinerant individuals. I cite it as another example of the periphery creating new landscapes or appropriating existing ones. When a group of black or *pardo* (brown) male youngsters decided to hang out together in shopping malls in Minas Gerais state, the centre's administrators called the police,⁷ fearing looting and the obstruction of pedestrians in public.⁸ The dispute ended up in court, as shopping mall representatives argued that the presence of youths compromised security. Further episodes led to violence, as the police used rubber bullets to expel these youngsters.⁹ Human rights advocates took a stand founded on the racial and class-based roots of the controversy because shop owners were acting based on prejudice against the youth's imagined 'dangerous' behaviour. Footage from the repressive measures against these groups went viral through blogs as CCTV footage emerged (**Figure 2**). Even if they are only 'strolling' semi-public spaces, producers insisted that shopping centres were also part of the legitimate grounds for the periphery, and so, these meetings continued to pop up on social networks.

This counter-mapping of shopping centres involved sharing pictures of the places' internal facilities, either to detail where groups could meet or help to evaluate where were the risk-free spots to congregate. 'Counter-mapping' could temporarily reverse the well-known rhetoric that shopping malls are inclusive environments, describing their hostile 'clientele' that blamed the youth as 'superficial' or 'dangerous'. The interviewed producers thus agreed that including the shopping mall as part of these new points of access for the periphery matters because public spaces are lacking in their own neighbourhoods. It was important for them to re-imagine new ways of being in the midst of the periphery but *outside* the periphery too. Likewise, producers from the *Baixada Fluminense*, a low-income region of Greater Rio de Janeiro, also produced content that battled homophobia within the community. They cited the coverage of a *kiss-in* protest, staged at the heart of their populous neighbourhood, which was a response to an episode that had resulted in physical aggression against a young man. For them, it was about strengthening 'the periphery inside the periphery'.

I also approached the Ceará-based group, *Aparecidos Políticos*. Their activities were more tied to media and artistic initiatives to promote popular awareness of the individuals whose names adorn the streets of Brazil's main cities. Many of these names, they argued, belonged



Figure 2: Brasil 247's coverage of the 'rolezinhos' (snapshot).

to participants in the dictatorship that ruled the country for twenty years; a few of which were directly involved in torture and oppressive practices. They flagged up such places in order then to campaign for a democratically voted name change. For them, it is of little importance that these streets and spots are geographically in the periphery or not, as long as they could add politicised elements to the way citizens relate to the city's landscapes. In common to all of the groups discussed in the last sections, this group's counter-mapping efforts mediated a slow process of replacing what were hegemonic discourses on the periphery (in this case, on those excluded from democracy, just like those excluded from the city centre, the shopping centre and so on), thus promoting purposeful and critical readings to change the homogenised reality of the centre. I see the significance of these findings according to four distinct dimensions, which come to represent a new communicative periphery.

The four counter-mapping strategies of Brazil's periphery: Towards new boundaries

This paper has introduced a fresh panorama of counter-mapping initiatives from Brazil's vast periphery. While I could not explore the ramifications of each reference or investigate its relationship with specific cultural, technological, and linguistic affordances, I interpreted each case as part of a wider spectrum of past impediments and stereotypes. By considering the incipient use of counter-mapping as a conceptual tool or activist strategy, which is, at least currently, conceptually and methodologically open, I demonstrated a possible application that emerges from the use of technology, but which aims at politicising the presence of 'the periphery' in new locations. Overall, I found that counter-mapping works well as a strategy to problematize the issue of diversity, as opposed to confirming historical representations based on hunger and precariousness. I propose we analyse these new discourses as four distinct communicative strategies: (1) Ethnic/racial (*segregation, apartheid*), (2) Cultural (*funk, hip-hop*), (3) The discourse of mobility (*rolezinhos*), and (4) Intersectional issues (sexual, racial-economic), which I expand below:

1. The articulation of historical terms, such as *slavery* or *apartheid*, with city spots connected with eviction and inequality, illustrates the strategic deployment of language. From normalised middle-class neighbourhoods, predominantly 'white locations' started to receive anachronistic associations that tested the dwellers' 'agreement' with present inequalities, and consequently, their ethics;
2. Since culture has long served to be the vehicle for sentiments of citizenship and civic adjustment in Brazil and South America (Dagnino, 2004), new ways of appropriating or staging cultural events appeared to forge a fresh dialogue with locations previously deemed inaccessible and elitist;
3. The issue of mobility has worked well for producers creating 'non-geographical' cartographies, deployed through innovative taxonomy, appealing images, and automated references (e.g. via geotagging, mobile applications). In these attempts, mobility also represents the urgency in evading the confinement of the peripheral neighbourhood, even when it is the subject of citizens' appropriation by online mapping tools, satellite images, and CCTV recordings, which create other risks, but generate evidences of their presence;
4. In consonance with past movements that forged positive representations, (e.g. 'periphery of the women' in Gohn, 1985), what can be claimed here is the increasing fluidity of such identitarian discourses, that encompasses social movements and a new range of participants, whether black or brown skaters in central business districts, or gays who congregate in suburbia.

Following Jacobs' (2002), I see the notion of counter-mapping pursued in this paper as a 'decolonizing' strategy due to its clear intention of 'laying out new boundaries of life.' The depth of detail, the assertiveness in narrating urban encounters, and creativity in repositioning marginalized profiles advance representations that were, at least in the mass media perspective, just a series of social impediments. These findings thereby confirm a local context of change, in consonance with other global movements in favour of the transformation of urban life conditions in all big cities (Sasken, 2006; Harvey, 2015 *et al.*), to be explored and verified in future research. This paper's limited scope could be extended in the future to confirm these convergences of repertoire and the success of local counter-mapping initiatives, as viable routes to real democratic accountability. Despite the political turmoil in the 2018's Brazil, counter-mapping appears to be a promising way in for the periphery to escalate its demands, ensuring public oversight through formats seen as informed and reliable.

Notes

- ¹ While I am not engaging in the theoretical debate about the 'alternative media', as everything can be alternative to anything else (Downing, 2001), the criteria I follow is the location of media producers, most of whom are based in neighbourhoods deemed as 'the periphery'. See note on sampling.
- ² My purposive sampling effort consisted of the inclusion of media producers that could represent the widest portion of Brazilian territory possible and cut across different funding, publication, and publics. I checked Brazil's Minister of Culture grant applicant lists, available on the Ministry's website, as this functions as a good inventory of socially-committed groups operating in different regions, which continues up-to-date due to its size of more than one thousand names and groups. To complement this effort so as to include non-applicants, I triangulated it with producers cited in recent scholarship (Peruzzo, 2013; Custódio, 2017).
- ³ I have translated the content and expressions originally in Portuguese, while using other translations to further compare.
- ⁴ I chose not to identify media producers as naming them, they argued, could lead to reduced opportunities in receiving public grants in the future or other undisclosed threats.

- ⁵ Gentrification has triggered much scholarly analysis applied to cities in stages of advanced capitalism (Harvey, 2015 *et al.*, for instance), but its existence in Brazil is highly controversial. During the years of economic boom, *favelas* were seen as quickly gentrifying largely due to increased house prices, displacing a proportion of the old dwellers (Cummings, 2015).
- ⁶ According to Brazilian mainstream news coverage verified in this research (mostly G1 and Folha), *rolezinhos* occurred first in Minas Gerais in 2013, in the city of Contagem and in 2014 at the Metro Itaquera shopping mall.
- ⁷ Their concern was based on previous episodes of robbery and looting, as reported. http://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/gerais/2013/08/18/interna_gerais,436663/seguranca-e-reforcada-em-shopping-da-capital-apos-tumulto.shtml. Accessed 03 December 2015.
- ⁸ 'Luxurious shopping mall gets clearance to stop rolezinho'. Terra. Available at: <http://noticias.terra.com.br/brasil/cidades/sp-shopping-de-luxo-obtem-liminar-para-barrar-rolezinho,50be08e1b1383410VgnVCM10000098cceb0aRCRD.html>. Accessed 10 May 2015.
- ⁹ As widely reported on key occasions, especially in São Paulo. 'Police use teargas and rubber bullets in action against rolezinho'. G1. <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2014/01/policia-usa-bombas-de-gas-e-balas-de-borracha-em-acao-contra-rolezinho.html>. Accessed 3 December 2015.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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