

The City as an Object of Research: Microsociology of Urban Spaces in Brazil

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Abstract

Sociological and anthropological productions that take the city as their object of investigation have met new approaches in Brazil, especially since the 1990s. This paper aims to discuss the recent theoretical and empirical trajectories of research proposals as their authors take the city to the spotlight. This scientific endeavor analyzes a corpus of theses and dissertations produced by students of the Sociology Graduation Program of the Federal University of Ceará, in Brazil, as such works encompass shifts and trends in predominant theories and methods of the Social Sciences in Brazil over the past two decades. They demonstrate an increasing interest for the microsociological look towards the urban, which we argue to be an effect of the influence of Anthropology in the theoretical and methodological approach of research objects. From the set of selected works, the city is composed by territories cross-cut by a strong dimension of power and conflict, as an influence of Political Geography. French Sociology and Historiography contribute with theoretical perspectives that prioritize the senses of creation and insubordination, thus attributing to the practice of diverse social actors in urban places. In the set of works, the neighborhood unfolds as a microcosm of social practices, embedded with multiple senses of belonging and spatial conflicts, which are expressive of a wider social struggle.

Keywords

Urban Studies, Theoretical Approaches, Methodology, Theses and Dissertations

1. Introduction

Theses and dissertations by young researchers entering an academic career provide an important record of the perception of theoretical and methodological approaches in the Social Sciences, as it takes time and space into account. The update of theoretical and methodological references and citations used in a research isn't deter-

mined solely by the student-learner. First, proof of intellectual domain is demanded. Research advisors and evaluators then ponder on the relevance of new references of specialized knowledge for their students' research projects, given that they are necessary elements for making theses and dissertations legitimate. Theses and dissertations are not only records of this academic negotiation; these works may too become objects of research interest as they open ways for analyzing the current state of the art in various specializations and its influences.

This paper¹ is an extract of a research conducted in the Department of Social Sciences at the Federal University of Ceará, in Northeastern Brazil, under the title "Fortaleza, the city as perceived in academic discourse from 1990 to 2011". The initial review of Sociology theses and dissertations from the late 1990s to the present period generated significant questions on the nature of knowledge production, the extent to which it expresses theoretical trends and particularities of the local context, as well as to the different modes in which sociological and anthropological knowledge is produced.

This text explores the theses and dissertations included in the thematic scope known as *urbanstudies*. The variations of this field of study appear in the works, as the authors outline the reflexive process that influenced their research perspectives and their "approach to the object of research". Such elements provide guidelines that lead our discussion in this article.

Thus, coming from different perspectives the focus on the city constitutes an interesting gateway to examine the presence of thematic clusters that cross-cut theoretical, methodological and empirical approaches.

Thirty graduate works were initially selected for analysis, taking as criteria to be a fieldwork conducted in the city of Fortaleza and to feature a discussion problematizing the very notion of the *city*. These works were read, summarized and discussed by a voluntary team of Social Sciences undergraduate and graduate students², instructed to identify the object of each work, the theoretical and methodological approaches, the central analytical categories, along with the most frequently cited authors. Selected theses and dissertations were then reduced to a corpus of 27³.

In general, the objects of research presented here are part of a global dynamics that is not restricted to the Federal University of Ceará. Although they express a case study-like research, their discussions highlight general trends in sociological research that can be observed, to a greater or lesser extent, in academic production elsewhere.

The research sought to capture a dynamics certainly characterized by similar expressions in other academic contexts, considering the influences that arise from academic exchanges set forth during congresses and seminars, with visiting scholars, in postgraduate courses and examination boards. The Social Sciences in Brazil are currently developing with an intense flow of knowledge dissemination in scientific events and accessibility on the web, which contributes to remove a significant layer of what would otherwise be deemed "regionally specific".

The selected works for analysis featured categories indicative of the ways to look at the city and understand it. Recurring categories reflected the paradigms and the suggested readings of the period, as they circulated in classroom discussions and scientific events. The analyzed sample revealed the importance with which the specific discussion of the urban studies has had among social scientists in Brazil over the last 15 years.

Such changes in the construction of knowledge came about as a fruitful path for reflecting about this scientific field. It is hardly surprising then to find patterns in dissertations and theses where authors and theories temporarily converge, featuring unusual or unexplainable changes in the nature of knowledge production that were not found in earlier works of similar fashion.

The sample of works reveals changes in theoretical approaches and research perspectives towards the city in the areas of Sociology and Anthropology.

¹Earlier versions of this work were presented at the Symposium "El giro cultural en los estudios urbanos, at the 54th" International Congress of Americanists, in Vienna, 2012, and at the Working Session 06 "Espaço e Território no pensamento brasileiro: história, ciências sociais e questões de pesquisa", during the 37th ANPOCS Annual Meeting, in Águas de Lindoia, Brazil, in 2013.

²During the project we had four meetings with volunteer students to review and synthesize central categories that were identified for examining the discourses, from 2009 to 2011.

³The theses and dissertations selected are cited in a complete form in the bibliographical references. In chronological order, the authors are: Arrais Neto (1993); Vale (1997); Barbosa (1997); Diógenes (1998); Pimentel (1998); Bezerra, (1999); Aragão (2002); Schramm (2002); Freitas (2003); Prado (2003); Moreira (2004); Mattos (2012), which was written as a Doctorate Dissertation in 2004; Lima Filho (2004); Oliveira (2006); Maciel (2006); Albuquerque (2006); Gadelha (2007); Paiva (2007); Matos Jr. (2008); Bezerra, (2008); Monteiro Junior (2008); Vasconcelos (2008); Mesquita (2009); Viana (2009); Ribeiro (2010) and Sá (2010). Given that such master's theses and doctorate dissertations are unpublished works written in Portuguese, only accessible in the library of the Federal University of Ceará, in Brazil, all selected citations were translated to English by the authors of this paper.

2. The Tradition of Urban Studies in Brazil and Latin America

Studies conducted about the Brazilian urban space come from a tradition that encompasses a vast array of questions and methods, including direct surveys which address the cities as an expression of social problems (such as inequalities, exclusion, segregation), as well as the analysis of sociability that contingently develop in the environment urban (influenced by violence, family, religion). The extent of this diversity hinders a thorough collection of all the works that could fit the category “urban studies”.

Valladares pioneered⁴ the studies of urban issues in Brazil and later produced a state of the art analysis of the field. Based on a survey conducted in the 1970s, the author points out (1983) (Valladares, 1983) that research projects were then strongly linked to urban population growth, considering that the number of Brazilian cities with population over 20,000 increased from 172 to 482 in the period of 1960 to 1980. The broad process of urbanization generated concerns about inequality and the state’s capacity to intervene and solve urban problems.

Urban issues originated scientific productions about informal settlements, mutual self-help housing and housing policies for urban peripheries. The decisive influence of theoretical frameworks of the Latin American sociological thought stands out, especially the so-called theory of marginality, which centered discussions on the possibilities of integrating the lower strata of the urban population. From this perspective, reflections on unemployment and slums permeated several analyses.

The critique of marginality theory, which also had the theme of dependency as a counterpoint, was replaced by an approach of capitalist accumulation, which attributed housing problems to the urban contradictions arising from the unequal forms of production and appropriation of commodities in the city. In fact, looking at the hegemonic traces of Urban Sociology produced in Brazil and abroad, as found in the works of Castells (1980); Topalov (1979); Préteceille (1985); Kowarick (1983) and others, it appears that the approach that focused on the city as an expression of conflicts or structural contradictions shaped a rather significant portion of the production in the field. The metropolis and its conflicts, the management of urban means of consumption and the unequal access to city spaces constituted the most frequently mentioned analytical references, especially since the late 1970s and mid-1980s.

Analyzing urban research and researchers in developing countries, Stren (1996) remarks the hegemony of Sociology, Urban planning and Architecture in current investigations taking place in Latin America, which differs from the African reality, where a strong influence of geographers is noted. Interdisciplinarity has contributed to delineate models and approaches, which are furthermore influenced by the education and ideology of professionals and the various forms they engage in institutional dialogue. For instance, the predominance of Geography in French urban studies influenced Francophone countries of Africa. In the 1970s, Sociology became hegemonic in Latin American urban studies, incorporating the challenges posed by the growth of cities and the consequent emergence of problems with local features, such as the issue of ethnicity in Peru, and the economy in Chile, which holds a key to understand the country’s poverty⁵.

In spite of the contention between traditions of theoretical thinking for studying the cities, considering Brazilian and Latin-American cities alike, it is possible to point out one common aspect: the quest for the specificity. This quest pervades several of the works, which are concerned with the inequalities and differences embedding cultural, political and economic transformations and resistance. A survey of urban studies in Brazil in the period of 1998 to 2008, conducted by Frehse & Leite (2010), highlights interesting aspects. Taking into consideration the oscillation from empirical to theory-centered studies permeating the tradition of urban research in Brazil and Latin America, the authors located macro-social approaches interested in finding aspects of economic and political orders. When these aspects are linked to globalization, they produce effects in the intervention and management of the city’s social inequalities. Another thematic topic refers to social and cultural experiences in the city that take into account the reactions of dwellers to urban planning projects, such as related to spatial heritage, experiences in gated communities, patterns of sociability, social movements and patterns of interaction.

Under the framework of the “social movements” topic, especially from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, the theses and dissertations presented at the Federal University of Ceará had a research focus on neighborhoods as the protagonists of demands and practices of contestation. Expressing a condition of exclusion from collective

⁴On this matter, read the works of Valladares: “Repensando a habitação no Brasil” (Valladares, 1983), and “Urban sociology in Brazil: a research report”, on the International Journal of urban and regional research (1988) (Valladares, 1988). One recent reference is “Cidade e política: nas trilhas de uma antropologia da e na cidade no Brasil”, a literature review by Eckert (2010) and “Espaço urbano no Brasil”, by Frehse & Leite (2010).

⁵This discussion is developed on the work “Plantego general de la marginalidad en América Latina” of Nun (1967).

consumer goods, working-class neighborhoods (often referred to as “the periphery”) were perceived less as places endowed with unique forms of sociability and more as an example of social deprivation as well as mobilization of demands by collective actors. The lack of access to consumer goods was seen as an expression of the city fragmented by social inequality, marked by the diverse uses of space. Such an approach was also fueled with works dedicated to the understanding of politics in everyday spaces of urban life.

This perspective of approach followed the trends of major Brazilian universities, and was developed in the Sociology Graduate Program of the Federal University of Ceará until the late 1980s. Afterwards, in the following decade, sociologists sought to study social movements in neighborhoods located in urban outskirts through lenses similar to ethnography, attentive to the meanings and transformations, in approaches interested in cultural processes.

The theses and dissertations labelled under the urban theme presented in this paper follow this trend of research proposals, pulverizing relevant theoretical changes, as observed by Stern (1996) since 1980. Concepts such as dependency, underdevelopment and hegemonic control of the state were replaced by micro case studies. Analyses of the State were replaced by analyses of local government; urban negotiation overlapped analysis and planning. Taking into account the variety of objects of research, the author highlights the spread of specialized approaches towards the increasing complexity of the urban environment.

As Sassen (2006) pointed out recently, while analyzing present-day Urban Sociology, the city appears not as a bounded unity, but rather “as [a] complex location in a grid of cross-boundary processes [...]. It is one of the spaces of the global, and it engages the global directly, often bypassing the national” (Sassen, 2006: p. 477).

3. The City as a Reference Point

The production of theses and dissertations shows a change of focus in the conceptualization of the city, shifting from a view of it as a single unit to an approach centered on local and dynamic boundaries that could be designated as a part of the micro-social. The metropolis and its contradictions, the management of means of consumption and the unequal access to urban space for dwellers cease to be referential questions. Local aspects of the city now appear in the choice of neighborhoods and spaces endowed with specific uses (airport, beaches, parks and movie theaters) as object of study, pointing to the dynamics of urban flows.

Ever since the late 1990s the research on the city has been strongly influenced by the concepts of *territory* and *space* within the Sociology Graduate Program, Federal University of Ceará. Such concepts are central to the framework developed by Félix Guattari in the paper *Espaço e poder: A criação de territórios na cidade* (1985)⁶. This work became an important reference in studies of the city in Brazil, not only in Sociology and Anthropology, but also in Architecture and Geography.

The series of five volumes written by Guattari & Gilles Deleuze, “A Thousand Plateaus”, published in Brazil in the 1990s, has come to influence master’s and doctoral research, introducing a new perspective to urban space and contributing to a shift from a Sociology/Anthropology *in the city* to a Sociology/Anthropology *of the city*. In its uses and meanings, this shift is seen as multiple and complex.

Based on Michel Foucault’s perspective of micropolitics (1979) (Foucault, 1979; Deleuze & Guattari, 1995) incorporated the examination of power relations as well as the production of subjectivities. By doing so, they expanded the perception of territory creation, which is a fruitful path for studying the city. In this perspective, a territory is linked to an order of individual and collective subjectivity, establishing itself as a space of functional relations of all kinds. If *space* acts as a reference in relation to the extrinsic objects it contains, *territory* stands in intrinsic connection with the subjectivity that it encompasses (Guattari, 1985). The concept of territory, more than a geographical reference, is taken as a symbolic feature of a social place, which is understood as a zone of renovation and identification, among individuals and the spaces they experience (Guattari & Rolnik, 1986).

This perspective appears in the master’s thesis of Vale (1997)⁷. Inspired by the idea of territory as a symbolic construction, the author refuses to subsume the notion of identity, which he considered unsuitable to understand the complexity of relations established among the audience members⁸ of Cine Jangada, a movie theater for porn. Vale’s work is remarkable in regards to the Anthropology *of the city* within the UFC Sociology Graduate Pro-

⁶The paper comprises of an interview published in Portuguese: “Espaço e poder: a criação de territórios na cidade”.

⁷Published with the title “No Escuro do Cinema: cenas de um público implícito” (São Paulo: Annablume; Fortaleza: Secretaria da Cultura e Desporto do Estado do Ceará, 2000).

⁸A theater that remained open for 47 years in the center of the city until the 1990s, when it was turned into a location for exhibiting gay and travesty porn movies.

gram. He was willing to “contribute in the drawing of a new kind of map type, with which one could describe and understand the metropolis, its forms of entertainment, and its functioning (Vale, 1997: p. 14)”. The modes of use of space as the production of subjectivities are justified as:

“[...] the choice of thinking about the distribution of bodies inside the exhibition hall, the “mental maps” and “bodies” that gave direction and the mental warp of rituals, symbols and codes and the role of transvestites and market prostitution in Cine Jangada” (Vale, 1997: p. 15).

The author observes that social interactions inside the porno movie room were mainly physical; words played a secondary role. Such transgression experiences of the audience establish a complicity in the membership of a “marginal territory.” Thus, he sought “to bring to the surface ‘invisible urban maps’ and territorialities of the city that relate to issues such as social marginalization and stigmatization (Vale, 1997: p. 22)”.

Developed at the same period, the doctorate dissertation of Gloria Diógenes (1998) is one of the first in the Sociology Graduate Program of UFC to think about the importance of the symbolic construction of territories, in this case about disputes between members of gangs. She adopts the comprehension of territory and subjectivity developed by Guattari & Suely Rolnik (1986).

The author describes the movements of gangs in the city in between the adventure of expanding activity reach, the conquest of new “areas”, and the concentration on “areas” where they feel safe from rival gangs and police. Diógenes understands that the youth created a fabric of territorial domain, mobilized confrontations, channeled vigilant and violent energies for the demarcation of borders, and strategized the visualization and demarcation of the body territory of gang members (1998).

The works of Vale (1997) and Diógenes (1998) feature the influence of Foucault, following his attention to the movements of *bodies in space*, trying to account for varying expressions of the exercise of power. Given that power involves social practice, struggles and the adoption of strategic positions, it is not an absolute or final substance. Foucault contributes to this positive view of power that is produced with the body and not just with repression or discipline. In both works, the space is appropriated by bodies in motion, reflecting tensions and conflicts of society as a whole.

In a more recent doctorate dissertation, the idea of territory gained a symbolic significance in its dimension of potential conflict, along with other kinds of marks and signs. In her dissertation, written in 2004 and published in 2012, Mattos (2012) examines disputes between candidates for councilor during an election campaign in a low income suburb of Fortaleza, Mattos considered territory to be a field of force, a network of social relations, with its internal complexity, “and at the same time, a limit, the difference between ourselves and others”, as suggested by political geographer Marcelo Souza (2000). Conflicting perspectives on the same place are always relative to the situation, depending on who is speaking and where they’re speaking from. This can be seen in the attempts of electoral candidates to define “areas” for their campaigns by painting the walls of houses and other places in the neighborhood with their posters and advertisements and by reacting against opponents who “invade” their supposedly well demarcated areas of influence.

This thesis also reveals the strong influence of the Anthropology of Politics, which values processes and the concrete social interactions rather than “systems” and “functions” (Palmeira & Goldman, 1996)⁹.

The master’s thesis research developed by Mesquita (2009) on Fortaleza Pinto Martins International Airport was inspired by the geographical concept of territory as well. Geographers Haesbaert and Limonard (2007) proposed concepts of *territory* and *space*, distinguishing: 1) in favor of the latter due to greater spatial coverage; 2) viewing territory as a social and historical construction of power relationships; and 3) focusing on the subjective dimension that could be called “consciousness, ownership, or in some cases even territorial identity”, alongside a more objective dimension, which can be called “domination of space”, comprising of instruments held by political and administrative agents.

It’s important to emphasize that the perspective of territory in connection with aspects considered “objective” appears to be sought in the relationship between power and space when the researcher is confronted with situations or places in the city where the validity of certain political-administrative controls seem more evident, such as the case with the airport. The author understands that:

“There is friction between the strategies and procedures established and implemented by control organiza-

⁹The authors discuss the history of this theoretical movement, since the development of British Political Anthropology, in the 1960s. See the Introductory section of “*Antropologia, Voto e Representação Política*”, edited by them and available only in Portuguese (Palmeira & Goldman, 1996).

tions, on the one hand, and spaces and the creative processes originating from the practices in time and space of other users and patrons that constitute spaces of flow, such as in airports, on the other hand” (Mesquita, 2009: p. vi).

The investigation does not stop with the classification of a space as a “no place”, following Marc Augé’s categorization (1994) (Augé, 1994) that denies the existence of a feeling of belonging or of identity in airports for those traveling through it. For Augé, this would also be the case for many other spaces of contemporary cities, such as shopping centers, railway stations and major hotel chains. Combining participant observation and questionnaires, Mesquita sought to understand how passengers and those accompanying them, as well as employees and business people “would perform practices related to time and space (Mesquita, 2009)”, ultimately highlighting aspects Augé was unable to see.

Ribeiro (2010) also used territory as a referential concept in her doctorate dissertation about an organized group of supporters for the football team Ceará Sporting Club. Territory arose from Political Geography, encouraging reflection on the idea of “control” over space. This notion has become significant in this field of study, since territories were the object *par excellence* of disputes between groups of football fans. The disputes for control over space that occur in the city were discussed by Brazilian geographer Paulo César da Costa Gomes in his book “A Condição Urbana: ensaios de geopolítica da cidade” (2002). He gives much emphasis to the idea of control over territory through the imposition of rules of access and circulation, as well as the regulation of uses, attitudes and behavior on a space. As an expression of power, arguments and struggles questioned the right to the city, similarly to most social disputes as they set power at stake (Gomes, 2002).

4. Change in Focus

In most of the theses and dissertations analyzed, authors want to emphasize a change in focus based on the uses of space in relation to the impositions set out by officials and administrators. Thus, they seek to understand how people escape political interference, including control over the body and the dimension of time. What is common in the works selected is that they account for a change on the way to look towards city spaces, escaping common sense and theories that emphasize the weight of the institutions and social roles on the dynamics of individual and collective behavior. Therefore, the strategic methodology adopted is that of participant observation, even though many authors admit they have not done ethnographies in the strict sense of the anthropological perspective.

The idea of change in focus is present in the interpretation authors make about the research subjects’ senses of *use* of urban spaces. That is also the basis of their own discursive elaborations, which oppose media perceptions and common sense about the city. If the Social Sciences claim a break with common sense, it is also possible to say that research works on microsociology aim to re-build the cities, going beyond usual interpretations and conceptions. The priority given to “processes of subjectification”, “territorialization” and “deterritorialization” replaces the Marxist approach in which the city was mainly analyzed from a structural perspective according to forms of capitalist domination. Even though this discussion hasn’t been abandoned in analytical reference, what is observed is the existence of a much broader view related to the senses of domination and insubordination.

Some of the main analytical references supporting the significance of this change are the categories developed by de Certeau (1998), which add to the contributions of Deleuze and Guattari, as mentioned above, incorporating the “processes of subjectification”, which is seen as capable of posing specific marks in the modes of experiencing the city.

One of their main differences is that the influence of Foucault is criticized by de Certeau for his “emphasis on discipline”. In relation to anti-discipline, the author wants to discover how an entire society cannot be reduced to discipline. From his standpoint, it is urgent to discover people’s small and everyday life procedures that play with mechanisms of discipline, unable to conform to them unless if the aim is to change them (de Certeau, 1998). Certainly, greater autonomy or freedom for the social actors has a strong inspiration on de Certeau’s formulations, which have given rise to spaces and everyday practices that had been previously subsumed or barely made visible under the imperative of economic and political perspectives to the city.

His concept of *uses* enabled for an evidence of diverse actors, places and their practices—Therefore, *uses* refer to singular ways of appropriating and re-signifying social practices.

The uses that fishermen make of Parangaba Lagoon, in the periphery of the city, is the topic for the master’s thesis of Hélio Monteiro Júnior (2009), which emphasizes the idea of inverting the view of social practices by

pointing out differences between the actions of fishermen and the rules of city administrators. He deployed de Certeau's category of tactical action (1998), in which the "weak" wins momentarily over "the stronger" using cunning articulation to seize opportunities and derive pleasure from daily activities.

In a research that also used participant observation, Monteiro Junior (2009) identifies three categories of the lagoon fishermen according to their uses—seasonal, weekly and daily fishermen. The author was interested in understanding how they dealt with the:

"[...] ambiguous geographical border between the place of work (working time) and place of leisure (free time after work and free time from lack of work/unemployment), between the public and private [...]. By appropriating themselves of the lagoon, these individuals subvert that distinction, reinforcing the social and active aspects in the construction of social spaces that constitute the ground of sociability and subversions." (Monteiro Junior, 2009: pp. 92).

The subjects portrayed in this work are active (and reactive) in relation to the rules regarding social control and domination. But they are also rendered "invisible", according to the author, because the dominant view ignores not only the lagoons' ecological importance in the city, but they also ignore the uses made of these ecosystems by fishermen, who somehow seek to "escape the system" or to get the food that will ensure their survival.

The notion of "invisible city" is revealed in another work analyzed: the master's thesis about memories of garbage workers in Fortaleza, written by Aragão (2002). In this case, a change of analysis is due to both the object of research and to the surprising results in comparison to common sense about garbage workers in the city. The author looks at the city as seen from the perspective and memories of "retired" informal garbage workers (Aragão, 2002):

"[...] the garbage workers and local solid waste disposal sites receive the same treatment as people/places linked to old and undesirable permanent "production" of society: cemeteries, asylums, hospitals, terminals, prisons, prostitution areas and hostels for homeless people. People who work or live in these places are often marginalized. These places are considered cursed, relegated to the "corners" and "periphery" of the city like the garbage in our homes." (Aragão, 2002: p. 122).

Based on the narratives of the people she encountered, the idea of an unequal and unjust city are present in her interpretation, as it was to be expected. However, what she finds goes far beyond the re-affirmation of such ideas. While referring to the testimony of workers whose memories of labor are marked by resentment, Aragão describes a meeting with a former garbage worker woman who still spent her time living and working in the trash as a form of insubordination to the system, highlighting cheerful moments with her former colleagues.

Another significant aspect of urban spaces observed in the scientific discourses analyzed was related to the distinction between "city" and "nature." The intrinsic relationship between these two poles, often seen as opposed¹⁰, is relevant to understand how subjects develop their "tactics" or "lines of flight" (to use, respectively, the expressions of de Certeau (1998) and Deleuze and Guattari (1995), three authors who have influenced the works reviewed here).

The natural environment is the great "hidden treasure" in the invisible city. "City" and "nature" are thus two sides of a coin in the development of meanings attributed to places, because one cannot understand the relationship of residents with the city without going through the uses and appropriations that residents perform of the sea, the beach, mangroves, lagoons, trees, and animal species; even though these interactions are visible only to some people.

In the master's thesis of Albuquerque (2006), dedicated to the practice of surfing on the east side beaches of the city of Fortaleza and on the beaches of a neighboring municipality, the author argues that the uses surfers make of the sea provide them with a sense of belonging to the space, making it their territory. The sense here is not "political" as of opposing the State, but it is political in the sense of subversion as part of the micropolitics of everyday life, as the author writes:

¹⁰In his research among fishermen of Parangaba Lagoon, Monteiro Junior raises questions about the dichotomy between "rural" and "urban", used in some works of the Chicago School. He analyzed this urban phenomenon, perceiving a blend of cultural aspects that would be seen as typically rural, expressing the multiplicity which characterizes the life styles in contemporary cities (Monteiro Junior, 2008: pp. 23-24)

“Localism is a common theme in the ‘universe of world surfers’. It is often discussed in the specialized media, but above all it is a frequent behavior among surfers. As already mentioned, there is an intense feeling of ‘ownership’ that individuals establish with the territory they occupy, which is huge where surfing is a ‘traditional’ practice. Although it is a practice widely criticized by the media and by surfers and involved in the sport, it is also universally accepted by most of those who share the ‘surfing culture’.” (Albuquerque, 2006: p. 160).

The relationship between “nature” and “city” is also dealt with in the doctorate dissertation written by Leonardo Sá (2010), elaborated in close relationship with the youth of the impoverished Serviluz neighborhood, where he moved in to conduct a long time participant observation with surfers and residents at Titanzinho beach.

“Violence, fear and risk are the experiences of youngsters in Titanzinho, making it an adventure from childhood to adulthood. Living in a surfing ‘point break’ is seen as the main godsend gift. From the natural environment, a portal opens to God. The relationship of the residents with the environment, with animals, with fish, with the memory of fishing and with the sea since their childhood are the main points of an experience that is felt to be sacred because it is centered on the value of human life. In face of the feeling of fragility that rises from natural adversities and social characteristics of the place, such value is doubled.” (Sá, 2010: p. 213).

Sá understands that, because of this intimate contact with the nearby beach, the young people of Serviluz feel privileged in relation to residents of other neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city. This “gift” becomes an honor in a seaside area deemed as a “dangerous slum”, especially due to the fame garnered by Titanzinho Beach, which is considered an outstanding ‘break’ for surfing not only in the city, but in Brazil as a whole. It is a place where local great athletes come about. To build a positive identity for the residents of “dangerous” neighborhoods is, according to Sá, an “affirmation of a non-hegemonic statement of values and alternative belongings which confronts the social indifference of the excluding social order of the city of Fortaleza which has disqualified the residents of Serviluz for over 70 years (Sá, 2010: pp. 239-240)”.

5. The Socio-Anthropology of Neighborhoods

The investigation conducted by Sá in the neighborhood Serviluz, situated on the seaside outskirts of Fortaleza, could be set together with other works related to neighborhoods deemed “dangerous” in the media discourse. This is the case of Aerolândia neighborhood, by Matos Jr. (2008); Bom Jardim, the subject of the master’s thesis of Paiva (2007); and Conjunto Palmeiras neighborhood, in the doctorate dissertation of Mattos (2012). Such works were not aimed primarily at studying the relationship between neighborhoods and the city. The first three cases above focused on different forms of violence, and the latter on political life. However, in the research process the neighborhood emerged as a broadly defining category to think about a variety of themes. Neighborhoods stood out as a microcosm embedded with a complex social dynamics.

In this sense it is possible to pose the following question: Is it a viable sociological point of view to think of the city from the perspective of neighborhoods? By realizing this problem from “native” point of view, can this logic of belonging be referenced in this territory called “neighborhood”? In other words, how can we adopt “neighborhood” in a context of great complexity such as life in contemporary cities, where social networks go far beyond the traditional mechanisms of identification as neighbors or residents?

It is curious to note that, in the scope of the analyzed works, the theme of neighborhood did not originate from the idea of using it as an exclusive field of research. The doctorate dissertation of Ribeiro (2010), cited above, focused on disputes between two organized groups of supporters for one of the major football teams in the state of Ceará, Brazil. It was in the process of developing her research that she realized the importance of neighborhood as a spatial reference and incorporated it to her analysis. The author came upon the neighborhood in a remarkable way during her ethnographic research through the supporters’ “native” perspective. At a certain moment, while conducting interviews, she noticed that the neighborhood Barroso II housed one of the most active and “dangerous” gangs linked to a group of organized fans¹¹.

¹¹“The neighborhood, or rather, the group of its young residents from there, is considered within the group of fans, to be under the weight of strong personal social and spatial stigma. They are defined by the geopolitics of urban youth as those who do not care, those who have nothing to lose and dangerous characters that fight and steal, with whom dialogue is impossible. This is precisely why I became interested in this neighborhood in particular [...] (Ribeiro, 2010: p. 120)”.

The research showed that neighborhood cleavage in rivalries between supporters and groups of supporters was, in many cases, more important than team allegiance. This was apparent at an organized party of a group of fans:

“The dances were organized, spatially and in terms of sociability, according to the geopolitics of friendships and rivalries between groups from different neighborhoods. The participation or sympathy of a fan was not determined by the location of the participants at the party, but submitted to territorial demarcations which organized the participants in the hall into three sides: A, B and C. This was because, when the dance was over you and your neighborhood could support Ceará or Fortaleza [two football teams]. If your neighborhood supported Cearamor [an organized group of supporters for Ceará Football Team], you had no choice but to follow it. If it was TUF [group of supporters for the rival Fortaleza Football Team], the same process would occur (...)” (Ribeiro, 2010: p. 110).

In a paper analyzing recent works in the field of Urban Sociology, Barreira (2007) also saw the neighborhood as a research field that offers a wide range of opportunities for study. The author proposed that “Sociology of neighborhoods” could constitute a field of research and analysis:

“Despite the presence of global processes, acting as a backdrop in the context of sociological records of the city, it is important to recapture the context of everyday practices revealing meanings and processes [...] [A] “sociology of neighborhoods” taking into consideration micro spaces, could be the basis for an examination of the overall outlook of the city. The neighborhood, as a place for social practices, can overcome the linear logic of certain generalizations, noting denser and contradictory situations experienced daily in the city.” (Barreira, 2007: pp. 165-166).

In the same paper, the author also points out that neighborhoods were frequent objects of research during the 1980s and 1990s. However, during this period they were interpreted as privileged sites of social struggle. As the struggle shifted from factories and working places to residential areas, thus began the “social movements” through which residents and “community leaders” addressed their demands to the State (Barreira, 1992; Scherer-Warren, 1993; Gohn, 1995).

While these works shared the idea of neighborhood as homogeneous, understood as essentially “political”, at the present time perspectives on neighborhoods do not always have the State as a reference—although they may incorporate categories such as power relations (Weber, 1991). Theses and dissertations that took the contexts of housing as a basis for their reflections favor the perception of different spatial orders and their complexity, by which individuals generate their territories in a place identified as a “neighborhood” in official maps.

Several of the works analyzed in this study identified the existence of “centers” and “suburbs” within neighborhoods, which were themselves perceived as peripheral in regards to the official center. The “insider and close-up view” to use an expression of Magnani (2002)¹², widely quoted in the majority of these works—considers that a neighborhood can be seen as “dangerous” in its entirety, especially by the media, however, internally, its residents differentiate, relativize and rank the space they inhabit, pointing out the “dangerous” territories based on the social places they speak from.

In this regard the research of Matos Jr. (2008) is significant for focusing on a square in Aerolândia neighborhood. A few years ago, it became a stage of conflicts for being a hangout spot for young drug users, deemed “dangerous” by residents. However, by choosing the drug users’ perspective, the author saw that their fears and perceptions identified and placed “perils” in other youngsters. The research conducted by Viana (2009) approached another city square as a location of conflict: the Gentilândia Square. Frequented by young gay men on Friday nights between 2004 and 2008, local residents and shop owners generated strong homophobic attacks. In her work, Viana discusses how the public expression of sexuality was associated with conflicts around the use of an urban space.

The perception of space segmentation and its symbolic divisions shed light on diverse perceptions of “We” and “Others”, as categories used by city dwellers to differentiate neighborhoods or the internal divisions within the same territory¹³. In other situations, the designations of “favela”, “neighborhood” and “community” became

¹²Magnani (2000, 2002) is extensively used as reference by researchers conducting studies in the Anthropology of the city, by saying so, we are interested in describing, understanding more fully and reflecting on situations and subjects in everyday uses of urban spaces.

¹³The works of Norbert Elias and J. L. Scotson, in “The Established and the Outsiders” (2000), and Loïc Wacquant, in “Condensados da Cidade” (2001) (Wacquant, 2001) which use neighborhood as a reference have considerable influence on these types of interpretations of “center” and “periphery”.

very fertile to analyze both the residents' perception of their practices as well as the relationship they establish with urban spaces (Mattos, 2004; Sá, 2010).

Spatial categorizations are not, however, fixed. Even among the works that adopt the "city center" as an object of study (Barbosa, 1997; Pimentel, 1998; Vasconcelos, 2008), the very idea of a center was problematized. The master's thesis of Vasconcelos (2008) is such an example, as he analyzes how the expansion of cities generates new "sub-centers" that polarize with the historic center. And then, since the second half of the 20th century, "the center becomes the target of revitalization programs, urban renewal or rehabilitation, undertaken by the public and the private sectors (Vasconcelos, 2008: p. 3)".

The so-called proposals of "rehabilitation" observed in certain parts of the city like the "center" and Iracema Beach (the neighborhood that was the "field" of five among the 27 studies reviewed here) are also discussed in light of the ideas of memory, historic preservation and heritage as social constructions.

The work of Schramm (2002) is exemplary in reflecting on the construction of a hegemonic "memory" that subsidizes a version of the past. The author analyzes government interventions in the neighborhood, showing that the process of "upscaling" Iracema Beach through the construction of new features in the mid-1990s relied on the memories of certain social groups, referring to them as the "tradition" of Iracema Beach, at the expense of obscuring other groups and their memories (Schramm, 2002).

Taking the neighborhood and the city as references for study did not necessarily lead to substantialize them. The micro-sociological perspective allowed for an understanding of the complexity of territorial and subjective orders that are intertwined within each space, officially delimited as "neighborhood". These maps, when superimposed, are very heterogeneous. The ensemble of research works reviewed here demonstrates such diversity and complexity.

6. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The studies analyzed have brought to light the old sociological theme of totality, showing the efficacy of micro-sociologic works that do not leave behind the insertion of research objects into the fabric of social processes. If the neighborhood is a microcosm of a broader relational universe, efforts for retracing the comings and goings must be met in order to avoid the perception of social practices isolated from the broader urban context, involving the city, its history and its connections to global processes. Thus, how can we separate conflicts based on sexuality stigmas and affirmative gender practices as well as the subsequent reactions that took place in Gentilândia square, in Fortaleza, from similar events taking place elsewhere in other urban contexts? Is there a way not to associate hegemony disputes over cultural heritage to the policies of urban management that radicalizes rules of uses and disciplines in the continuous dispute for spaces? These and other questions lead towards considering the neighborhood in a two faced manner: as it tends to separate itself from the whole under the perspective of affirming geographical identities, at the same time it connects to daily practices and intervention proposals that permeate urban life in its social, economic and symbolic aspects.

The micro-social look onto urban spaces acquires deeper significance in this moment, when Fortaleza is rising as a metropolis. As the 5th largest Brazilian city with a population of 2.5 million people, Fortaleza has come to house complexities, diversifying areas of leisure and consumption, as well as constituting places of sociability, similar to turfs¹⁴, as Magnani (2002) called them. Cross-cut by diversities, the "decentralized" city is a fertile ground for the development of sociological and anthropological views.

Contrasting the academic works on social movements from the 1980s with current theses and dissertations, one may point out differences and similarities. The works that came the closest to an anthropological or sociological approach aiming to understand the everyday exercise of politics inherited the focus towards the unequal access to cultural and political goods. In fact, these works frequently engaged in the quest of unveiling the broad dynamics of social and political exclusion. Recent approaches rely on micro-relations without fostering a necessary connection with collective actors, and therefore become somewhat detached from the idea of the city as a provisional model of totality. If, on the one hand, the concept of territory enabled the investigation of emerging sociabilities, uses and diverse contraventions, on the other hand, the same concept shaped the comprehension of a city with multiplicities.

¹⁴"Turfs" was used as translation to the Portuguese word "pedaço", originally used by Magnani (2002). In 2005, a translated version of his paper was published online at the Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais website, although lacking formal references. The translated paper is available here: http://socialsciences.scielo.org/scielo.php?pid=S0102-69092005000100002&script=sci_arttext

In sum, the flow of ideas renewed the urban discussion. The investigative look for diversities, everyday life dynamics, and symbolic and territorial expressions brought about discoveries that, however, ignited the need for recomposing the urban as a whole. This time, though, the wholesomeness is not taken for granted, but rather constructed through connections and intercessions conducted by the researcher.

The passage from structural to micro-sociological approaches represents a kind of a movement towards paradigms capable of encompassing, in defined situations, a more complex network of interactions. The “discovery” of concrete actors in their diversity of actions, and their different collective meanings, constructed some sort of “metropolis with chairs on the sidewalk”. This is a reference to the daily habit of setting chairs on the sidewalk for family members and friends to sit and talk, which in Brazil is iconic for sociabilities and trust. Neighborhood sociability, then, co-inhabits with anonymity and the attitude of indifference (Simmel, 1979), which stand out as the image of “small town life” existing within a metropolis.

The master’s theses and the doctorate dissertations analyzed used magnifying glasses to craft close-up views, like a zoom of the electronic screen signaling for everyday life in its intersections, leading to the emergence of a multitude of actions and social categories usually hidden in a purely structural approach. The neighborhood *of the city*, the neighborhood *in the city* and the neighborhood *as a city* are, therefore, important shifts which this ensemble of theses and dissertations indicated.

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