A Broader Definition of Fragile States:
The Communities and Schools of Brazil's *Favelas*

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Though the existing literature on the favelas *(or shantytowns) of Brazil thoroughly documents the chaotic and violent nature of life within them, few connections have been made between the literature on* favelas, *fragility and small states, particularly with regard to the fragile state of educational institutions in* favelas. *This article summarizes the primary findings of prominent* favela *studies across the social sciences alongside the literature on fragility, drawing out a summative definition of fragility that easily applies to the context of education in Brazilian favelas. Primarily, this article argues that not only do the slums of Brazil qualify for classification as fragile small states, but such a classification by prominent multilaterals would open these areas to donor funding for educational programming that could greatly mitigate their fragility and advance educational equity, as occurs in other postconflict and fragile settings around the world.*

Introduction

The social, political and economic dynamics of the *favelas*, or illegal urban shantytowns that have materialized in the hills around Rio de Janeiro and other urban centers throughout Brazil, have long provided a fertile basis for academic research and analysis across disciplines. Political and historical analysis Gay, 1994; Penglase, 2009) has explored the political rivalry between drug cartels, local politicians and grassroots neighborhood associations for control of the hearts and minds of *favela* residents. Ethnographic work (Goldstein, 2003; Jones de Almeida, 2003; Leeds, 1996; Pardue, 2004; Soares, 2000) has extensively documented the day-to-day life of *favela* residents, as well as the particular forms of language, music and culture which have developed therein – both as responses to and as coping mechanisms for the economic and social inequalities experienced by Brazil's urban poor.

However, despite the chaotic and violent nature of *favela* life, few connections have been made between the literature on *favelas*, fragility and small states. In this article, I summarize the literature on fragility, drawing out a summative definition of fragility as a weakness or lack of capacity in local institutions (Mosselson, Wheaton, & Frisoli, 2009; Vallings & Torres, 2005) that – I argue – easily applies to the context of Brazilian *favelas*, as well as similar low-income slums across the globe. While not currently classified as independent regions in a formal sense, *favelas* are often ruled by local political actors (whether legal or extralegal) that exercise de facto sovereignty which I argue, according to Baldacchino (2012), qualify Brazilian slums for classification as fragile small or micro-states. To support this classification, I then summarize the primary findings of prominent *favela* studies across the social sciences, highlighting those findings which indicate the precarious and fragile educational, political, and social institutions in *favelas*.

I argue that such a classification by prominent multilaterals would open *favelas* to donor funding that could greatly mitigate their fragility (especially with regard to education), as occurs in other postconflict and fragile settings around the world. I further argue that education – particularly educational programming that promotes community-level political participation – is a key type of donor support that would ease fragility in this context. To do so, I draw upon extensive literature that documents Brazilian popular participation efforts, especially those based in Freirean

educational models, and their mitigation of fragility in low-income areas of Brazil. In sum, I use the literature on fragility and small states, favela life, and popular education in Brazil to argue that the classification of *favelas* as fragile micro-states by multilaterals could lead to donor attention that, if focused properly on educational programs promoting popular participation, could greatly improve the precarious political and economic status of Brazil's urban poor.

Fragility: A Review of the Literature
Though "fragility" is a standard term in the development literature, applied primarily to states that are recovering from some form of conflict or natural disaster, Mosselson et al. (2009) note that there is no standard definition of "fragility" or "fragile states" (p. 1). However, common threads arise when working definitions used by institutions and scholars are compared.

At its most basic, fragility is an inability to provide basic services, whether due to a lack of political will or a lack of institutional capacity (Mosselson et al., 2009, p. 2; see also Rose & Greeley, 2006, p. 5-7). Using this definition, Brazilian *favelas* definitely count as a fragile setting, due to the lack of state-provided security as well as the low quality of most existent state services, notably education.

However, localized settings like *favelas* do not meet most organizational definitions of fragility, as such definitions are currently very state-centric. Indeed, until recently the term "fragility" has been used less often than "fragile states" (Mosselson et al., 2009, p. 4). Mosselson et al. (2009) explain why, stating that it is a common commitment by donors and organizations to "[work] alongside governments" towards "state-building and governance priorities" (p. 2) that leads them to focus on fragility at the state level. In other words, the reasoning for a state-level focus seems to be two-fold: first, state-building is where donors and organizations have the most experience and expertise, due to their historical commitment to such. Second, there is the issue of receptivity on the part of the recipient state. States are usually not eager to be labeled as 'fragile.' As such, states that are not wholly fragile – but rather experience pockets of fragility – are often less willing to accept this label, especially since the funding that such labeling makes possible does not always reliably accompany it, making the decision something of a political gamble (Brown, 2006).

Due to this phenomenon, Mosselson et al. (2009) note that many donors are moving towards the concept of fragility rather than fragile states, a definition that allows donors and organizations to "move beyond the emphasis on governments" (p. 4). A term like fragility can be applied on the regional or local level as well as the state, and as such can be more widely applicable and useful. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development, or DFID (2005), has reflected this general shift with their use of the more general term "difficult environments." Such open, dynamic terms allow more general application, especially pertinent to settings which are experiencing strong growth at the state level while maintaining pockets of extreme inequality and fragility, like Brazil.

Building on the argument that current global conditions require some "creative political economy" that moves beyond state-centric models (Baldacchino & Milne, 2008), Baldacchino (2012) provides a framework within which *favelas* and other sub-national areas can be seen as small states unto themselves, able to exercise some degree of autonomy and sovereignty. According to Baldacchino (2012), the globalized and postcolonial international relationships of the 20th and early 21st centuries extend beyond traditional national boundaries to include subnational areas that do not claim independent national sovereignty in the traditional sense. While traditionally "you either are sovereign or you are not" has been the standard for statehood, "this rule of thumb is increasingly found wanting in the 21st century" (Baldacchino, 2012, p. 239). As Baldacchino

(2012) further explains,

> What is evident is that subnational units can target specific functions and powers (of sovereignty), which they then seek to secure...Although always dependent on context, all the functions and powers typically associated with sovereignty have been up for negotiation. (p. 245)

Within a Brazilian *favela* context, there are a number of local political actors that have historically negotiated a certain degree of de facto sovereignty, as will be explored more fully in the next section. As semi-autonomous micro-states exercising degrees of de facto sovereignty, *favelas* become defensibly classifiable as fragile even using a more traditional state-centric model of fragility.

Vallings and Torres (2005) provide a fragility framework that is particularly applicable and useful in a *favela* micro-state context. To Vallings and Torres (2005), the primary driver of fragility is weak political institutions and a lack of political participation. That is, "in areas where [state-level political institutions] are continuously changing, or in a state of transition...there is only a weak system of institutional coherence, so that individual parts of that system fall open to abuse by powerful groups or interests" (Vallings & Torres, 2005, p. 9). This lack of institutional coherence is what creates fragility.

As exemplified by the literature on *favelas* explored in the next section, Brazilian *favelas* are a clear example of such institutional instability. Through a review of the extensive social science literature on life in *favelas*, the following section will illustrate how the continuous power struggle between the police and drug cartels described by Penglase (2009) as "ordered disorder" leads to the "abuse by powerful groups or interests" described by Vallings and Torres (2005, p. 9). Similarly, the variously agitated and banal environment in *favela* schools that will be described by Guareschi (1998) clearly displays that Brazilian education can epitomize Vallings and Torres' (2005) definition of a "weak institution."

Life in Brazilian *Favelas*

The *favelas* of Brazil are plagued by a constant state of conflict and tension that Penglase (2009) described as a sort of "ordered disorder" or purposeful "(in)security" (p. 47) provided alternately by the state police, local drug traffickers, and local community leaders. Extensive literature on favela life (Arias, 2004; Gay, 1994; Leeds, 1996; Leeds & Leeds, 1977; Zaluar, 1998) addresses this "(in)security," much of it from a partially historical perspective. These works will be discussed first, followed by works that focus on current conditions – particularly the state of education – in Brazil's slums.

Leeds (1996) provides an introductory history of how *favelas* developed as a form of affordable low-income housing, in response to the growing need for cheap labor in Rio de Janeiro. Officially illegal but tolerated by the state due to the labor they provided, *favelas* were seen as acceptable so long as they remained invisible. This invisible status granted by the state laid the groundwork for *favelas* to develop into what Leeds (1996) calls the most "visible and tangible form of the violence used by the state" against Brazil's urban poor (p. 50).

Several other authors, notably Gay (1994) and Zaluar (1998), build upon Leeds (1996) by focusing on the role of neighborhood associations, or *associações de morro* (AMs), in the formal establishment and development of Brazilian slums. In the language of small state jurisdictions explored earlier

by Baldacchino (2012), AMs are one of the primary actors that have endowed *favelas* with a sense of relative autonomy and sovereignty.

Since *favelas* first began to grow in the hills around Rio de Janeiro, AMs typically arose organically as small groups of neighborhood leaders would organize themselves to petition local government for legal title to their newly seized land. This role as broker between *favela* communities and local politicians granted AM leaders a great deal of political strength (Leeds & Leeds, 1977). However, as basic infrastructural needs for utilities, roads, and schools were eventually met, the importance of AMs began to wane (Gay, 1994; Zaluar, 1998).

Over time, AMs were replaced in their role as political brokers by drug cartels that increasingly developed patron-client relationships with local politicians and police (Arias, 2004). AMs were not completely replaced and remained important community figures – however, their survival often meant their inclusion in or association with the drug trade (Gay, 1994). It is this gradual growth in drug activity within *favelas*, and the accompanying violence and instability, which has brought *favela* life to its current fragile state.

There are many excellent qualitative *favela* studies which document the fragility of slum life due to the violent relationship between drug cartels and police, in which both sides fight for the hearts and minds of *favela* residents. Holloway (1993), in a qualitative study of Rio de Janeiro's police force, describes the role Rio police see for themselves as providers of order for the greater population of Rio, justifying their violent containment and repression of drug activity in *favelas* as necessary for the greater good. Garotinho and his co-authors (1998) provide an analysis of how this has reinforced what they call "criminal legitimacy": as police violence became pervasive enough to seem arbitrary, local residents turned to drug traffickers as *de facto* community leaders. Several other authors use qualitative data gathered in various *favelas* to document the same pattern. Goldstein (2003), in a larger ethnographic work on race and sexuality in a particular *favela,* notes that local drug gangs provide "a parallel or alternative rule of law" (p. 225) that settles local concerns due to a lack of resident faith in the police. Soares (2000), in an excellent Portuguese-language *favela* ethnography, emphasizes the perception of *favela* residents that drug traffickers, while despotic, provide order that strongly contrasts with seemingly arbitrary police violence. Leeds (1996), in her ethnography on the cocaine trade in one *favela*, also highlights the perception by *favela* dwellers "that the formal justice system does not work for them [and] has led a portion of the population to accept an alternative justice system" provided by drug cartels (p. 62). Perlman (2006), in a synthesis of ethnographic data collected over a 40 year period in a single *favela*, notes that the marginalization of the urban poor has only increased over that time frame due to increasing drug-related violence and a lack of opportunities for democratic participation.

Particularly, several studies focus on the unstable and inequitable nature of education in urban *favelas*. In her qualitative study of adolescent students in a *favela* school, Guareschi (1998) notes the degree to which her participants internalize (while still attempting to resist) messages of underachievement, marginalization and deviance received in school settings. Brazilian urban adolescents are marginalized by formal educational structures, a situation which has prompted the growth of alternative educational projects and community schools based around popular cultural forms such as hip-hop (Pardue, 2004) and traditional Afro-Brazilian music and dance (Jones de Almeida, 2003).

Looking at Brazilian education comparatively with educational systems in other Latin American countries, Vegas and Petrow (2008) point out that, although democratically governed since 1985,

Brazil has struggled to transition to a just society. For the last 60 years, expanded opportunities in education have been a significant factor in social mobility. However, much of this expanded opportunity sprang from privatized channels denied to marginalized groups, so educational inequality persists among racial minorities and low-income Brazilians, particularly in urban *favelas*. Consequently in Brazil, as in much of Latin America, income inequality correlates positively with educational inequality (Vegas & Petrow, 2008).

Several prominent articles provide compelling theoretical frames in which the dynamic of violence, patronage and educational inequality found in Brazilian *favelas* can be understood. Kerstenetsky and Santos (2009) – economists using a capabilities approach, or a development framework that focuses on what individual actors in a given setting are able to do – try to characterize *favela* life as poor due to a lack of freedom that results from insecurity and violence. This argument arose in response to several Brazilian economists that have argued that *favela* residents cannot be truly considered "poor" in an absolute sense when their average salaries are compared globally (see Silva, 2005; Valadares, 2005). Kerstenetsky and Santos (2009) make the point that *favelas* are "freedom-poor" due to their instability and lack of access to quality public services (particularly education), even if average incomes have reached a level that could be considered above poverty.

Rodrigues (2006) attempts to explain the roots of Brazilian urban violence, inequality and insecurity by tying such to a perceived lack of civil democracy. Basing his claims in survey data gathered in several *favelas* where various strategies have been used to increase stability, Rodrigues (2006) notes that attempts to build the legitimacy of public-level institutions (such as the neighborhood police and local elected officials) have had positive effects on perceptions of security, while efforts to build social bonds at the private level had no such perceived effect. While Rodrigues' (2006) findings are interesting, they are limited due to their specific temporal and spatial context, especially given the fraught relations with police noted by most *favela* researchers.

As the last of the reviewed theoretical pieces, Penglase (2009) coins the term "(in)stability" to refer to the ability of drug traders to maintain political and social control through alternately inflicting local violence and providing local protection. In this sense, this author addresses the ambiguity of drug cartel control with a level of nuance that is lacking in other works. Penglase (2009) notes that sovereignty is determined just as much by "the ability to institute and suspend 'normality'" (p. 47) as the ability to enact or enforce law. By deliberately creating instability and disorder, and interrupting the normal functioning of schools and other public institutions, drug gangs normalize such behavior and by so doing "naturalize their power" (Penglase, 2009, p. 51). With this theoretical construct of "(in)stability," Penglase (2009) provides a compelling explanatory framework for how drug cartels can maintain power through the reinforcement of fragility.

Clearly, given the broader definition of fragility and micro-states described earlier (Baldacchino, 2012; Mosselson et al., 2009), the picture of Brazilian *favelas* and their schools captured by Penglase (2009) and others reveals these contexts to be fragile environments that act as semi-autonomous small states. Identification as "fragile" micro-states could help open Brazilian *favela* communities to an immense amount of donor wealth, at least with regards to global education funds like the Fast Track Initiative (Sperling, 2007), that could help to end "the [continual] marginalization of the [Brazilian] urban poor" (Perlman, 2006, p. 154) witnessed by countless researchers over the last century. The following section will review the literature on education and fragility, specifically in a Brazilian context, so as to build the argument for investment in education as a means to mitigate the fragility experienced by Brazil's urban poor.

Where to Go From Here – Education and Fragility
Mosselson et al. (2009) have clearly noted the potential relationships between education and fragility – that is, education can either be a mitigating or exacerbating force (p. 6; see also Bush & Salterelli, 2000). Within a Brazilian context, a number of educational initiatives have been found to help reduce instability and fragility by promoting democratic educational institutions and political participation in schools and their surrounding communities. This section reviews several examples of these initiatives found in the literature.

One of the main results of increased gang violence and fear in *favelas* is a reduction in people's willingness and ability to use the social networks and social capital available to them (Perlman, 2006) in community organizations (which, as Arias [2004] has previously noted, were quite common during the initial settling of Rio's *favelas*). This stigmatization of community organizing and subsequent lack of political participation has been one of the main marginalizing trends in *favela* life. Strengthening local institutions (including schools) and increasing community participation could mitigate the instability and fragility experienced in urban Brazilian slums.

Several efforts at increasing local community participation have experienced a great deal of success in mitigating fragility in urban Brazilian contexts. One such effort, participatory community budgeting, has been explored at length (see Abers, 1996, 2000; Avritzer, 2010). Several southern Brazilian cities – most prominently Porto Alegre – have begun to allow local communities to publicly plan their own local spending budget, and the results have been well-documented. Living conditions for the poor in these communities have drastically improved (Avritzer, 2010), and perhaps more importantly (given the prominence of patron-client relationships between *favelas* and local authorities [Arias, 2004]), participatory budgeting has substantially lowered clientilism. That is, in a study of several communities with participatory budgeting, clientilistic neighborhood associations have largely lost access to public goods during their first years of participatory budgeting, and have reacted by changing social practices to become more transparent and democratic (Abers, 2000).

This same participatory approach to local governance has also been used in and through Brazilian schools to mitigate fragility, especially by movements and schools that have adopted the pedagogical model of Paulo Freire (1970). Perhaps the most visible example of this is the *Movimento Sem Terra*, Brazil's nationwide landless peoples' movement, which organizes community-run schools in all of its settlements. These schools are governed by community-level councils, which are responsible for school administration, curriculum selection, and day-to-day maintenance and governance of schools (Caldart, 1997; MST, 1999). Several researchers credit this democratic system as being one of the principal sources of the movement's organizational stability and strength (Martins, 2006; McCowan, 2003).

Such a system could easily be applied in Brazilian *favela* community schools, as strong local governance systems such as AMs are already in place (Perlman, 1976; Resende de Carvalho et al., 1998). Donors and other international actors could sponsor the creation of local democratic governance systems within existent community networks such as AMs and schools, building capacity for locally run democratic governance systems. Democratically organized community schools are already a reality in many parts of Brazil, though documentation is perhaps strongest for the "citizen schools" of Porto Alegre (see Gandin & Apple, 2004). In these schools, students and their parents take an active part in organizational planning, and as a result the exclusion that often typifies urban Brazilian schools is replaced by a sustainable, locally-controlled institution that teaches students to think critically and work towards the betterment of their quality of life.

Arias (2004) calls for the expansion of these types of democratic systems as a potential solution to *favela* instability, asserting that through sponsorship of local democratic schooling initiatives, international actors can provide *favela* communities with the means to develop innovative solutions to community problems and petition for necessary changes in state policy.

Due to their outsider status, such organizations have the legitimacy to help identify and circumvent corrupt local actors, supporting nascent organizations until they have gained local credibility. Using data from several *favelas* where such programs have been implemented by international agencies, Arias (2004) describes how internationally-sponsored local democratic institutions have led to local police reform (p. 26) and increased safety. For instance, in urban Salvador in northeast Brazil one internationally-financed community school (most prominently funded by UNICEF) holds regular community meetings to plan community projects and address common concerns. Out of these meetings have come organized neighborhood watches, grant applications for vocational and other educational courses for neighborhood youth, and many other opportunities to which, without these meetings, this community would not have had access (G. dos Santos, personal communication, June 15, 2005). Recognition of *favelas* as areas of fragility would allow for further examples such as this by opening *favelas* up to further investment from educational fragility-minded donors and multilateral organizations.

Discussion

While this article has made the argument that Brazilian *favelas* could be made less fragile through international funding of educational programming, several questions remain: Should international organizations or the Brazilian state be held responsible for such work? If *favelas* were to be classified as small states using Baldacchino's (2012) criteria, who at the *favela* level would be the sovereignty-exercising actors with whom multilateral investors should interact? This section will explore these questions.

First, regarding governmental responsibility for Brazilian *favelas*, international third-party intervention is hardly a new concept given the long-standing role of the international development industry in promoting such interventions, whether through multilateral funding organizations, non-profits or other non-governmental actors (Boli & Thomas, 1997). In areas in which governments fail to fulfill public needs, such intervention is common (Rahman, 2006), and the Brazilian government has arguably failed to fulfill its mandate to provide quality public education in low-income *favela* settings (Vegas & Petrow, 2008). While the state and local police have become increasingly present in the *favelas* around Rio de Janeiro through recent pacification efforts (Baroni, 2011; Veloso, 2010), this sudden governmental concern has not extended to the improvement of basic services, like education. As a result, international organizations could have a significant impact on those social sectors which have been neglected by state and national governments.

Local cartels, neighborhood associations (AMs) and non-profits are all actors that could solicit and maintain economically supportive relationships with international entities independent of the Brazilian government. This type of relationship could be problematic if cartels are the local agents soliciting support on behalf of their communities, due to the extralegal nature of cartel activities and the ambivalent support they receive from their surrounding neighborhoods (Garotinho et al., 1998). While there is abundant evidence of local governments in sub-national areas exercising sovereignty in making decisions for their communities (Baldacchino, 2012), these local governments have local legal authority which cartels have only been able to assert in a de facto manner. Further research would be necessary to determine whether, in any given particular

favela context, cartels would be the local authorities most fit to solicit external support, as opposed to local neighborhood associations (AMs) or non-profits.

Conclusion

Through a review of the relevant literature, it is evident that Brazilian *favelas* are sites of extreme instability, violence, insecurity, and educational inequity. Additionally, Brazilian *favelas* easily qualify as fragile if, as Baldacchino (2012) suggests, the definition is extended beyond the state level. Such an application of the term "fragile" could prove helpful by opening poor *favela* communities to greater donor investment in local schools and other community organizations. As illustrated in the examples above, such investment would prove especially helpful if used to promote stronger democratic institutions in schools and neighborhood associations at the local community level. Such initiatives have been shown to successfully mitigate *favela*-level fragility, and an increase in similar programming and funding could reduce the educational and social insecurity experienced by *favela* residents on a daily basis. Such intervention by international organizations in sub-national areas is philosophically defensible given the complex and nuanced potential definitions of contemporary statehood, within which areas like *favelas* can be considered comparable to other small states or states-within-states (Baldacchino, 2012).

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