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FRAGMENTS OF 19TH-CENTURY RIO: THE MISERICÓRDIA AND ITS THOROUGHFARES **FRAGMENTOS DO RIO NO XIX: A MISERICÓRDIA E SEUS LOGRADOUROS** **LETÍCIA BEDENDO CAMPANHA PIRES**

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Abstract

The Misericórdia neighborhood, located in the former *freguesia* (a historical administrative unit comparable to a parish) of São José in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, underwent profound transformations in its land use and occupation throughout its long trajectory, reflecting the social, political, and economic dynamics that shaped the city. This study focuses on the neighborhood and its streets, particularly during the 1870s, mobilizing a diversified set of sources — such as historical maps, images, news reports, advertisements, and excerpts from literature that address complementary temporalities and contexts — in order to shed light on the everyday life of the area through an approach that articulates both macro and micro spatial scales. In the second half of the nineteenth century, growing investments in urban infrastructure, combined with the exploitation of land as a source of profit, induced the subdivision of existing properties in the city center. The findings reveal a neighborhood characterized by a strong presence of commerce and services, marked by the coexistence of different forms of dwelling. By highlighting everyday practices and the uses of urban architectures, the investigation seeks to position Misericórdia as a strategic site for rethinking the city and its memories, while also demonstrating the potential of articulating primary sources in historiographical revisions aimed at recognizing actors and territories traditionally rendered invisible within Urban Studies.

Keywords: Misericórdia neighborhood, Rio de Janeiro, Nineteenth Century, Urban properties, Spatial scales.

1 Introduction

The Misericórdia neighborhood, situated in the former *freguesia* (a historical administrative unit comparable to a parish) of São José, constitutes a paradigmatic case study for understanding the processes of urbanization, segregation, and land valorization that characterized nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro. Its origins date back to a strategic initiative of the Portuguese Crown in the sixteenth century aimed at territorial protection against foreign invaders. Over the centuries, its role within the urban fabric was progressively reshaped in response to emerging needs as well as to successive urban reform projects, which gained momentum from the nineteenth century onward. In the early decades of the twentieth century, shortly before the beginning of its demolition, chroniclers attentive to the city's everyday life, such as João do Rio, the pseudonym of writer João Paulo Barreto (1881–1921), and Luís Edmundo (1880–1961), portrayed the Misericórdia neighborhood as an insalubrious area marked by progressive abandonment and sustained neglect by public authorities. The second half of the nineteenth century was notably defined by an intensification of Rio de Janeiro's urbanization process. According to Maurício de Almeida Abreu (2003, p. 218), the growing commodification of urban land, spurred by the crisis of the slave-based system and by investments in infrastructure, contributed to a reordering of the city, encouraging the occupation of new areas and the conversion of former elite residences into collective dwellings. Within this context, the Misericórdia Street, located in the neighborhood of the same name and originally linked to the city's foundational core, was transformed into a space where properties were increasingly subdivided into rooms and rented to urban workers and students.

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Building on this contextual framework, the present article aims to investigate the occupation of the Misericórdia neighborhood during the 1870s, an initial milestone in this broader process, with particular emphasis on urban property uses, especially mixed-use *sobrados*, a term employed here to designate multi-story buildings that simultaneously accommodated residential and non-residential activities. The commercial and service-related functions were typically concentrated on the ground floors, whereas dwellings occupied the upper stories. The research articulates the existing bibliography on the neighborhood with a corpus of primary sources, such as news items and advertisements published in periodicals of the time, photographs, cartographic material, and literary records, with the aim of reconstructing the everyday uses of this portion of the urban territory. In cases where property numbers are recorded, these sources make it possible to identify their respective thoroughfares, thereby informing the spatialization of the forms of sociability that structured the region. Although the neighborhood frequently appears in studies focused either on its colonial phase or on the moment of its demolition, the intermediary processes that led to its gradual erasure remain relatively understudied. This article seeks precisely to illuminate this interval, marked by the increasing profitability of urban land and by residential densification. To this end, sources from different historical periods are mobilized as a means of expanding the analytical grasp of the phenomenon under investigation. The strategic cross-referencing of these diverse sources allows for the apprehension of history through complementary perspectives. Exploring their interconnections

evokes what German philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) conceptualized as “constellations”: non-linear arrangements of dispersed elements that, when brought into association, disclose new meanings regarding the object of study (Benjamin, 1984 [1925]). In the case of the Misericórdia neighborhood and its everyday life as an object of analysis, the goal is to underscore the value of primary sources as allies in constructing interpretive frameworks capable of illuminating the trajectory of this and other erased urban territories, aligning the investigation with contemporary agendas committed to the recovery of marginalized memories.

2 Between the micro and the macro: historiographical approaches and scales of analysis

The fields of History and Historiography¹ are frequently incorporated into other areas of knowledge as a strategy for achieving a multidisciplinary understanding of their respective objects of study. In the specific case of Urban Studies, such an articulation becomes essential for interpreting the connections that take shape in space over time. Recognizing the methodological frameworks available within History, therefore, requires acknowledging both the potentialities and the limitations that each perspective offers to the field. According to Bernard Lepetit (2001a), for much of the twentieth century, long-duration structures occupied a central position in European historiographical approaches, particularly within the French tradition². However, the primacy of the macro-scale in fields of observation entered a clear crisis between the 1970s and 1980s. It was in this context, more precisely in Italy, that the micro-historical³ approach emerged, drawing on the collection, interpretation, and analysis of sources tied to the specificities of individuals who shaped the everyday life of the city, concurrently with the development of computing technologies and the possibility of new tools for recording, storing, and processing quantitative data (Revel, 1998). Lepetit (2001b) noted that one of the main contributions of micro-analysis was its ability to act as a counterweight to the risks of excessive theoretical schematization in the interpretation of historical contexts. He also emphasized, however, that the conclusions derived from an analysis conducted at a particular scale should not be opposed to broader scales of observation, but rather complement them, so that historical inquiry may be continuously renewed on new foundations (Lepetit, 2001b).

Supported by this perspective, Naylor Vilas Boas (2019) underscored the potential of microanalysis to articulate Demographic History with Social History. By assembling diverse sources capable of elucidating aspects of everyday life, he proposed moving beyond strictly quantitative readings of historical series, directing attention instead to the social relations embedded within them. In this sense, he defined *micronarratives* as records that, although seemingly devoid of broad historical relevance, focus on reduced temporal scales and reveal fragments of the lived experiences of individuals and groups. These micronarratives may be constructed through the association of multiple sources, each contributing to illuminating different aspects of cities, their populations, and the historical contexts in which they are embedded. Although discrepancies in dating across sources present challenges, the author argued that such obstacles are not insurmountable. Concerning the different temporalities within the field of Urban Studies, the geographer Milton Santos (1926–2001) identified the city center as a privileged object of analysis precisely because it incorporates forms inherited over time, what he termed *rugosities* (in the original, *rugosidades*). This condition results from the accumulation of *techniques* (or *técnicas*) inscribed in the territory, linking “man” and labor and acting as a connective element between time and space, thereby allowing multiple historical phases to coexist in the present (Santos, 2002 [1996], 2008 [1959]). The Misericórdia district exemplifies this phenomenon by traversing distinct political and economic phases in the history of Rio de Janeiro. A micro-analytical approach centered on the district is thus articulated with broader scales, allowing for an understanding of how temporalities coexist and project themselves dialectically across different levels of observation.

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¹ Regarding the distinction between history and historiography, Marina Waisman notes that historiography concerns, in broad terms, the study of the writing of history itself. In her words, “historical science is not the mere reproduction of what happened (...) and historiography enables a dual reading of the subject matter and of the ideology of the historical moment in which it was studied” (Waisman, 2013, pp. 3–4, our translation).

² As for long-duration structures, Jacques Revel (1998, p. 17) explained that they refer to temporalities defined by historiography on the basis of identified historical ruptures, aimed at examining social phenomena through the selection of a sufficiently extended timespan so that transformations of a global scope may become observable.

³ According to Lepetit (2001b, p. 191), debates concerning the field of micro-history were first articulated by the group of Italian historians associated with the journal *Quaderni Storici* and the *Microstorie* series. Among the most relevant authors and works of that period are Carlo Ginzburg and his 1976 book *The Cheese and the Worms*, as well as Giovanni Levi, author of *Inheriting Power: The Story of an Exorcist*, published in 1985.

Moreover, this perspective highlights how techniques manifest in the interaction between major urban ruptures and everyday responses.

A potential methodological key for working with micronarratives lies in the proposals developed from Walter Benjamin's theory regarding historiographical postures. As defined by Michael Löwy (2002), Benjamin's theoretical framework was grounded in a critique of a philosophy of progress and of any positive, linear, or qualitative conception of temporality. Benjamin simultaneously acknowledged the continuity of certain essential themes while emphasizing that curves and ruptures emerge when history is examined "against the grain," that is, from the perspective of agents who were rendered invisible in hegemonic historiographical constructions (Benjamin, 2000 [1940]; Löwy, 2002). A Benjaminian concept directly relevant to the study of cities is that of the constellation, which Rita Velloso (2018) mobilized to avoid treating urban connections in linear or evolutionary terms. According to the author, Benjamin appropriated the image of the relationship between stars and their grouping into constellations as a way of illustrating concepts that, when interconnected, materialize ideas and generate a configuration of relations in which there is no single center but rather a set of interdependent meanings. Drawing on Benjamin's reflections, thinking in extremes, that is, analogous to the points that correspond to the stars, necessarily produces voids and discontinuities that serve as analytical potentialities. When addressing the urban realm, it is essential to consider the study of a city's morphology, its physical ordering, and material unfoldings in association with what resists planning and exceeds the urban design, such as conflicts, claims, and demands for space (Velloso, 2018).

Velloso (2018) therefore proposed approaching the city through the presentation of historical images drawn from diverse sources, among documentary, iconographic, and even the materiality of buildings, which, when associated, form a literary montage of heterogeneous phenomena, that is, a constellation. A practical example defended by Walter Benjamin is the device of mosaic construction, in which the images produced emerge from the juxtaposition of isolated elements. What is noteworthy in mosaics is that the smaller the apparent relation between the fragments and the resulting image, the greater their value of presentation. In his words, they are "shards of ideas, torn from their original context, and which must be reborn in a new relational universe, contributing to the formation of a new whole⁴" (Benjamin, 1984 [1925], p. 23). As Paola Berenstein Jacques (2018) further noted, in historiographical or urban montage, unlikely associations generate shocks through the different times and spaces embedded in the citations. In this regard, the author discussed the device of montage as a process — which includes dismantling and reassembling — as one of the fundamental responses to the problem of constructing historicity (Jacques, 2018). An illustrative example is the *Mnemosyne Atlas* by Aby Warburg, the art historian who sought to create a space of thought regarding the history of art, though never limiting himself to that field in its strictest sense. The *Atlas* consisted of a series of large, movable panels containing highly heterogeneous fragments and images, such as photographs of artworks, details of paintings, maps, drawings and diagrams, newspaper clippings, and magazine excerpts. Warburg's central concern was to articulate a form of "methodological testament" and to search for a kind of residual "life" persisting through the memory of later epochs. The practice of such montages thus promises to harness the remnants of history through the reassembly of fragments of time and of diverse narratives and narrators (Jacques, 2018, p. 210).

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3 Misericórdia in perspective: a journey through Its multiple temporalities

The area corresponding to the Misericórdia neighborhood was part of the former freguesia of São José, whose initial delimitations date back to the 18th century. As explained by Francisco Agenor Noronha Santos (1965), before the creation of the Neutral Municipality in 1834, Rio de Janeiro was territorially organized by its freguesias, whose boundaries coincided with those of the ecclesiastical parishes. Even after this first transition and later to the Federal District in 1892, the ecclesiastical divisions continued to operate as administrative units, evidencing the overlap between the religious and civil spheres (Santos, 1965). The freguesia of São José was instituted by royal charter in 1753, following the dismemberment of the freguesia of Candelária. Its boundaries extended from the vicinity of the Carioca fountain towards Gávea and stretched to Jacarepaguá neighborhoods, also encompassing areas such as the Laranjeiras, the Cosme Velho and the Botafogo neighborhood as well. Subsequently, in 1834, part of its territory was dismembered to form the freguesia of Glória (Santos, 1965). The Misericórdia region, specifically, occupied lands originating from old land grants and navy lands conceded in the 16th century by Mem de Sá (Santos, 1965).

⁴ The Origin of German Tragic Drama (originally *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*); the transcription provided here is based on the Portuguese edition consulted.

Important edifices marked the space, such as the Fort of Santiago (1603), the Ordnance House (1762), and the War Arsenal (1764). The fort, initially aimed at defense against invasions, later came to be used as a prison and torture site for enslaved people, giving rise to the nickname Calabouço Point. These constructions, currently integrated into the National Historical Museum (in Portuguese, Museu Histórico Nacional – MHN), are located at the Marechal Âncora square, between the Praça XV square and Santos Dumont Airport (Museu Histórico Nacional, n.d.).

While walking through the rear grounds of the MHN, one can still find the Misericórdia Slope, the only remaining physical vestige of the former street of the same name and of the Castelo Hill, both erased from the urban fabric in the early decades of the twentieth century. Adjacent to the slope and at the base of the hill lay the Misericórdia Square, which Jacques Sillos (2015) identifies as the city's first public open space resembling a square (praça), and the site where the Misericórdia Confraternity was originally established. The settlement of the Confraternity in this location led to the construction of a church, a hospital, an orphanage, and a cemetery. The building of the Church of Misericórdia, today known as Nossa Senhora de Bonsucceso, and of the Misericórdia Hospital dates to the late sixteenth century (Sillos, 2015). The main façade of the hospital faced the former Santa Luzia shore, which disappeared after 1905 due to the landfilling works carried out during the administration of Pereira Passos (1902-1906) (Brasiliana Fotográfica, n.d.). The Confraternity of Nossa Senhora da Misericórdia spread throughout the Portuguese Empire with support from the Crown, assuming charitable and colonizing functions. Its activities in Rio de Janeiro are believed to have begun with José de Anchieta in 1582 (Gandelman, 2001). The Jesuit College, located beside the slope, housed the city's first School of Medicine in 1808, operating in conjunction with the Royal Military Hospital. The Confraternity strengthened its charitable and educational presence in the territory through institutions such as the Foundling House (Casa dos Expostos) and the Shelter for Orphaned Girls (Recolhimento das Órfãs), which, although physically relocated over time, remained under the Confraternity's authority⁵. These establishments functioned as mechanisms of social disciplining and the reproduction of gender roles, as they sheltered boys and girls in situations of vulnerability (Santos, 1965; Gandelman, 2001). Within this context, the Foundling Wheel (Roda dos Expostos or Roda dos Enjeitados) operated as a device installed on the exterior walls of such institutions, enabling the anonymous surrender of newborns to the Santa Casa (Arantes, 2010; Marcílio, 2016).

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In the nineteenth century, the *Santa Casa* underwent a process of restructuring in response to the diseases that afflicted the city. Beginning in the 1830s, a movement toward the specialization and fragmentation of spaces emerged, accompanied by structural and administrative reforms. Within this context, sanitary improvements were implemented, such as the introduction of piped water into its departments and the construction of a new cemetery outside the hospital grounds. The Foundling House became the target of measures aimed at increasing control and improving sanitary conditions, including the separation of healthy and sick children, the replacement of clothing and utensils, and the use of artificial breastfeeding. It ceased to operate adjacent to the hospital in 1811, relocating to a nearby building and, in the twentieth century, to the neighborhood of Flamengo. The Shelter for Orphaned Girls, in turn, underwent reforms such as the expansion of internal space and the reduction of contact with public alleys. In 1842, the institution left the hospital and began circulating through different buildings in the city (Gandelman, 2001). Misericórdia Street, connected to the square and the slope and extending to Primeiro de Março Street, functioned as a circulation axis and access route to the Confraternity's services. Moreover, at the beginning of the street, near Paço Square, the Town Hall and Jail (Casa de Câmara e Cadeia) operated from 1630 onward. Over the centuries, the building housed institutions such as the first public bank called Caixa Econômica and, in 1823, the first Constituent Assembly. It later became known as the seat of the Chamber of Deputies, before being demolished in 1922 (Brasil, 1965). In the surrounding area, the Church of São José was established in 1842, whose Confraternity was governed by blood purity criteria and formed part of the ritual path taken by the condemned on their way to prison⁶ (Santos, 1965). The short stories of Machado de Assis (1839-1908), such as *Sem Olhos* (1876), *Uma por Outra* (1897), *A Mulher Pálida* (1881), and *O Anjo Rafael* (1869), mentioned shared lodgings and rented

⁵ The *Santa Casa* possessed a significant revenue stream derived from urban properties exempt from taxes such as the décima predial (urban tithe), as well as from contributions originating from lotteries, legacies, allocations from Public Revenue, prizes, fees paid by affluent patients, and funeral services. Beyond the architectural complex of the Misericórdia, the Confraternity also administered the hospitals of Irajá, Nossa Senhora da Saúde, and Nosso Senhor do Socorro, in São Cristóvão neighborhood (Santos, 1965, pp. 137-138).

⁶ Machado de Assis captured the religiosity in these urban journeys through characters such as the "brother of souls", in his work *Esau and Jacob* (1904).

rooms on Misericórdia Street, suggesting the presence of young people arriving from other provinces to study in the capital. Years later, records from the Police Precinct⁷ located in the area confirmed this collective residential pattern. One example was the report of a resident in 1916 concerning the theft of a dog by his roommate. The complaint, in this case, was corroborated by two witnesses, who also lived on the same floor and in the immediate vicinity. This seemingly ordinary episode reveals central aspects of everyday life on the street: shared rooms, informal social bonds, and the coexistence of workers. It also indicates that, by the early twentieth century, the logic of collective dwelling, already present in nineteenth-century chronicles, persisted in the area.

The Misericórdia neighborhood, whose boundaries vary according to the sources, encompassed not only the square, slope, and street of the same name, but also several additional thoroughfares, including streets, squares, and alleys. Gerson Brasil (1965) explained the origins of the names of the neighborhood's principal alleys. Cotovelo Alley, for instance, is thought to have been opened as early as the sixteenth century as an access route to the sea, receiving its name "elbow" due to its angular configuration. Batalha Alley allegedly derived from an oratory once located there, dedicated to the devotion of Our Lady of the Battle. In the case of Moura Alley, at the rear of the square of the same name, the Moura Regiment, brought from Portugal in 1777, was first housed in temporary huts and later in a barracks, which accounts for the alley's name. Música Alley, in turn, was frequented by drummers and musicians who taught in a house that had previously housed the administration of the salt monopoly. Boa Morte Alley was likely associated with the proximity of gallows, whereas Guindaste Alley referred to the inclined plane and lifting device employed by the Jesuits to transport goods from the port to the top of Castelo Hill. As for Ferreiros Alley, the author did not indicate the origin of its name, but he noted that, at the turn of the nineteenth century, it was inhabited by a significant Chinese population, whose presence is also documented in chronicles about the city. Indeed, when referring to the same alley, the chronicler Luís Edmundo (1938) described how its properties were used by the Sino-Brazilian community, particularly in connection with the consumption of opium in collective houses composed of multiple dark and unsanitary rooms known as *fumerias*. He also identified, regarding the material fabric of the Misericórdia Neighborhood, features such as peeling plaster, exposed masonry, roofs covered with fungus, and widespread moisture infiltration. These material signs of decay coexisted with everyday practices that evidenced the continuity of residential occupation, such as clothing hung on improvised clotheslines, as well as a variety of services offered within the houses and along the streets (Edmundo, 1938). The photographs taken by Augusto César Malta de Campos (1864–1957) throughout the 1920s illustrate the neighborhood's materiality by documenting the building typologies found on Misericórdia Street and its transverse alleys, including one-story houses and two-story *sobrados*⁸ (townhouses). In the case of the *sobrados*, the images reveal a pattern of mixed use that combined residential and commercial functions: shops on the ground floor and dwellings on the upper floors.

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4 The exposed urban properties of Misericórdia: land, architecture, and the city in 19th-century Rio

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Rio de Janeiro underwent a continuous process of urban reconfiguration, in which the Misericórdia neighborhood participated with its own singularities. Within this context, the city possessed a network of commercial streets, as revealed by the *Mappa architectural da cidade do Rio de Janeiro: parte comercial* (1874)⁹, which delineates the entire Fidalga Alley and the Misericórdia Street up to numbers 13 and 36, located on opposite sides of the street. The document suggests the importance of the area by numbering properties and mapping their street frontage; however, because it does not cover the entire street, it requires cross-referencing with other sources to clarify its patterns of occupation. João do Rio compares, in *A alma encantadora das ruas* (1908), Misericórdia Street with Ouvidor Street, highlighting their structural and social differences. While Ouvidor Street represented a space of ostentation and cultural effervescence, the Misericórdia was described as a place marked by decay (Rio, 1995 [1908]). The early twentieth century, contemporary to João

⁷ Document retrieved from reports of the 5th Police Station of Rio de Janeiro related to the Misericórdia neighborhood, Morro do Castelo and its surroundings in the year 1916. It is a collection composed of 388 microfilms, currently under the custody of the Casa de Rui Barbosa Foundation, which offers a glimpse into daily life in the region (Rui Barbosa, [S] SSP-RJ 001850, 1916).

⁸ Photographs available in Loredano, C. (2022). Misericórdia: rua, largo e ladeira, no Rio de Janeiro [Série "Avenidas e ruas do Brasil"]. Brasiliana Fotográfica. Biblioteca Nacional / Instituto Moreira Salles. <https://brasilianafotografica.bn.gov.br/?tag=rua-da-misericordia>.

⁹ Fragoso, J. da R. (1874). *Mappa architectural da cidade do Rio de Janeiro: parte comercial*. Biblioteca Digital Luso-Brasileira (BDLB). <https://bdlb.bn.gov.br/acervo/handle/20.500.12156.3/16411>.

do Rio's work, was marked by the consolidation of urban reforms envisioned in preceding decades. These interventions were grounded in a technical debate strengthened since the mid-nineteenth century, which associated collective housing with the spread of endemic diseases. The second half of the nineteenth century was a moment of intense political and social transformation in Brazil — from the transition from Empire to Republic, and from institutionalized slavery to free labor — while Rio's downtown was being reshaped according to modernization ideals.

The development of transportation systems, the opening of new thoroughfares, and the expansion of urban sanitation reshaped the logics of occupation and circulation in the city, placing pressure on central areas such as the Misericórdia neighborhood while simultaneously expanding access to peripheral zones (Abreu, 2003). The emergence of the horse-drawn streetcar and the steam train was crucial for the city's physical growth after 1870, since these new means of transportation enabled the extension of affluent areas toward the southern zone of the city, while the suburbs were progressively occupied by less privileged classes. Residences located in the central parishes increasingly housed urban workers, many of them engaged in temporary occupations that compelled them to remain in the city center in search of economic viability. These properties were often converted into *cortiços*, tenement-like dwellings characterized by precarious living conditions and high population density (Abreu, 2003; 2022 [1987]). At the time, Rio attracted international capital that, in search of new avenues for accumulation, invested in public services through state concessions (Abreu, 2022 [1987]). Regarding access to Misericórdia Street by streetcar, Alfredo do Valle Cabral (2023 [1884]) noted that the lines serving the area were those departing from Onze de Junho Square and from Lapa Square and Riachuelo Street. His text, produced as a guide for travelers visiting Rio in the 1870s, also lists commercial establishments on Misericórdia Street, such as a wine shop located at number 10, an organ of the *Tribuna* serving Portuguese interests at number 79, and the Chamber of Deputies at number 1 (Cabral, 2023 [1884]). This period of urban transformation stimulated the production of cartographic documents capable of mapping these changes. One example is the Plan of the City of Rio de Janeiro: Brazil¹⁰, prepared by Edward Gotto and published in 1871, based on a survey conducted in 1866. The work consists of a book divided into sections of the city, detailing the sewage network according to the engineer's proposed project. This detailed-scale map includes lot boundaries and building numbers, encompassing the Misericórdia area.

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In parallel with the modernizing atmosphere, the city remained fundamentally grounded in slavery. Raquel Rolnik (1997) argues that the presence of enslaved domestic workers, those tied to urban services and commonly known as *de ganho*, enabled the coexistence between the ownership of people and the progressive monetization of land. According to the census conducted in 1872, the Parish of São José housed approximately thirty-eight thousand inhabitants, of whom nearly half lived under conditions of enslavement. The total population was classified as white, Black, *pardo* (mixed-race), and *caboclo* (Indigenous or their descendants). Men worked primarily in construction, carpentry, and the production of clothing and footwear, while women were employed as seamstresses, street vendors, laundresses, and domestic servants (Brasil, 1874). Using the Digital Hemeroteca platform¹¹, it was possible to locate advertisements as well as short news notices by searching for references to the streets of the Misericórdia neighborhood in newspapers from the 1870s. Among the identified advertisements, offers related to the purchase, sale, and rental of enslaved people, ranging from children to adults, appear frequently, alongside references to Black and *pardo* individuals employed as laborers, especially in domestic service and in trades connected to the production of goods for commerce. A gendered division of labor is also evident: for women, tasks commonly mentioned include cooking, cleaning, and sewing; for men, occupations such as baker and cook are listed.

With regard to building typologies and modes of habitation, Gilberto Freyre (1900–1987) identified significant transformations in the uses of *sobrados* (two or three-story townhouses). Initially the residences of affluent families, these structures gradually came to accommodate collective forms of housing such as *cortiços* (tenement houses), brothels, boarding houses, hotels, and shelters; or, in the case of larger *sobrados*, they were substantially altered to house public offices, foreign legations, consulates, clubs, newspapers, Masonic lodges, theaters, and warehouses, among other functions. In the specific context of Rio de Janeiro, the author explicitly mentioned Misericórdia Street, alongside other streets such as São José, Ajuda, and Guarda Velha, as emblematic examples of this process. These areas were increasingly regarded as "a scourge" and "a constant danger to public

¹⁰ Gotto, E. (1871). Plan of the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil [Plano de esgotamento e edificações em escala dos lotes]. Biblioteca Digital Luso-Brasileira (BDLB). https://objdigital.bn.br/objdigital2/acervo_digital/div_cartografia/cart326448/cart326448.html.

¹¹ Biblioteca Nacional. (n.d.). Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira. <https://bndigital.bn.gov.br/hemeroteca-digital/>.

health," where "the transmission of more or less serious diseases was its natural consequence" (Freyre, 2013 [1936], p. 28). Between 1822 and 1850, the legal framework governing landownership entered a transitional phase. As Raquel Rolnik (1997, p. 23) notes, the acquisition of land through registered purchase fostered the growing monetization of property relations. This process was consolidated with the enactment of Law No. 601 of September 18, 1850, the so-called *Lei de Terras* (Land Law), which, as observed by Murillo Marx (1999), established a new system of property rights by shifting control of land from the Crown to private individuals. Within this context, Luiz César de Queiroz Ribeiro (1996) identified three principal agents in the capitalization of urban land: the property owner, the capitalist, and the user. The uses assigned to urban areas derive from the interaction among these three actors. As the author adds, there is a direct relationship between the level of public investment in a given territory and its land valuation, with urban land prices resulting from disputes over the economic use of the city (Ribeiro, 1996). In central urban areas, when the property owner and the capitalist coincide but the user is distinct, the focus centers on real-estate income, driving the reconversion of uses, leasing, construction, or subdivision of land with the aim of maximizing profit (Ribeiro, 1996). In such cases, the so-called "rentier capital" operates according to a mercantile logic applied to the housing market, resulting in the proliferation of *corticos*, including *casas de cômodos* and *estalagens*. Lilian Vaz (1994) defines *estalagens* as rows of small, single-story houses built side-by-side, with reduced dimensions and minimal compartmentalization. *Casas-de-alugar-cômodos* consisted of buildings internally subdivided into multiple rented rooms. Both models made use of limited unbuilt spaces in the old central *freguesias* (parishes), occupying backyards and vacant lots, as well as adapting existing houses. In this system, property owners leased their buildings to third parties who invested modest sums in construction or adaptation and obtained substantial profits through high rents. For the year 1869 in Rio de Janeiro, Freyre identified the existence of 642 *sobrados* of this nature, totaling 9,671 rooms occupied by 21,929 people, 13,555 men and 8,374 women; 16,852 adults and 5,077 minors (Freyre, 2013 [1936], p. 188).

News items and classified advertisements centered on the Misericórdia neighborhood that address its inhabitants' modes of dwelling refer to addresses of "rooms for rent," as well as the leasing of entire floors or individual units, such as parlors, alcoves, and attics—indicating the subdivision of a single property for individual or multifamily housing. Advertisements for boarding houses are also present, in addition to a hotel. The articulation between small-scale retail and the operation of collective housing was common. In this context, long-standing small businesses that resisted relocating to other areas in the face of pressures for new uses of buildings represent the persistence of earlier economic forms predating modern capitalism (Ribeiro, 1996). With regard to the most common forms of commerce, various entries published in periodicals of the time indicate the presence of small establishments dedicated to the sale of predominantly domestic products in the Misericórdia neighborhood. Among the examples identified are bookstores, general stores, seed and snuff shops, coal houses, and secos e molhados (grocery shops), as well as establishments specializing in the sale of specific food items such as potatoes, and goods such as clothing, textiles, crystal, and porcelain, both domestic and imported. Services provided by professionals such as dental surgeons, physicians, and typographers are also recorded. As for the uses of the buildings, reports frequently mention the presence of taverns, dance halls, drinking establishments, and so-called public houses, which functioned as spaces of social interaction and, often, as settings for conflicts, fights, and other disputes, including those involving foreigners. The mention of multiple addresses suggests a concentration of such establishments along Misericórdia Street. Notably, foreigners, especially Americans, Spaniards, and Englishmen, appear frequently in these accounts, often associated with episodes of conflict that were subsequently registered at the local police station. The survey conducted through the Hemeroteca Digital, rather than providing immediate answers, prompts new questions. Reading the sources extends beyond what they explicitly reveal; it requires attentiveness to the gaps and silences that permeate the records. Who owned these properties? What was the relationship between enslaved individuals and these spaces? What was the profile of property owners, and under what conditions were leases negotiated? In the specific case of the Confraternity of Misericórdia, in what ways did it exercise its authority over the neighborhood's properties? The material presented here illustrates an effort to demonstrate pathways for answering these questions as new connections emerge.

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5 Final considerations

The everyday modes of appropriating buildings and streets described in the chronicles offer a pathway for understanding the territory at a micro-scale, revealing the neighborhood's role within broader urban dynamics through the commercial functions carried out there. Moreover, the continuous flows of students, workers, and other transient populations appear to have been a persistent feature of occupation until the onset of the area's demolition, reinforcing the hypothesis that its process of devaluation resulted less from abandonment than from the gradual transformation of its urban functions. Broadly speaking, for centuries, the

Misericórdia area consolidated its role in the city through its network of welfare services, from its initial occupation by the Jesuits to its later incorporation into formal medical education. In this context, the care of the sick emerged as a constant. At the same time, the Confraternity's activities were consistently guided by the dissemination of moral and religious values, sustaining disciplinary practices that spanned different political regimes and historical moments. Through the area's assistential structures, the square, the slope, and the street came to be affirmed as spaces of access and circulation for the subjects attended by this system. However, as the institutions connected to the Santa Casa were gradually relocated to other parts of the city, this function may have dissipated, contributing to the weakening of the original area's political-religious centrality precisely at the moment when new conceptions, those that would later guide large-scale urban reforms, were taking shape. The mobilization of sources drawn from different scales enhances the analytical potential of urban investigation by enabling the construction of relations not immediately apparent between times, spaces, and subjects. In the horizon of Benjaminian constellations, such sources, arranged in a non-linear fashion, are articulated through critical proximities. Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas offers, in this sense, the assemblage of images and keywords as a cognitive device, in which the value of connections emerges precisely from the tensions and intervals between elements. By integrating cartographic data, visual records, and narratives from distinct contexts within a single interpretive field, the analysis begins to operate through the composition of multiple frames, in which urban history is revealed as it becomes recomposed through new mosaics. In this regard, the work seeks to broaden the repertoire of possible readings of urban processes, aligning itself with contemporary debates that aim to recognize silenced memories, confront asymmetries, and articulate multiple perspectives in understanding the transformations that shape urban life.

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