

# Creating the Image of a Modern Fortaleza

## Social Inequalities, Political Changes, and the Impact of Urban Design

by

*Linda M. P. Gondim*

*Translated by Laurence Hallewell*

With close to 2 million inhabitants, Fortaleza, the capital of the state of Ceará, concentrates the majority of the population and economic activity of its metropolitan region.<sup>1</sup> Its unemployment rate stands at over 12 percent, and more than 36 percent of the population work in the informal sector (Fortaleza, Prefeitura Municipal, 1998: 23). About 30 percent of the inhabitants live in the shantytowns that are found in 87 of the 114 administrative districts into which the city is divided (Falcão, 1996: 96). The proportion of heads of families with monthly incomes of R\$ 755 (US\$400)<sup>2</sup> or less is 78 percent, and over a third of these survive on the minimum wage of R\$ 151 (US\$80) a month or less (Fortaleza, Prefeitura Municipal, 1998: 25). With regard to income distribution, the Gini index relating to average family monthly income in 1996 was 0.618. According to the household budget survey of the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian National Institute of Geography and Statistics—IBGE) (1990; available at <http://www.sidra.ibge.gov.br>), this places it as the worst among the nine metropolitan regions of Brazil.

Despite such statistics, since the early 1990s Fortaleza's image has been no longer one of misery and drought but one of "the Miami of the Brazilian Northeast" or "the Brazilian Caribbean" (Cabral, 1994). One sign of this change has been the increase in the number of tourists it has attracted. In 1997, according to a survey conducted by the Associação Brasileira de Agências de Viagem, Fortaleza had become the most popular destination for Brazilian tourists (Pessoa, 1998: 62). Another indication is offered by a

Linda Gondim is a sociology graduate of the Federal University of Ceará with a doctorate in city and regional planning from Cornell University and is the author of *Clientelismo e modernidade nas políticas públicas: Os "governos da mudanças" no Ceará, 1987–1994* (1998) and of various articles on planning, public policy, and citizen participation. Since 1992 she has been teaching at the Federal University of Ceará. Laurence Hallewell was, until his retirement, a librarian at Columbia University specializing in Latin America.

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survey based on a sample of 362 persons living in various city districts, which found that most of those interviewed considered the changes in the city over the past few years to have been positive, with over 90 percent reporting that they liked living in Fortaleza (Bomfim, Domicio, and Terceiro, 1997: 4).

One of the key elements in the creation of this new image has been the intensive use by the state and local administrations of strategies of political marketing to promote the attractiveness of the city and the state for investment in tourism and manufacturing. Marketing, however, is the most banal side of the process of creating images; the media are omnipresent in city administration and in electoral politics in Brazil as in other countries. In particular, place marketing has been an essential element of urban and rural development policies in the industrialized nations (Gold and Ward, 1994; Paddison, 1993) and is becoming increasingly common in Brazil (Ribeiro and Garcia, 1995). More important in terms of the symbolic and material construction of "modern" Fortaleza are the urban improvements implemented by state and local government. As will become evident, such programs are also an item of contention between the two groups that dominate Ceará politics: the one led by Tasso Jereissati, which has controlled the state government since 1987, and that led by Juraci Magalhães, which has controlled the city government since 1990.

Recent transformations of the state capital should also be recognized as the product of a broader process of producing urban space, the long-term result of social and economic agents which include not only government but also business and social movements. Government action is therefore only one component of this process, whose social and historical dimension needs in-depth investigation to avoid superficial and voluntarist explanations.

### **THE FORMATION OF THE URBAN STRUCTURE OF FORTALEZA: EARLY STAGES**

The capital of Ceará, with its contrasts of wealth and poverty, is the result of a historical process that is relatively recent. Its consolidation as a city did not take place until the latter half of the nineteenth century and the formation of its metropolitan region not until the 1970s. Although the Dutch had founded it in 1649, Fortaleza was of little significance for over two centuries. On the contrary, other cities like Recife and Salvador were already important centers in the colonial period because of the sugar industry that was mainly concentrated there. For reasons of geography, Ceará did not benefit directly from the sugar industry. Settlement there began in the seventeenth century as free-range cattle ranching developed on a large scale in the backlands in

response to the demand from the forested coastal zone of the Northeast for meat and for draft animals for its sugar mills. However, as the “Fort City” offered only an open roadstead unsuitable for embarking livestock or dry meat, it benefited so little from the “cattle cycle” that in 1810 it still had fewer than 2,000 inhabitants.

Only in the second half of the nineteenth century did Fortaleza become its state’s main urban center, thanks to its role in marketing such export products as wax from the carnaúba palm, coffee, and, above all, cotton, whose price on the world market was substantially boosted by the American Civil War. It is in this period that the city began to expand, with the laying down of city squares, the erection of public buildings, the opening up of new streets, and improvements in city services, transport, and communications. Cultural life became more active with the establishment of scientific, literary, and educational institutions. The architect Adolfo Herbster was invited to draw up a city plan, in which he proposed the laying out of boulevards in the fashion imposed on Paris by Baron Haussmann.

Foreshadowing the contrasts of wretchedness and opulence that would become the city’s trademark, Fortaleza during the *belle époque* (Ponte, 1993) became the pole of attraction for families driven from the countryside by changes in agriculture made worse by the droughts that every so often desolated Ceará.<sup>3</sup> The great drought of 1877 had set a pattern of government intervention to lessen the effects of such “climatic disasters,” chiefly through job creation in, for example, public construction projects in urban areas, especially in the state capital (Neves, 1998).<sup>4</sup> During that drought, which lasted for three years, the population of Fortaleza grew from about 75,000 to an estimated 189,000, the increase being made up of some 114,000 refugees from the drought. They brought with them hunger, misery, and even “barbarism,” in the expression used by the reporters and historians of the period (Neves, 1998: 21). Apart from its unpleasant aesthetic effects, the presence of these immigrants was seen as the source of every kind of malady from begging to prostitution, including plague, robbery, and the looting of food stores. More effective than the direct repression of such problems was the imposition of hard labor on public works as a condition for government welfare handouts. Another condition was the confinement of the refugees in what, during the droughts of 1915, 1932, and 1942, became virtual concentration camps (Neves, 1998). Such encampments of immigrants, whether spontaneous or imposed, helped form the first shantytowns in the early 1930s.

All the same, the city’s population growth until then had been moderate, thanks to two factors: a high death rate due to epidemics such as smallpox, cholera, and yellow fever; and out-migration to other parts of Brazil, chiefly to the Amazon region during the rubber boom. The result was that Fortaleza

in 1920 still had little more than 78,000 inhabitants while Recife had almost 240,000 and the then Federal District of Rio de Janeiro more than 1 million (Marques, 1986: 84, 97).

### **THE “SWELLING” OF FORTALEZA IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC GROWTH**

The population of the capital of Ceará began to grow significantly from the 1930s on, helped by a decline in the death rate probably due to such public health measures as vaccination. During the 1940s the city showed the greatest rate of population growth of all the state capitals in northeastern Brazil (Jucá, 1993: 203), going from 180,000 in 1940 to 270,000 in 1950. By 1960 it had more than a half million inhabitants.<sup>5</sup> In this period, Fortaleza underwent a severe crisis: agriculture was suffering the effects of the droughts of 1952 and 1958, trade had stagnated, and the first small beginnings of manufacturing industry (a small textile sector and a few factories processing vegetable oils) were handicapped by a shortage of electric power and by competition from southern Brazil, whose products benefited from better transportation and interregional communications.

On the other hand, migration from the countryside continued, driven by the droughts but especially by the loss of smallholdings, the growth of live-stock ranching at the expense of agriculture, and the replacement of subsistence food production by large-scale commercial crop growing (Irmão and Sampaio, 1983: 146). It is therefore not surprising that the plan for Fortaleza proposed in 1960 by Hélio Modesto should mention the spread of shantytowns and the poor state of sanitation—only 12 percent of buildings were connected to the city water mains—giving rise to Fortaleza’s label as the “swollen city.”

While the economic crisis that affected Ceará and the Brazilian Northeast at the end of the 1950s could be considered a long-term problem’s having become acute, its political repercussions were unprecedented. For the first time the rural poor got themselves organized, forming peasant leagues and allying themselves with populist and nationalist groups in the cities. They put pressure on the government to come up with solutions for social and economic problems of Northeast Brazil (Oliveira, 1977). In Fortaleza in 1962 the inhabitants of the Pirambu shantytown got together, with the help of a Catholic priest, to obtain legal ownership of the occupied areas.

One of the federal government’s initiatives for dealing with the “Northeast problem” was the establishment of the Superintendência para o Desenvolvimento do Nordeste (Agency to Promote the Development of the North-

East—SUDENE), whose program, particularly after the army coup d'état of 1964, gave priority to stimulating the industrial development of the region by offering tax incentives. Despite the considerable increase in industrial employment during the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>6</sup> the informal economy remained the main source of urban employment, accounting in 1980 for 49 percent of the economically active population of Fortaleza. The rates of unemployment and underemployment remained high (Casimiro, 1986).

Under such conditions, the growth of Fortaleza—whose population reached over 800,000 in 1970 and 1,300,000 in 1980—continued as in the preceding decades, and its division into an east and a west became even more marked. This segregation had begun in the 1940s, with the movement of upper- and middle-class families out of downtown and its immediate environs and into Aldeota, the western part of the city, while the poor stayed in the east part, which was also where industry was concentrated.<sup>7</sup> Since the end of the 1960s federal intervention had become a crucial factor in transforming the urban structure through the financing of low- and medium-rent housing by the Banco Nacional de Habitação (National Housing Bank—BNH, created in 1964) and through investment in express ways and other infrastructure. Removing shantytowns and building blocks of houses with minimum facilities in the outskirts of the city has reinforced spatial segregation and contributed to an expansion of the metropolitan area, chiefly through the dizzying population growth of Caucaia and Maracanaú, counties just outside the city limits. Although industrial zones have been established in these counties, their growth has been overwhelmingly due to their having become dormitory suburbs for low-income families, since their industries are not labor intensive (AUMEF, 1985: 19).

The poor have not been just passive victims of their worsening housing conditions, not even when the military dictatorship of 1964–1985 was in control of public life. When, under General Ernesto Geisel, president from 1974 to 1978, the regime began to liberalize, it allowed the emergence of social movements, a process that would gain force in the first half of the 1980s as a result of changes in labor relations in the countryside, an increase in the growth of cities and metropolitan areas, and changes in the political condition. Among the more outstanding of these changes was the shaping, with decisive support from people and groups connected with the Catholic Church, of an ideology based on the campaign for citizenship rights and a view of government as the “enemy” (Durham, 1981).

In Fortaleza, the opposition to the removal in 1978 of the José Bastos shantytown, although harshly put down, helped strengthen social movements in the city. The next ten years saw the establishment of umbrella movements such as the União das Comunidades da Grande Fortaleza (Union of

Greater Fortaleza Communities—UCGF) and the Federação das Entidades de Bairros e Favelas de Fortaleza (Federation of Neighborhood and Shantytown Organizations of Fortaleza—FBFF) to coordinate the struggle to stop the demolition of shantytowns and to campaign for the provision of public services and urban infrastructure, especially under the last military administration (that of President João Figueiredo, 1979–1985) (Barreira, 1998: 55). Greater Fortaleza's problems were worsened further during this period by a long drought.

In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a real-estate boom promoted by government funding for housing and infrastructure in areas mainly occupied by the middle and upper classes. Following the approval in 1979 of new urban planning legislation, city districts in the east and southeast (Aldeota, Meireles, Varjota, Paipicu, and part of Cocó) were transformed by high-rise construction into the most valuable land in Fortaleza thanks to their inclusion in high-density residential zones (Costa, 1988: 101–4).

An important aspect of the changes made to the city since the early 1960s was the construction of Avenida Beira-Mar (“Seaside Avenue”) along the eastern seashore. Until then not just business but also the tourist and leisure industries (hotels, restaurants, clubs, movie theaters, and public squares) were concentrated in downtown Fortaleza. The growth of the eastern zone toward Futuro Beach and the Rio Cocó salt marshes began in the 1970s, helped by the extension of Avenida Santos Dumont and the laying out of the Praça 31 de Março and Avenida Zezé Diogo (Costa, 1988: 134). Growth toward the southeast had already been encouraged by the installation or expansion, from the late 1970s on, of such public and private undertakings in the area as a convention center, the state printing press, a large private school, a private university, the Iguatemi Shopping Center (owned by the Jereissati Group, controlled by the family of the former state governor), and, most recently, the Clóvis Beviláqua courthouse.

Government intervention was also important with regard to changes in socioeconomic infrastructure. Between 1968 and 1974 the Brazilian economy grew very rapidly, with an average annual increase in the gross domestic product (GDP) of 10.9 percent (Skidmore, 1988: 276). The Northeast shared in this growth, although not sufficiently to close the gap separating it from the Southeast. The available data on Ceará show GDP growth of around 15.9 percent for 1970–1975 and of 10.1 percent for 1975–1980 (Cavalcante, 1992: 104). The fruits of this growth were shared out very unequally. In 1960 the poorest 40 percent of Brazilians received 12.2 percent of total GDP; the poorest 40 percent in the Northeast received 15.9 percent of total regional GDP. By 1980 their respective shares had fallen to 9.25 percent and 11.2 percent. Meanwhile the wealthiest 10 percent had increased their share from

37.4 percent to 46.7 percent of GDP for Brazil as a whole and, in the case of the Northeast, from 37.7 percent to 47.1 percent (Romão, 1991: 79).

Although no data are available on income growth in other segments of the population, it is reasonable to suppose that part of the middle class in the Northeast benefited from the “economic miracle,” securing higher incomes in the new jobs created through this economic growth (Skidmore, 1988). The growth of Fortaleza can therefore be associated with the emergence of a new middle class made up of members of the liberal professions, mostly working in the public sector. Some would be in such long-established agencies as the Banco do Brasil (Bank of Brazil), created in 1808, the Departamento Nacional de Obras Contra as Secas (National Department of Public Works to Counter Droughts—DNOCS), created in 1906, and the Banco do Nordeste do Brasil (Bank of the Northeast of Brazil—BNB), created in July 1952 and headquartered in Fortaleza. Others would work for agencies created by state and local government during the 1960s and 1970s: the Companhia Estadual de Habitação Popular (State Housing Company for the People), the state and city planning departments, the Superintendência de Desenvolvimento do Estado do Ceará (Agency to Promote the Development of the State of Ceará), the Autarquia da Região Metropolitana de Fortaleza (Authority of Greater Fortaleza Metropolitan Region—AUMEF), the Instituto de Planejamento do Ceará (Ceará Institute of Planning), and the state corporations providing telephone, electricity, water, and sewer services. Note should also be taken of the importance of the training of qualified human resources and the employment of these resources in their teaching faculties by the two universities, the federal one created in the 1950s and the state one created in the 1960s, to which was added a private university created in the late 1970s. There are also the government planning and management agencies, outstanding among them the (previously mentioned) Banco do Nordeste do Brasil, which have helped train an elite of technocrats who have had great influence in the political modernization of Ceará.

**POLITICAL CHANGES IN CEARÁ:  
“THE YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS” AND  
THE END OF THE PATRIMONIALIST STATE**

During the last years of the military dictatorship, it was not just grassroots movements but also business sectors that campaigned for a return to democracy. In Ceará, a new generation of entrepreneurs<sup>8</sup> won control of the Centro Industrial Cearense (Ceará Industrial Center—CIC) in 1978 and transformed it into an important forum in which even intellectuals opposed to the regime

such as the economists Maria da Conceição Tavares and Celso Furtado took part (Martin, 1993).

Official propaganda is wont to paint the 1986 election of Tasso Jereissati as governor of Ceará as a radical break from prevailing political practices. Despite the innovative character of his political and administrative program, the changes that took place in the state were not all that sudden, nor should they be credited to any whim of the new leadership. The transition had begun over 40 years earlier with the creation of the Banco do Nordeste do Brasil (Rebouças et al., 1994). The bank did not just promote important studies, research projects, and plans for the Brazilian Northeast but played an outstanding role in training new elites, for many of its technocrats occupied high office in the state bureaucracy. Another evidence that the “modern” quality of state government was not particularly new was the pioneering experiment in strategic planning in Ceará carried out by the first administration of Virgílio Tavora (1963–1966), one of the three “colonels”<sup>9</sup> who dominated politics in the state up until 1986 and have generally been blamed for its “backwardness.” It should also be pointed out that, in the early 1980s, relations between the young entrepreneurs and these “colonels” were quite friendly, even close. Indeed, the CIC supported Luís Gonzaga Mota, who had been state secretary of planning in the second Távora administration, when he ran successfully for office in 1982 in the first free election for state governor since the 1964 military takeover. Despite his image as a modern technocrat, Gonzaga Mota led an administration marked by patronage, distributing jobs and public funds among the colonels who had supported his campaign. In office he gave out government jobs so freely that the total of civil service salaries rose to 140 percent of the income from the sales tax that constituted the state’s chief source of revenue. However, these salaries were paid up to three months late.

Popular dissatisfaction with this way of governing, also characteristic of the city administration (Ribeiro, 1994), led to the victory of Maria Luiza Fontenele, candidate of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ party—PT), in the mayoral election of 1985. She led a turbulent administration, with long strikes by municipal workers that paralyzed important public services such as garbage collection. As mayor she had to deal not only with criticism from the elites, the middle classes, and even grassroots social movements but also with political and ideological divisions within her own administrative team (Barreira, 1992). It is probable that disillusionment with the PT administration favored the political rise of the young entrepreneurs, because Tasso Jereissati’s run for governor as nominee of the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Brazilian Democratic Movement party—PMDB) eventually received the support of a wide range of forces, including both of Brazil’s communist parties.<sup>10</sup> Although at the start of the campaign his

chances against his main rival, the colonel Adauto Bezerra, were considered quite poor, he obtained 61 percent of valid votes, winning not just in Fortaleza but also upstate in such towns as Juazeiro do Norte, the traditional electoral base of the Bezerra family.

It is worth emphasizing that the election of 1986 seemed to point to a broader shift among the elites in that all three of the largest states in the Northeast elected governors committed to ending the traditional patronage system and supported by the left—not just Jereissati in Ceará but also Valdir Pires in Bahia and Miguel Arrais in Pernambuco. However, it was only in Ceará that the new group managed to hang onto power, enabling it not only to give continuity to its plans to modernize state administration but also to have a decided influence on the course of national politics.<sup>11</sup> Jereissati, besides securing his successor's victory and then getting reelected himself in 1994 and 1998, was national president of the Partido Social Democrático Brasileiro (Brazilian Social Democratic party—PSDB), which he joined in January 1990. Ciro Gomes, his successor during the 1991–1994 period, became federal finance minister during the last few months of the presidency of Itamar Franco. Both Jereissati and Gomes—who has now joined the Partido Popular Socialista (Socialist People's party—PPS)—are currently being promoted as probable candidates in the coming election for president of the Republic.

The administrative model introduced by Jereissati is characterized by a transformation in the relations between government and society. Thus, in contrast to the refashioned “patrimonialism”<sup>12</sup> hitherto in vogue (Schwartzman, 1982), he endeavored to run the public sector in accordance with universalistic principles of management, giving priority to balancing the budget and making the “administrative machine” efficient. By firing civil servants who had been recruited irregularly or were not working effectively and reducing the average real salaries of public servants, he secured a considerable reduction in personnel costs, which in 1991 amounted to only 45.29 percent of current liquid revenue (Botelho, 1994: 76), whereas the limit allowed by the federal Constitution was 65 percent.

Despite its concern with financial and fiscal austerity, the self-styled “government of change” carried out an aggressive policy of attracting investment in industry and the tourist trade, using tax incentives and strategies of place marketing. Continuing a tendency noted in previous years, Ceará's GDP had been growing at rates higher than that of the GDP of Brazil as a whole: a 3.55 percent annual average in the 1985–1990 period against the national 1.18 percent (Ferreira, 1995: 159). Agriculture, in contrast, which still employed 46 percent of the state's workforce, had been stagnating (Teixeira, 1999: 14–5), and (as already mentioned) Greater Fortaleza and the state as a whole both

continued to experience high levels of poverty and income concentration (Teixeira, 1999: 29).

In his first months in office, Jereissati broke with the politicians of his own party and their allies on the left, setting up an authoritarian pattern for his relationship with social movements, civil service unions, and the associations of the liberal professions. It is probable that the dissatisfaction felt by these groups was part of the reason for the defeats suffered in Fortaleza by candidates whom the governor supported. At the same time, the difficulties the left had in capitalizing on the “anti-Cambeba” sentiments of the Fortaleza electorate (Cambeba is the name of the state governor’s seat) can be linked to a weakening of the grassroots movements, partly because these had become partners in public administration in implementing “participative” public policies, a development encouraged by international financial agencies and institutionalized by the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 itself (Soares and Gondim, 1998: 85). This type of grassroots participation, added to other factors such as the increased influence of evangelical sects with a politically conservative outlook, helped moderate discontent voiced by the neighborhood associations in Fortaleza (Barreira, 1998: 58). These became vulnerable to strategies of repression and co-optation used by the state government, which already in Jereissati’s first administration was promoting the creation of the *Federação de Entidades Comunitárias do Estado do Ceará* (Federation of Community Organizations of Ceará—FECECE) (Barreira, 1998; Braga and Barreira, 1991; Matos, 1998).

The clearest form of co-optation of community leaders was achieved through the “agents of change” program, which offered them training and income if they would work under the direction of the governor’s secretariat. This was particularly the case in 1988, a municipal election year (Braga and Barreira, 1991; Bonfim, 1999), when opponents of the “governments of change” united against the candidacy of *Ciro Gomes*, who won by a narrow margin. Things were, however, different in the elections for governor, which *Gomes* in 1990 and *Jereissati* in 1994 and 1998 won by clear majorities. In addition, the governor’s party had been increasing its majority in the state legislative assembly, obtaining 54.5 percent of seats in the last elections (Bonfim, 1999: 141). The party’s majority at the state level was achieved through the support of upstate clientelist politicians, and this was so effective that the *PSDB* and its allies elected 58 percent of mayors throughout Ceará in 1992 and 59 percent of them in 1996 (Bonfim, 1999: 145).

In Fortaleza, however, the “young entrepreneurs” do not dominate the political scene, and the candidates with government support were defeated in the first round of voting for mayor in 1992, 1996, and 2000—in the former

year by Antônio Cambraia and in the latter by his mentor, the PMDB physician Juraci Magalhães, a former ally of Jereissati who had become the governor's foe.<sup>13</sup> Opinion polls indicated high levels of public approval for both the Cambraia and Magalhães mayoralties, each of which was characterized by a centralized administration and impressive public works achievements such as the construction of viaducts, the opening up or widening of city thoroughfares, the remodeling of a large public hospital, and the construction or remodeling of public squares and parks. These works, particularly the road along Iracema Beach, helped reinforce the attractiveness of the capital as a center of leisure and tourism despite the poverty and run-down state of downtown, the outlying areas, and the shantytowns. Despite accusations of clientelism, Juraci Magalhães was reelected mayor in 2000, even though on this occasion he had been opposed by electorally stronger opponents, including one candidate supported by the parties of the left.

#### **A MODERN CAPITAL FOR A "NEW CEARÁ": URBAN DESIGN CHANGES AND THE CREATION OF AN IMAGE FOR FORTALEZA**

Both state and city administrations have made intense and effective use of the media, seeking to create a positive image both of their governance and of Ceará and Fortaleza. Thus in 1994 and 1998 the state government helped Brazil's major TV network produce television soaps with locations in Greater Fortaleza and on the beaches of Ceará, to show off the "side of the state that has tourist infrastructure, modernity, and industry" (Sanches, 1994: 90). The consolidation of this image of the "new Ceará" has been aided by reports in newspapers and news weeklies both in Brazil (*Veja*, *Folha de São Paulo*) and abroad (*Newsweek*, *the Economist*, *the New York Times*, and *the Wall Street Journal*), as well as by studies by North American researchers such as Judith Tandler (1997).

In this context, the various interventions in urban space by the state government can be interpreted as an attempt to achieve political hegemony in Fortaleza, since they are not limited just to projects of a regional or metropolitan impact such as the new international airport, the sewer network, and Metrofor, the transport system. Instead, the state is involved in an ambitious urban renewal project along Iracema Beach undertaken without participation by the city government with the twin objects of increasing tourism and upgrading a run-down historic area. Beginning in 1994 with the remodeling of the old Ponte dos Ingleses, the project went on to create in August 1998 the Centro Dragão do Mar de Arte e Cultura (Sea-Dragon Art and Culture

Center), an architecturally daring complex in a postmodern style. Occupying a 30,000-m<sup>2</sup> (7.41-acre) site, it contains two museums, a planetarium, two cinemas, a theater, an amphitheater, a café, a bookstore, and a handicrafts store.

Despite criticism by artists and intellectuals objecting particularly to the concentration of cultural infrastructure and activities in a well-to-do district of Fortaleza, the preliminary results of my research show that people of different social classes have been using the Center in a quite positive way. This finding agrees with the results of a study on the municipal elections of 1992, according to which people living in shantytowns and on the outskirts of Greater Fortaleza do not object to the projects implemented by Mayor Magalhães even though most of them have been built in the upper income areas of the city. Their sense of well-being is associated with the existence of lively and aesthetically pleasing public spaces that offer them vast opportunities for recreation and make them feel that they live in a beautiful city (Costa, 1993: 13) even though the neighborhoods where they spend most of their daily lives are ugly and filthy.

The intense programs of city development carried out by the city and state governments assert the importance of landmarks, such as the beaches of the eastern end, especially that of Iracema, in building the identity of an urban nucleus—a basic element in obtaining the political support of the voters. Those who criticize the concentration of investment in upmarket areas and consider such works of embellishment mere demagogic “window dressing” forget that as Roland Barthes pointed out, the concrete city is full of embedded symbolism created by its inhabitants’ use of its public spaces or facilities. Critics who regard the new image of Fortaleza as a modern, handsome, and lively coastal resort as false are guilty of oversimplification. The imagination can allow the building of representations that unify reality precisely because they hide its constituent parts, especially if these are contradictory, as in the case of cities like Fortaleza, with its contrasts of wealth and misery. Unlike concepts, images are ambiguous and can work to integrate contradictions that may exist without any need to eliminate them. As Mircea Eliade (1961: 15) so well puts it, it is the image as such—that is, as a group of meanings—rather than any one of its components taken in isolation that represents the truth.

Murray Edelman (1978: 6) calls attention to the characteristic of “self-fulfilling prophecy” that is typical of political symbolism: the symbols of a clearly segmented whole are presented as values that are collectively shared, creating the impression of a just order. Thus, by responding (symbolically) to the (actual) needs of the excluded, such symbols end up being accepted by them, especially in a context of political demobilization. Nevertheless, this

acceptance is not just produced by manipulation: if it were, the powerful would have no great problem in securing popular support, as long as they can count on resources needed for a well-orchestrated political campaign.

Neither can the images associated with urban space produce integration through the effect of a *deus ex machina*. This integration happens only because the symbolism associated with space expresses the needs and aspirations of the population. Thus, the images of a city will be more popular, from the viewpoint of their political effectiveness, to the degree the people accept them not as descriptive of what they actually have but as an indication of what they ought to have or would like to have. It is having projects in common that allows the whole citizenry—despite marked socioeconomic inequalities—to form the shared identity so essential in building the political hegemony of a social order.

In the case of Fortaleza, we have been watching the image of a poor and backward city being replaced, over a ten-year period, by one of a rich and modern city that is attractive to tourists and a delight to its inhabitants, even though people fleeing the droughts and their descendants continue to enlarge the shantytowns and add to the number of homeless in the streets. The new image is, without question, associated with political marketing by those currently in government, but it could not be sustained in a vacuum. In fact, this marketing mobilizes an imagination formed in a historical process through which an urban structure marked by contrasts has been shaped. The history of the city, as we have seen, is dotted with attempts to “beautify” its spaces and to segregate and politically control the poor. However, they have not been just victims but have been striving in more or less organized ways for better conditions of life, including the right to stay in places they have occupied “improperly.”

The changes that have taken place, especially since the 1970s, with the creation of a great entertainment area in eastern Fortaleza and the emergence of modern political elites express increasing social and spatial divisions in the capital of Ceará. Paradoxically, these divisions have favored the symbolic integration of people around the project of transforming this capital into a “handsome” city. The very material form of this urban space, which simultaneously concentrates and segregates, supports the vision of Fortaleza as a “fantasy island,” whether for tourists or for its permanent inhabitants. In the end, the contrasts between the upmarket areas and the shantytowns and areas on the edge of town allow many “journeys” within the city itself—and with them, symbolic access to the new beauty of place (Santos, 1996).

The struggles of the poor for the social and political rights of citizenship, made more difficult by the decline and collapse of grassroots movements,

take on ambiguous forms, such as voting for corrupt candidates who have little interest in a politics of equality but present themselves as opposed to the state government. In this picture, supporting public works to embellish the city and favoring the vision of Fortaleza as a pleasant city to live in (Bonfim, Domicio, and Terceiro, 1997) should not necessarily be interpreted as conformism. As Milton Santos (1996: 261) has noted, in the great conurbations of our globalized world the poor see, in the abundance enjoyed by the rich, a future in which they can imagine that their own wants, material and spiritual, will be satisfied. Therefore, the contradiction between the persistence of misery and the positive transformation of the city's image is perhaps more apparent than real.

## NOTES

1. The metropolitan region of Greater Fortaleza consists of the *municípios* (counties) of Aquiraz, Caucaia, Eusébio, Fortaleza, Guaiúba, Horizonte, Itaitinga, Maracanaú, Maranguape, Pacajus, Pacatuba, and São Gonçalo do Amarante.

2. Five times the legal minimum wage.

3. The worst droughts during the period discussed here were those of 1877–1879, 1888, 1900, 1915, 1932, 1942, 1952, 1958, 1980–1984, and 1992–1993. According to Neves (1998), the expansion of cotton cultivation made small producers more vulnerable to the effects of these droughts.

4. Starting with the drought of 1958, attempts to plan infrastructure investment would permit a greater decentralization of projects to combat the effects of droughts. From then on, in the smaller towns upstate, looting tended to be mainly of government warehouses rather than of retail stores (Neves, 1998: 296).

5. Since the 1930 census was never carried out [because of the insurrection that year that overthrew the government of Washington Luís—Translator's note], no demographic statistics are available for that year. The formation of the first shantytowns (Cercado do Zé Padre in 1930; Mucuripe and Lagamar in 1933; Morro do Ouro in 1940; Varjota in 1945; Meireles and Papoquinho in 1950) is, however, a significant indicator of Fortaleza's unplanned growth (Silva, 1992: 29).

6. The number of persons working in manufacturing increased from around 17,000 in 1960 to 33,000 in 1970 and to 84,000 in 1980 (Silveira, Almeida, and Santos, 1983: 26).

7. This east-west division is somewhat of a simplification, since there are, as Silva (1992: 56) has emphasized, some low-income areas in the west (the shantytowns and housing blocks in Mucuripe and in Aldeota itself) and some middle-class areas, such as Parquelândia, São Gerardo, and Parque Universitária, in the east.

8. Young entrepreneurs such as Tasso Jereissati and Amarilio Macedo were generally university graduates and had become the directors of their respective family enterprises. According to a survey carried out by the *Gazeta Mercantil* [Brazil's equivalent to the *Wall Street Journal*—Translator's note], the Jereissati Group (Iguatemi shopping malls) and the Macedo Group (food processing) were among Brazil's 300 biggest corporations (Gunn, 1993: 11). Other members of the CIC were Assis Machado Neto, director of a construction firm, Benedito (Beni) Veras, direc-

tor of the Guararapes textile corporation, and Sérgio Machado, director of the Vilejack textile firm.

9. Virgílio Távora, César Cals, and Aduino Bezerra (the first two of whom are now dead) were actual army colonels, but the title of “colonel” is also used in Brazilian political tradition for a sort of cacique, a large landowner or other economically powerful figure who was the local political boss. For a more detailed discussion on recent changes in Ceará politics, see Gondim (1997 and 1998).

10. The traditional Partido Comunista Brasileiro and the break-away (originally Maoist) Partido Comunista do Brasil. —Translator’s note.

11. The appearance and political success of an innovating elite in one of the poorest and most peripheral of the states of Brazil is certainly a very stimulating research problem. To analyze it would, however, be beyond the scope of this article, for it would require a comparative survey of all the northeastern states.

12. The old regime, characterized by the dominance of the colonels, the traditional landowning oligarchs, and an all-pervasive clientelism. —Translator’s note.

13. Juraci Magalhães was elected deputy mayor in 1988 on the PMDB ticket, which was then headed by Ciro Gomes. He became mayor when Gomes resigned to run for governor in 1990.

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