

Governed and not being governed – The case of Brazilian favelas as organic urban spaces

Abstract

A *favela* is the generally used term for a shanty town in Brazil. In the 19th century, the first settlements were called *bairros africanos* (African neighborhoods), and they were the place where former slaves without land ownership and no options for work lived. Over the decades, many freed slaves moved in. However, before the first settlements called favela were built, poor blacks were pushed away from downtown into the far suburbs. Most modern favelas emerged from the 1940s, due to a rural exodus, as consequence of the rapid modernization of the agricultural sector (ZALULAR 1998).

The people who live in favelas are known as *moradores da favela*, or pejoratively as *favelados*. Favelas are associated with poverty, informality and crime. Brazil's favelas, as a structural expression of the “planet of slums” (Davis 2006) can be seen as the result of the unequal distribution of wealth in the country (see Rothfuß 2008). Brazil is thus one of the most unequal countries in the world with the top 10 % of its population earning 50 % of the national income and about 34 % of all people living below the poverty line (IBGE 2007). The “naturalization” of social inequality in Brazil (Souza 2008) finds analogy in the urban structural expression of the tight juxtaposition of favela and *asfalto*. The *asfalto* means all formal urban spaces beyond the favela. The social reality of the favela is determined through the status of illegality of their creation, why these urban spaces are referred to the “informal” city (Ventura 1994).

The inexistence of formal governance and infrastructural assistance through decades, forced the favelados to build up their urban environment on their own. This circumstance produced a total different structure apart the planned and formal city. Thus I want to draw attention on how this political practice of *not to be governed* was replaced by mutual help and self-organisation in the favelas by developing more and more organic urban structures.