

## HYBRID TERRITORIES IN RIO DE JANEIRO: NEW CHALLENGES IN THE UNPLANNED CITY

Lilian FESSLER VAZ, Lecturer

Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
lilianfv@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*In Rio de Janeiro, a large number of favela's formed around factories during the twentieth century; at the end of the century, with the de-industrialization, large productive areas have been abandoned and occupied by homeless, forming a new type slum. A new relationship was defined, this time between the slums and the de-industrialization. The industries have withdrawn, but the fragile slums remained, not only around but also inside the fabrics (plants). Sheds and warehouses were turned to housing, working, religious and cultural spaces.*

*We propose to analyze the transformation of a region in Rio de Janeiro, composed of a small industrial area and a large shanty town. At its borders can be noticed the emergence of a new land: a hybrid territory, with some outstanding cultural venues, many of them in old factories that have been appropriated by the slum's inhabitants. Favelas and rehabilitated factories exist in many Brazilian cities, and some of these, used as cultural venues, too. But this agglomeration and this bottom-up process of creation make this example, as far as we know, a unique case of such hybrid territory.*

*This paper presents a study of the formation of these two areas, as well as its transformation in this hybrid territory, inquiring about the approaches that can allow us to understand them, and proposing the discussion of the challenge of planning this very particular area. How to characterize and how to plan for unplanned spaces that overlap with reappropriated, reutilized and resignified planned areas? A cultural regeneration promoted by the population?*

*Since the municipal planning does not bring contributions to this new territory, the study emphasizes the context and the process of space transformation, both architectural and urban (hybrids of housing, work, culture), in order to guide, through the arrangement of the elements of the problem, to possible planning proposals. This is an interdisciplinary study, and the theoretical and conceptual framework come from different fields of knowledge.*

*In this sense, we work with the concepts of opaque spaces, by Milton Santos, of spaces of insurgence by Holston, and of resistance by Ribeiro and by Porto, who link the cultural forms of resistance to the forces of social exclusion. We favor the approach of the spatialization of culture presented by Fortuna and Silva, who seek to understand the territories of hybridization of cultures. To develop the hypothesis of the constitution of places and territories we report to Barker, and Bonnemaison. About planning, we report to Bianchini and Parkinson (1994), Meyer (1999), Zukin (1995), Miles (2001) and Vaz and Jacques (2006).*

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<sup>1</sup> Slums, shantytowns

## FAVELAS IN RIO DE JANEIRO - THE MARÉ COMPLEX

*Favelas* are the predominant pattern of housing in Rio de Janeiro, characterized by frail buildings, lack of sanitary conditions, urban irregularity and illegality. The numbers are controversial: data from the last census have been strongly altered by the growth of slums in the past decade and estimates are diverse, oscillating between 1,300 million and 2 million<sup>2</sup> people in a city with 6,161.047 inhabitants<sup>3</sup>.

The Maré Complex (Complexo da Maré, Tide Complex) is located along the margins of Guanabara Bay between two major highways that access the city, approximately halfway between the international airport and downtown. This swampy region has been sanitized and had its urbanization started in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1930's and 40's, it was designated as industrial area and linked to the urban fabric through an important road axis, initiating the installation of factories in the surrounding neighborhoods. Thus the Maré region was limited between this axis and the water, and characterized by its industrial and commercial activities and housing. Due to low-income, workers attracted by industries created a few slums, firstly around areas close to the plants, and later stilt houses, a reference to the area name (Maré means Tide). In the 1980's, the concentration of *favelas* by the shore suffered a great intervention in sanitation, urbanization and the creation of housing projects followed by the construction of a new road axis on top of the landfill spots. Today the Complex is the home of over 132,000 inhabitants<sup>4</sup> spread along sixteen communities among original *favelas* and housing projects built to house the population removed from the *favelas* on the shore and other areas in the city (Vaz and Jacques, 2004). Other important features of the site are the violence and its Human Development Index, the third worst of the city in 2007<sup>5</sup>.

With de-industrialization, factories were closed down and abandoned, enabling big empty spaces to arise and contributing to the decay of such areas. With reduced working opportunities, reduced social public policies and habitation, the industrial vacants started being used for different purposes, mainly housing. This is the case of the invasion of large storage areas by homeless people who subdivide the spaces building small houses, leading to the conformation of "post-industrial *favelas*" hidden behind the tall walls of textile industries. Another type of occupation, promoted by popular cultural groups, brings to the installation of cultural centers in an attempt to overcome the absence of proper spaces. It is worth to highlight that Maré's and surrounding industrial vacants, as opposed to those situated along the port area, are not contemplated by revitalization policies, remaining as decadent scenery in the local landscape.

## POPULAR CULTURAL GROUPS<sup>6</sup>

The last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century displayed an increasing presence of the culture in different parts of society life: the expansion of the cultural industry, the importance of subjects like history, memory and heritage. Another revealing factor was the many cultural policies and urban regeneration plans for decadent areas, using the creation of big cultural equipment as radiance spots of urban intervention (Bianchini and Parkinson 1994) and also of the transformation of such spots into scenery and spectacle (Eames 2006; Monclús and Guardia 2006).

During that period, beyond de-industrialization, the collapse of development strategies and models centered in material progress and economic growth was also noticeable, facing its disastrous consequences in terms of social polarization and increasing poverty; the reduction of the State action especially within social public policies, and of the role of neighborhood associations, and the growing presence of drug trafficking in the *favelas*. As an answer to this crisis, original cultural activities began to emerge from popular pro-active groups seeking to overcome the huge Brazilian social inequity.

<sup>2</sup> The lack of information and disagreement are so big that in 22/03/2010, starting date of the Urban World Forum and the Social Urban Forum, local newspaper O Globo informed two different numbers: 1,300.000 inhabitants and 2,000.000 inhabitants.

<sup>3</sup> [http://portageo.rio.rj.gov.br/estudoscariocas/download/2407\\_Estimativas%20MRJ%20em%202008.pdf](http://portageo.rio.rj.gov.br/estudoscariocas/download/2407_Estimativas%20MRJ%20em%202008.pdf) Accessed in 26/02/2010.

<sup>4</sup> Maré Census data from year 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Legado Social dos XV Jogos Panamericanos Rio 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Parts of the following text were first developed in: Vaz, Lilian and Seldin, Claudia. Resistance and Cultural Experiences. In: CD-Rom Anais do Corpopcidade - debates on urban aesthetic, out. 2008, Salvador.

Such cultural actions can be perceived as community groups' efforts, usually by younger people who keep a strong bond with the space they occupy and whose action aims at human development and social transformation through a great variety of cultural practices and languages. As Coelho (2001) suggests, the concept of cultural action is always fundamentally social because it carries a utopic spirit in itself, looking for the democratization of culture and making people be their own actors, creating their own conditions, means and ends to their realization. The cultural action isn't restricted to the conquest of individual development, bestowing more value upon collective development as well as its symbolic production.

It is important to highlight that the action we analyze emerge from informal, opaque<sup>7</sup> (Santos, 1994), marginalized spaces of the city and brings visibility to new social actors of the "peripheral culture".

In these spaces the lack of educational, health, leisure and culture equipment is alarming. Therefore, those groups are forced to improvise adequate spaces in vacant *favela* spots where they can rehearse, establish workshops, hold meetings, etc. Aware of their lack of access to traditional cultural means and used to the indifference and lack of space for their activities, the younger see action as an opportunity to leave their state of invisibility and fight for the assertion of their spaces and their rights. This affirmation is allied to a strong resistance aspect that is manifested through different realms: space, society, ethnicity and culture.

At the Maré Complex we can observe how some of these groups operate and how their action has contributed to the creation and transformation of the space, both architecturally and urbanely. We proceed to present two of the cultural groups active in the region and their respective spaces as central elements in the transformation of the new territory.

## CEASM AND MARÉ MUSEUM

The Center for Studies and Solidarity Actions of Maré - CEASM, a non-profit civil society, was by a group of inhabitants and former inhabitants who managed to get a university degree. Concerned with education, culture and communication, the group began to develop projects supporting the creative potential of the population and praising the internal view of the community. From its many projects and activities, the Memory Network came to life starting from the awareness and understanding of the local memory, history and identity of the inhabitants. Thus, the registration of information, documents, statements, imagery and objects, the creation of a file, the publishing of books and exhibitions about Maré all contributed to the emergence of the Museum project. Another contributing factor was that in 2003, CEASM was permitted an inactive building to develop its activities.

Open since 2006, the museum is part of a larger cultural equipment: The Maré Culture House, which occupies storage areas and warehouses which had been used as shipyards until the 1990's. Due to its big spaces, CEASM decided to house their workshops and projects related to the preservation of local memory there, among which is the Maré Museum itself, regarded by the Culture Ministry as the first *favela* Museum in Brazil.

The collection is mostly composed of donations by the inhabitants, organized so as to tell the visitor the story of the community from its own point of view<sup>8</sup>. A tall and small stilt house, reproducing the type of housing that was typical of the area for decades, is the main piece of the museum. With the stilt house we can recognize the habitation pattern as one of the most important of local history and a fundamental aspect of the construction of that group of people and the place's spirit.

The stilt house, that gathers the memories and pieces of its inhabitants' lives and personal experiences (Vieira, 2007), acts as a shelter for the bodies and a support for the former dwellers memories. The spotlight on the stilt house works as a self-

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<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the bright spaces, of the rationality and modernity, Milton Santos called the neglected spaces, where the poor live, where the times are slow and infrastructures are incomplete or outdated, opaque spaces. But he noted that they are also areas of creativity and resistance.

<sup>8</sup> See: Seldin (2008).

affirmative statement: despite eradication, the stilt house shan't be forgotten. It has gained new meaning: the despised symbol of extreme poverty becomes the milestone of heroic resistance times.

The resistance aspect is emphasized with elements that remind the labor and effort to build a home in a region where natural resources were so unfavorable. The mere existence of the Museum shows resistance against hegemonic cultural processes by placing the *favela* as a culture and memory space and acknowledging the differences amongst the many communities that compose Maré, and placing it as a heterogeneous and diversified space.

Following this thought, the Museum stands out by “[stating] as the core of its main interest not preservation action, but the social lives of its inhabitants” (Chagas; Abreu, 2007). Its intention is cultural, social and political, for it intends to get the inhabitant in touch with their origin and bringing awareness about their history, indicating that the memory of Maré lies within those who dwell in it.

## **AYPCG - MARÉ CENTER FOR ART AND POPULAR CULTURE**

The Maré Center for Art and Popular Culture is the result of action taken by the Angola Ypiranga de Pastinha *Capoeira*<sup>9</sup> Group and relied on other cultural action groups in a process of dispute and occupation of an estate where many actors were involved.

There's a closed construction material factory at Maré, whose legal owners faced great difficulty selling the estate due to the location, an area of notorious violence and constant drug dealing gunfire wars - a largely media-promoted image. Therefore, the estate remained abandoned for about two decades, with tax evasion by the owners who accumulated high debt to the City Hall. As a solution, they proposed that the estate be donated to an institution able to take care of the debt, which did not happen.

The abandonment of the estate - composed of a 5-story administration building and two large yards - was known by the neighbors, many of whom understood that those spaces were available and ready for occupation. Thus, in the past few years, the place has been invaded by the homeless and young people connected with drug traffic, which resulted in massive destruction of the buildings.

Aware of such processes, the Neighbor Association tried to avoid destructive occupation by contacting the owners and the authorities, proposing that one of the yards be cleaned and turned into a sports court with the help of the same people that were tearing the place down. The people would then be able to work together with the Association, starting off a period of articulation and negotiation among a wide range of social agents including non-locals, other associations, culture groups and NGOs, legal owners, authorities and the local drug dealers. The cleaning of the yard happened along six months and the revenue from the scraps sold was reinvested to benefit all the parties involved, all of which began to feel entitled to utilize the space.

Nonetheless, negotiation between the owners and the authorities fell through and resulted in transference of property to the City Hall. Despite the efforts from community leaders and culture groups, the slow pace of the government and the difficulty in keeping an ongoing maintenance program led to yet a new destruction of the estate, this time around accompanied by the occupation of one of the yards by people expelled from their original communities, therefore triggering a behind-the-walls *favelization* process.

In 2006, facing a new imminent occupation, a culture group took over the ground floor of the administration building in an attempt to keep that space and prevent new invasions. It was the Angola Ypiranga de Pastinha Street Dance Group. This group intends to combine physical practice with teaching of the history of *capoeira*, highlighting its black roots and seeking to form new educational agents able to bring awareness through their art.

The Angola *Capoeira* adopted by the Maré group values the connection of dance, defense and sway (of the body), which demand great flexibility, speed and muscle effort. *Capoeira* also demands that the participant will be able to take initiative

<sup>9</sup> Brazilian Street Dance: originally, a martial art, a fight slaves practiced as a dance in colonial times.

based on reasoning, intuition and improvisation in response to the tricky moves of the opponent. That points out another important characteristic of *capoeira*: the necessity to take position, ever present in fight situations, and which can be seen as a preparation for life and facing daily life problems.

The successful enterprise made other culture groups notice the potential in the building, and smaller cultural groups (a music project, a jiu-jitsu school and a recording studio) tried to join efforts with the *capoeira* group, spreading their centers along the five-story building. That's how the alternative culture nucleus Maré Center for Art and Popular Culture began.

## SPACES AND TERRITORIES

The cases seen are not single examples around that region; on the contrary, its surroundings also hold actions, spaces and transformation processes. Despite the great diversity, they still keep things in common: the location amid the porosity on the border of industrial zones and *favelas*, the cultural activities and the pro-active stand of the groups. They reflect current phenomena that articulate urban vacants and cultural action.

Be it in the materiality of the stilt house at the Maré Museum or in the immateriality of *capoeira* practice at the Center for Art and Popular Culture, popular action is present showing various ways to affirm people's right to achieve culture, the city and citizenship.

It is worth noticing that the two examples are cases that best represent this intention, besides being bottom-up constitution processes: through the creation of the first *favela* museum in Brazil, CEASM affirms and reassures the meaning of its community history, and the GCAYP, through the invasion and occupation of the estate, as well as the practice, education and promotion of *capoeira*, a sign of its African-Brazilian origins.

Both reported cases show the creation of new spaces in architectural and urban scale. Those are new spaces in architectural terms because they are originally industrial buildings whose internal spaces have been modified so as to serve to other purposes, cultural ones. In this sense, we regard them as cultural equipment although they don't fit the formal or traditional description, like libraries and theaters. Finally, these spaces are also urbanely new, because with the combination of both analyzed centers and five other cultural equipment<sup>10</sup>, the common surrounding define a new, cultural territory.

According to Bonnemaïson (2002:99), the symbolic relation between culture and space is expressed and strengthened through the territory. This relation occurs when three complementary elements articulate: a social group, its culture and its territory. Theoretically, this territory presents a group of hierarchy-guided places connected by a network of itineraries established by a given social group in its social-cultural and social-spatial practices. In terms of urbanism, we understand the itineraries networks as free public spaces - streets, squares, etc., which connect places. And we understand places as poles where groups concentrate and their culture is condensed as symbols: materially, through architecture, or immaterially, through practices carried out there, and the meanings that remain impregnated. We point out with Baker (2005:445) that places are socially constituted locations where the production of sense of space happens.

But how to understand these spaces and territories? First we can consider this new territory, this porous border, as cultural, because the places defined by it are exactly the cultural equipment, and the activities held there, artistic and cultural, polarize the surroundings.

Many authors regard such territory as the result of resistance spaces. Like Holston (1996), who regards such spaces as social affirmation spots, to "go against" or, as mentioned by the author, of "insurgent citizenship". The connotation of resistance associated with the opaque spaces is also present in Ribeiro (2004), when noticing that "its inhabitants are the real pioneers of creative opportunities, insubordinate and disruptive", because "truly radical innovation comes from these inhabitants and their space." The connotation of resistance, creativity and transformation is

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<sup>10</sup> Reference to Observatório das Favelas (Favela Watch), Lona Cultural (Culture Center) that also shelters a municipal library, CEASM, Marés Network and Maré Center of Arts headquarters.

also present in Fortuna e Silva (2002) and Porto (2005), who claim these spaces as “privileged locus of social structure transformation.”

The study of the formation and transformation processes in the existing space, architectural or urban, discloses a recurring peculiarity: the mixing of not only heterogeneous, but apparently uncombined and messed up elements (formal and informal space, tradition and renewal, housing, labor and culture, among other). Thus, space, time, processes and activities are constantly in transition and also mixed in. It's a territory emerged differently from before, from specific elements, but from a mix: it is born hybrid and impregnated with culture.

These observations go back to Canclini (2008) and his hybridization definition: “...social-cultural processes where discreet practices or structures, which exist separately get combined to generate new structures, objects and practices”. The author highlights that more important than the study of hybridization is the study of hybridization processes. Hence it makes sense to take into consideration the possibility that those are indeed hybrid territories.

## CHALLENGES FOR PUBLIC POLICIES AND PLANNING

How to deal with hybrid spaces? With unplanned spaces (*favelas*) that merge with planned spaces (industrial zones) that have been re-appropriated, converted and got new meanings?

On the one hand, we are dealing with new forms of appropriation, occupation and utilization of old buildings, while on the other hand, with new ways of land use that is subversive of the law, redefining, as we have seen, new territories which do not fit the current patterns. The public policies, in spite of advances related to the informal city - *favelas* and peripheries - still don't see this new reality clearly, of unfitting previously existing patterns, particularly those reported here: the occupation of vacant estate, the formation of slums behind walls and a cultural center with both characteristics.

The fact that the estate had been abandoned firstly reminds us of the City Hall departments of Treasure, which impose as a legalizing condition the payment of taxes due for long years (payment that owners of broken companies cannot afford, let alone with invasions and cultural actions in the *favelas*). The City Hall organs for planning are also active, collecting data about the areas and suggesting productive use of such spaces to companies and institutions (for example, big call centers and social centers) without any proven practical results. Despite the news about studies and proposals of rehabilitation of great factory structures toward various activities, in Rio de Janeiro the official plans only take into account the revitalization of the Harbor Area and not the industrial areas.

In addition to the illegality of the occupations, we highlight the irregularity of the land use, especially the mixed land use. As we know, the legislation on land utilization in Rio de Janeiro was constituted when the modernist paradigm prevailed in urbanism and reinforced the strict division of urban functions recommended by the Letter of Athens and simply rejected the mixing of activities even though they were present in urban spaces<sup>11</sup>.

Curiously, in this scene of ambiguous and contradictory urban norms toward the hybrid characteristic of the upcoming territory, it's the Federal policies that stand out in search of solutions to the reported cases. We refer to the Cultura Viva Program (National Program for Culture, Education and Citizenship led by the Culture Ministry), which attempts to rescue, incentive and preserve Brazilian culture; while its most well known actions are the Pontos de Cultura (Culture Spots). To do so they select groups, projects and cultural activities via public bidding to promote art, culture, citizenship and solidarity economy, providing them with the necessary support to survive. That's how the Maré Museum received recognition and became a Ponto de Cultura.

<sup>11</sup> A classical example of rejection of reality is how the urban legislation has treated the suburban areas along the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The boroughs were perceived as halfway between residential and downtown-ish, undefined between the nucleus and the inner city, undetermined between past and future, which led to emptiness and degradation (Vaz and Silveira, 2009). Only in the 1990's this picture began to change, when the mix started to be recognized and accepted as positive, and the presence of housing as essential for the central areas' public policies.

The contemporary plans and policies for opaque spaces aim at sanitation and urbanization, and only provide very little equipment and virtually never cultural facilities. Policies and specific plans for cultural territories and facilities tend to adopt models from Europe and USA with spectacular architecture and urban marketing, which were criticized by several authors because of its consequences such as gentrification (Meyer 1999, Miles 2001 and Zukin 1995) and spectacularization (Vaz and Jacques 2006). There are no models for a new hybrid, complex, cultural and popular territory.

Since the municipal planning does not bring contributions to this new territory, the study emphasizes the context and the process of space transformation, both architectural and urban, in order to guide, through the arrangement of the elements of the problem, to possible planning proposals.

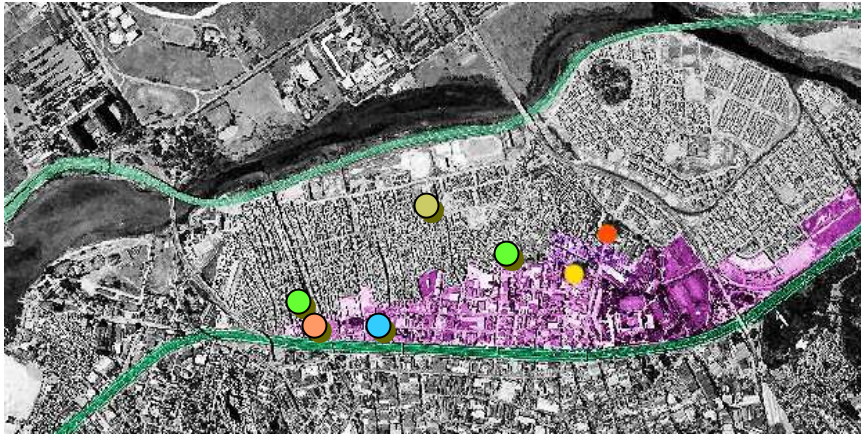
The new territory, with inaccurate characteristics, remains a challenge for the public power. We have no answers to the questions that arise with this phenomenon. But we should remember Pinheiro (1986), to whom the dominant groups apparently “define, design and determine” the axis of expansion and occupation of the city, “but who redefines and redesigns” the planning imposed by the authorities is the population. Therefore, the poor people re-urbanize and rebuild the city in their own way.

Curiously again, this territory, installed on the border of the *favela* and the neighborhood, can blur the limits between the informal and the formal city. It can be pointing the emergence of possibilities to overcome one of the most serious social problems of Rio de Janeiro: its socio-spatial division.

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*Aerial view of the Maré Complex*

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|  Centro de Arte e Cultura Popular da Maré |  Sede do CEASM/Redes Maré |
|  Museu da Maré e Casa da Cultura          |  Centro de Artes da Maré  |
|  Observatório das Favelas                 |  Antiga zona industrial   |
|  Lona Cultural                            |  |