

Rafael Soares Gonçalves, *Favelas de Río de Janeiro: historia y derecho*, Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2018, 429 pp.

Favelas de Río de Janeiro: historia y derecho, recently translated into Spanish, has become a reference for those who are interested in learning about Rio's favelas, understanding the urban history of the city, and the public policies that shaped this type of settlements in Brazil. The book challenges the traditional narratives on the subject: Gonçalves explores the juridical construction of favelas, inviting the reader to question not only relevant categories of analysis but also the established periodization. Through the study of the public opinion, the world of policymakers, state and non-state agents, and social scientists, the author brings a sharp analysis of the socio-political actors (and their roles) in the formation of the favela, including the very own *favelados*. The author avoids the tendency to see favela residents as passive actors that either suffer or passively accept governmental decisions. He does this without falling into the trap of romanticizing poor residents.

The literature on favelas is extensive and so are the theoretical debates that inform the discussion. However, there are few historical analyses that bring, as this book does, a comprehensive study from a *long-durée* standpoint. The book challenges the reader to reconsider what we know about these settlements by articulating a historical perspective, claiming back the central role of the state and emphasizing jurisprudence to understand favela's origins and constant transformations.

The book has three main virtues. The first one is the periodization. The unit of study covers more than one century which allows to capture the specificities of the micro and macro levels of analysis and the intersections within different temporalities. To explore the juridical, political, and social aspects of favela's presence in Rio produces its own periodization. It moves away from scholarly works that address specific set of state policies as discrete, self-contained periods. This book looks at the way favelas were formed and kept changing juridically and conceptually, and the tensions and debates that informed each period.

The second contribution is the theoretical framework, a history of law that is detached from a traditional legal history perspective and rather explores its social, political and symbolic implications within the broader context of the city's urban transformations. From an interdisciplinary and critical approach, Gonçalves challenges the study of jurisprudence as a self-contained discipline. On the contrary, he follows Bourdieu to explore the production and uses of legal standards to understand Brazilian and Rio's politics. In so doing, he shows the relevance of the juridical formation of favelas and their consequences, which exceeds the temporality of the individual administrations that produced specific sets of laws.

The third contribution is methodological. Gonçalves delves rigorously into several archives and multiple sources: legislatives, state documents, as well as neighborhoods associations, journals, statistics, and reports from the Catholic Church and non-governmental organizations. The last part of the book also provides a collection of very pertinent photographs. An original aspect of the book is the analysis of several legislative debates that not necessarily sanctioned legislation but are still important to understand different standpoints of the social actors involved in the discussion on favelas.

The book develops a dialectic critique of the influence of jurisprudence over different social realities. This is a contribution to disciplines within the humanities and social sciences that

study favelas and that oftentimes avoid legal issues. The book shows that jurisprudence is not just a matter of debate of the political elites but that the favela residents appropriate them to defend their grievances and push for their social rights.

The power of the law lies on, on the one hand, the ability to produce social stigmas by defining certain urban habits as *abnormal* or *pathological* but, on the other hand, the capacity of the residents to reverse them and to negotiate specific solutions to their precarious living conditions. As Goncalves shows, legal standards were ambiguous and used in very dissimilar political projects that either sought to eradicate or to improve these neighborhoods. A *sui generis* status over favelas defined them for decades. In many cases, these precarious definitions (or in practice, the political and legal tolerance of these informal settlements) extended over long periods. Even when more formal arrangements finally took place, this ambiguity did cease to exist in practice perpetuating the vulnerability of favela residents. Ambiguity is therefore a constant when thinking about favelas. In this sense, the book also brings relevant concerns about recent policies implemented in the favelas that show the contradictions of urban programs that seek to secure the rights of the residents through favela urbanization and tenure security.

Throughout the twelve chapters, divided in three sections, the book unveils a history that challenges a homogenous idea of favela bringing back their complexity and heterogeneity and the tensions behind policymaking. It contests a linear history demonstrating the complexities of the city's social and symbolic urban processes. Finally, the historical and social analysis defies the reification of favelas produced by jurisprudence, showing the tensions and relations between exclusion and integration, recognition and denial of these neighborhoods and their presence in the city. His original approach and thorough study will make this book a classic on favelas.

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