

'I WENT TO THE CITY OF GOD': GRINGOS, GUNS AND THE TOURISTIC FAVELA

A regular tourist destination since the early 1990s, Rocinha - the paradigmatic touristic favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - has seen the number of foreigners visitors grow considerably after the successful international release of City of God in 2003. In dialogue with the new mobilities paradigm and based on a socio-ethnographic investigation which examines how poverty-stricken and segregated areas are turned into tourist attractions, the article sheds lights on the ways tourists who have watched Fernando Meirelles's film re-interpret their notion of "the favela" after taking part in organized tours. The aim is to examine how far these reinterpretations, despite based on first-hand encounters, are related back to idealized notions that feed upon the cinematic favela of City of God while giving further legitimacy to it.

Introduction

In the summer of 2009, Susan, a retired teacher from Australia, spent her holidays in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's most popular international tourist destination. After having 'enough of lying on the beach' and being encouraged by some friends who had done it before, Susan and her husband decided to pay U\$35.00 and go on a favela tour. On her virtual travel diary titled 'I went to the City of God', the 54-year-old shares what she experienced during a 'warming and real visit' to 'another side of Rio'.¹ Encouraging others to join a tour created so as not to be 'voyeuristic or depressing', Susan goes into details:

Our guide explained (...) we were perfectly safe but [he] would not advise coming up here by ourselves and just wandering round. There definitely were drug cartels in the favelas (...). They were fiercely protective of their areas, helpful to those within, but did not tolerate any interference in the way they ran their business.

A lot of the residents benefited from the Favela Tours as they set up stalls selling their handicrafts. (...) We bought a couple of things but others in the group bought nothing and there was no hard sell at all. After we left this little group of stalls (...) we climbed to the top on [a] roof. From here you could see all round the favela and across Rio.

(...) there was no feeling of menace or threat. I had not taken anything at all, no bag or camera (...) so as not to offer temptation (...).

Favela is the generic name given to highly populated agglomerations, which emerged in Rio in the early twentieth century, composed of substandard housing usually built on land not owned by settlers. 'Nowadays it stands in Brazil for a poor segregated area in the city and it is often seen contradictorily as an area of solidarity and sociability, but where violence, associated to drug dealing, is present in everyday life' (Valladares 2008: 2). Through mobile technologies, which include both physical and virtual travels, the favela becomes capable of offering international visitors a most interesting package: controlled risk combined with a deep sense of adventure, the opportunity of acting as a concerned citizen (by supposedly contributing to the economic development of a poor area) and, no less important, a beautiful view of the city captured from above.

Susan, however, did not visit the real City of God (Cidade de Deus),² but Rocinha, a neighbourhood sold in the tourist market as 'the largest favela in Latin America.' While Rocinha is located in the rich South Zone on a hill that overlooks several tourist attractions, Cidade de Deus spreads itself horizontally on the western fringes of the city, displays no spectacular view of the ocean, is not blessed by the sight of the famous Christ the Redeemer Statue. Rocinha attracts an average of 3.5 thousand international visitors per month, Cidade de Deus has never managed to place itself as a tourist destination. 'We've tried, but it's too far from the main hotels. Unlike Rocinha, it doesn't allow for the contrast of the have and have-nots that is so striking for the gringo (...) To be frank with you, Cidade de Deus is just plain ugly,' explained to me a tour operator doing business in Rocinha for over a decade. And yet, on the tourist's narrative, Rocinha and Cidade de Deus, the touristic favela and the cinematic favela of *City of God* (BRA, 2002), all favelas in Rio – they could merge in an imaginary geography and become one.

The discursive superposition between the cinematic favela – *City of God* – and the touristic favela – Rocinha – is not exclusive to Susan. A long aerial shot of Rocinha caught the eye of a fascinated Roger Ebert (2008) in his review of *The Incredible Hulk* (USA, 2008), directed by Frenchman Louis Leterrier, for the *Chicago Sun-Times*:

This is the *City of God* neighborhood, and as nearly as I could tell, we are looking at the real thing, not CGI. The director lets the shot run on longer than any reasonable requirement of the plot; my bet is, he was as astonished as I was, and let it run because it is so damned amazing.

The Australian tourist, the US critic, the French film-maker, the international audiences – they are all 'astonished.' Doubts about the materiality of a 'damned amazing' view are thus raised: is it real or a computer generated image? In other words, can such a chaotic urban form really exist? Within the global mediascape (Appadurai 1996), answers to these questions which ultimately revolve around the ontology of the favela have become more and more dependent – not exclusively, for sure – on the set of representations offered by the film directed by Fernando Mcirelles and co-directed by Katia Lund.

Although the favela and its inhabitants (favelados) had been presented to international audiences before (Stam 1997; Sepúlveda dos Santos 2003; Leite 2005), no other Brazilian or foreign film before *City of God* had exposed them to so many viewers nor directly inspired such a large number of narratives about their lives within

the transnational cultural industry.³ Furthermore, according to all whom I interviewed during a three-year-long socio-ethnographic research project,⁴ no other cultural product has ever had such a dramatic impact on how the favela is orchestrated, performed and consumed as a tourist attraction.⁵

I attempted to demonstrate on previous opportunities (Freire-Medeiros 2008, 2009a) that the touristic favela can only subsist while being part, on one hand, of global narratives and practices that re-signify poverty as an object of rational consumption capable of reinforcing class boundaries and distinctions (Halnon 2002); on the other, of the expansion of the so-called reality tours which promise direct and safe contact, under close supervision of professional travel personnel, with marginal territories idealized as the perfect opposite of the world the tourist comes from. Here, I concentrate on examining how the interlocking technologies of cinematic representation (as in *City of God*) and tourism practice (as tours in Rocinha) are co-dependent on the elaboration of what is understood to be 'a favela' within the global imagination.

In his remarkable analysis of the debates around the cultural artefact 'City of God' (book, ethnography and film) in Brazil, Paulo Jorge Ribeiro (2005) demonstrates how it was turned into a disputed ground upon which social actors met to discuss the past, present and future of the nation.⁶ Inspired primarily by the film, leadership from social movements and NGO activists, residents of various favelas and students from different segments, representatives from the government and hip-hop movements, film-makers and film critics, and politicians of all pedigrees defended their conceptions about life in Brazil's metropolis, drug trafficking and violence. Scholarly literature also abounds with analysis of *City of God*. Coming from different disciplinary affiliations, praising or disapproving it, Brazilian as well as non-Brazilian authors have used the film as a platform to discuss the aesthetic and political choices of the New Brazilian Cinema, social and economic inequality, violence within contemporary societies in more general terms.

The present article attempts to be an original contribution to an already crowded field of investigation by focusing on the uses and articulations of *City of God* that emerge upon a very specific ground. In an explicit dialogue with the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2007) and its focus on technological mediation, I invite the reader on a tour through to Rocinha, where tourist activities have been performed since the early 1990s with a significant increase after *City of God's* international release in early 2003. We will follow the steps of some men and women who have spontaneously mentioned the film on their accounts of the favela they explored hiring one of the seven agencies officially registered with the Rio Tourism Bureau.⁷ The aim is to examine how far their understanding of what a 'favela' is, despite being based on first-hand encounters, is related back to idealized notions that feed upon the cinematic favela of *City of God* while giving further legitimacy to it.

Before we start our tour, it is worth checking which favela tourists might bring with them from home.

Whose 'City of God'?

A few cultural products may claim the status of ambivalence between the mobilities of here and there, home and abroad, rootedness and displacement. 'City of God in fact speaks many and at the same time no idioms', proposes Elsc Vieira (2005: vii) in

reference to the film's mimicry, the original use of a constellation of narrative styles, from documentary to music video, and the interweaving of dramatic techniques from Brazilian and non-Brazilian cinemas.

On a number of occasions, Meirelles stated that his self-financed film was always conceived with Brazilian audiences in mind. But still, he delegated to powerful Miramax its worldwide marketing and distribution. The film director often argued that, had he really aimed for the global market, he would not have based the script on an obscure novel by a first-time author.⁸ Against the accusation of having reduced the complexities of the favela to Hollywood's dualistic logic for profit's sake, Meirelles highlighted the fact that amateur actors were picked from favelas in Rio and encouraged to improvise using their own vocabulary as well as their body language — elements that resist translation and cannot be captured by subtitles. Nevertheless, the film employed an American scriptwriting advisor throughout its production. Although claiming that *City of God* was ultimately a film for Brazilians reflecting upon themselves, Meirelles admitted taking the stance of a foreigner who narrates a supposedly true story, but one not directly related to him. A place, one could say, naturally inhabited by co-director Katia Lund, responsible for the formation and preparation of the cast, who is the daughter of North-American immigrants to Brazil.

Hinging on the dialectical interplay between singularity and universality, spontaneity and artifice, the real and the fictional, *City of God* required a mediator, someone capable of guiding the viewer through an endless maze of a social reality that — supposedly — cannot be understood by society at large. Within the film, such a role is played by Buscapé (Rocket), who, via voice-over, establishes himself as the narrator — and translator — of the story of *City of God* and its people. Holding Buscapé's hand, we engage on a trip that begins with quick close-up shots of a knife being sharpened against a rock and lasts three decades of violent deaths. After chasing a running chicken and being caught in a dead end in one of the most quoted, described and analyzed scenes of contemporary cinema, we find ourselves on a swirl: the camera moves circularly around our guide in a dizzying motion, in an effect comparable to the famed 'bullet time effect' seen in *The Matrix*, the background alternating between the favela, passersby, a police car, and heavily-armed thugs. When we finally get a hold of our breath again, we realize that we have been sent back in time. Men, women and children arrive either on foot or driving horse carriages through an orange dry land and against blue skies. They come from unknown places bringing their scarce belongings, ready to start the colonization of an empty territory: according to *City of God*, the favela starts out as a frontier land. Our guide, who not by chance is also a photographer capable of freezing bits of 'reality' while putting 'captions' on it, has placed us in a setting common to Western movies, therefore highly recognizable by Western audiences. Recognizable, but not comfortably familiar, for the establishment of the settlers on the virgin land leads to barbarism and not civilization.

If Buscapé is the tour guide within the film, outside the film it is due to the qualified critic to render the unfamiliar with meaning. As discussed by Miranda Shaw (2004), most Anglophonic critics, despite being extremely positive in their reviews, ended up erasing the film's national specificities and translating it according to the cognitive framework of audiences used to the conventions of Hollywood. In order to make it more appealing and accessible, they recurrently placed *City of God* in the long line tradition of the gangster films or as yet another piece about black people killing each

other, this time with a peculiar accent. Rather than highlighting its dialogue with Cinema Novo, reviewers for influential newspapers and magazines celebrated the film's stylistic choices as indebted to the likes of Scorsese and Tarantino.

Not surprisingly, the favela was introduced to millions of spectators in the United States and Western Europe as a black ghetto and the *comandos* – heavily armed drug factions mainly devoted to the retail sale of cocaine in Rio – as US gangs. Despite being comparable in their status of stigmatized territories, the North-American ghetto and the favela were produced by disparate patterns of governmental intervention which actually varies from ghetto to ghetto, favela to favela (let us not forget that Cidade de Deus, for example, started out as a public housing complex). They are sociospatial formations which are based on different conceptions of race and perform distinct functions for their broader metropolitan systems (Wacquant, 2007).

If the touristic favela carries the burdens of displaced representations proposed by *City of God*, the cinematic favela is also shaped by the vocabularies of tourism and the demands of potential travelers. Exemplifying this feedback loop, in a reviewed titled 'Gangs of Rio de Janeiro' critic Richard Corliss (2003) wrote: 'The film is seductive, disturbing, enthralling – a trip to hell that gives the passengers a great ride.' In one of the earliest and most acid reviews to circulate in the Brazilian media, Ivana Bentes (2002) stated: '*City of God* promotes tourism in hell.' In order to denounce what she saw as the 'domestication of the most radical themes of culture and Brazilian cinema (...) as products for export,' Bentes coined the widely employed term 'cosmetics of hunger' and traced explicit parallels between tourism activities in Rocinha and the aesthetization of poverty as well as violence presented by *City of God*. In both cases, the favela was supposedly being fashioned for voyeuristic appreciation and international consumption.

But are perverse voyeurism and sadistic sensibility enough to explain the success of *City of God* and the existence of the touristic favela? I would say the matter calls for more nuanced considerations.

'Infamous, notorious, glamorous (in a gangsta kinda way) ...'

Neither the indifference of public power (the site was only officially recognized as a tourist attraction in 2006) nor the opposition of most middle and upper-class Brazilians (who claim that favela tourism is a despicable activity which denigrates the nation's image and traps the poor in a zoo-like display) were enough to avoid Rocinha becoming a lucrative tourist attraction for international audiences:

'[The favela tourist] is no first-timer ... Usually better informed, he [sic] wants to avoid the beaten-track, wants to go beyond the postcard (...) He's seen *City of God* and wants to compare it with reality. There are more Europeans ... let's say 60%,
(M., tourism promoter)

Composed of university students and retired couples, liberal professionals of various ages and families with small kids, the organized groups of favela tourists are very diverse. As observed by one of the few tour guides who is actually a resident from Rocinha, 'nowadays you don't really have a specific profile. You get from a hostel guy to a big

executive from the Copacabana Palace [Hotel].’ The groups are balanced as far as gender is concerned, but not in terms of race, with a large predominance of white tourists who usually collect travel experiences in ‘alternative’ circuits around the world.

Tourists under examination here took part on tours of previously established paths, and were guided by professionals. Visits to day-care centers are common practice to all companies, just as the rental of roofs (‘lajes’) which serve as a viewing platform. This so-called *momento laje* is one of the most appreciated: with an ocean of little houses under their feet, the visitors can confront the favela with its surroundings, the unlined houses with the luxurious buildings not so far away. All this favors a collective view of the touristic favela and some common anxieties recurrently emerge.

‘Would favela life be like the movie *City of God*? Who lived there? Were wars constantly being fought between police and drug lords? Would I be in danger of being robbed? How does one see a favela without exploiting a group of people living in a poorer environment? The questions continued.’ With this set of interrogations, Dominic opens his virtual travelogue about a trip to Rocinha taken in the summer of 2009⁹ and which reverberates with anxieties often shared by the favela tourists. After all, images of Rio circulating in the global media are usually referred to dramatic episodes of life-threatening situations, many times involving tourists. Traveling to Rio, thus, already entails a willingness to take risks that go far beyond the general checklist of tropical illnesses, muggings and language misunderstandings. In the case of favela tourism, violence and risk do not constitute a background or a possibility, but are main features highly anticipated and informed by the tourists’s viewing of *City of God*.

As with other tourists we have physically or virtually followed, Dominic expresses the anxieties that anticipated his encounter with what he assumes to be a threatening and highly charged moral ground. Reports of reluctance were indeed recurring amongst the majority of tourists we met and basically revolved around these two topics: on one hand, the pertinence of gazing at other people’s misery; and, on the other, the binary safety risk.

The scope of this article will not allow for a careful examination of the complex moral dilemmas that constitute poverty tourism, a practice which is often depicted in dark colors, to say the least (Freire-Medeiros 2009b). In an insightful essay on the debates around the ethics of such a kind of tourism, Selinger and Outtersen observe: ‘Articles in *The New York Times*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Huffington Post*, and other popular media characterize these trips as morally controversial. Critics attack not just actual visits, but also virtual poverty tourism through film’ (2009: 2). In the case of Rocinha, many tourists assume a defensive posture, attempting to convince that their visit is not a voyeuristic exercise, but an act of solidarity that may lead to the development of the area.¹⁰ As for dealing with the juxtapositions between risk and excitement that are also an intrinsic part of the touristic favela, some interesting strategies are established.

I should start by mentioning that, since the early days of tourism activities in Rocinha, streets where drug dealing is evident are avoided and not one visitor has been victimized so far. Furthermore, all company owners and tourists guides we interviewed affirmed that a central purpose of the tours is to throw into doubt the logic associating favela and violence. The agencies’ websites contribute to anticipating an atmosphere of good-will and gratitude which tourists would encounter:

The tour seeks to bring you into the root of the Favela community, to provide you with an insight into the vibrant spirit of its people . . . [At the] daycare center adorable children are guaranteed to greet you with open arms.

(www.bealocal.com.br)

The tour changes their reputation of areas related to violence and poverty only. Don't be shy, you are welcome there, and local people support your visit.

(www.favelatour.com.br)

Nevertheless, tourism promoters are aware that many visitors come precisely in search of the excitements of a violent favela:

'I already have clients who really wanted to see action. Action – they thought they would walk by and see armed drug dealers. They wanted to watch all hell break loose. The guy thinks he's strolling through Universal [amusement park]. He thinks here is *City of God* and it's all fake. He doesn't realize that it's all true. There are tourists who simply think they are in a film set (. . .) For me, having to deal with this, is quite frustrating.' (C., professional tour guide)

Coming from media-saturated societies, tourists are eager for non-mediated experiences of encounter capable of providing an authenticity lost in the 'civilized West' (MacCannell 1992). Paradoxically, however, they use these very first-hand encounters as an opportunity to confirm – or confront – what has been learned from the media. This is what Ellen Strain (2003) calls 'the illusion of the non-mediated mediation.' It is a myth, or an illusion, offered by the 'alternative' forms of tourism – the reality tours being an obvious example – for it postulates the possibility of the tourist experience existing outside mediatic frames, i.e., without the mediation of the various cultural products which are responsible for shaping the tourist's desires in the first place.

However, as Bulent Diken suggests, it is necessary to examine 'not only how fiction is mistaken for reality, but also . . . how reality itself is mistaken for fiction' (2005: 317). To the guide's frustration, the realities of Rocinha are blurred and mixed with those of a high-tech leisure facility or a film set. Despite its realist aesthetics, to use Beatriz Jaguaribe's (2004) expression, more than an 'effect of reality,' *City of God* ends up producing an 'effect of unreality': 'the real itself (the camp, the favela) is perceived as a violent specter, as a fantasy space. In *City of God*, through images the favela turns into a virtual entity, into a simulacrum' (ibid.).

If the favela encountered by the tourist first hand has already been experienced as a 'virtual entity' or a 'simulacrum,' it still elicits a plethora of emotions that are lived as very much real. A feedback loop links the virtual and the real, for the presence of tourists has tangible impacts which definitely reverberate on the empirical grounds of Rocinha and beyond. The words of one of our interviewees, a 27-year-old computer technician from England, illustrate the complicated juxtaposition, so common to Rocinha tourists, between excitement, quest for knowledge and real compassion:

I have studied the favela [at secondary school] and believe it is an important cultural symbol of Rio. I also believe that tourism can be a very positive industry for the poorer classes in society. The tour also sounds exciting – the prospect of seeing guns, riding on a motorbike – and informative. It's important that areas of our

society are not ignored or hidden from view, especially this area which is so dynamic and exciting (...).

The highlight for me was just the realization that these people are not as oppressed or poor as I had been led to believe at school. The downside was that the money spent on the tour did not chiefly go towards the people who live in the favela (...). If I had known this before the trip I would have investigated other companies that donate some of their profits.

It would be no exaggeration to say that all tourism agencies invest in the commodification of poverty and danger by playing around the pair 'risk and trust' (Giddens 1990). On one hand, the companies present themselves as the trustful mediators of a positive form of contact that will benefit the favela socially and economically, even if the money spent on the tours is not shared with the favelados. On the other, tourists are assured of their safety, even when walking through the poorest areas, riding open jeeps or motorcycles. 'The violence that takes place in the favelas is not directed at tourists. You can bring your most expensive camera and you won't be bothered,' repeat the guides. In *City of God*, action takes place mostly within a favela pictured as isolated from the rest of the city, where killings victimize the favelados themselves, not the 'regular citizens' who are outside its boundaries. In Rocinha, the tourist is encouraged to maintain a distance comparable to this, to believe that all violence and brutality, although real, do not concern him directly.

Against the risk of potential danger in the touristic favela, frameworks of trust are built, but not around the institutions (the tourist agency or the police) normally responsible for tourists' physical integrity. Most guides, although highlighting that '99% of the favelados are peaceful workers,' put in plain words to tourists that their safety is guaranteed by the drug traffickers. The owner for an agency extremely popular amongst backpackers repeats in the tours he conducts:

While in Copacabana you have to be very careful, here the drug lords are in charge and neither theft nor murder of tourists are tolerated simply because they want to make their sales and if something happens to one of you, the police might come. And of course it isn't good for their business.

As happened on the cinematic favela of *City of God*, in the tales of the touristic favela a rather complex form of social interaction that is part of many favelados' daily lives – what sociologist Machado da Silva (2009) pertinently explains under the notion of 'violent sociability' – acquires a simplified version that, however, is far from exclusive to either filmic or touristic narratives, cutting across academic and governmental discourses. Let us see what a traveler from California writes on her blog, eloquently titled 'The real Rio'¹¹:

I was asked to roll down the window of the van I was in so the drug lords could see that I was a tourist and not a member of a rival gang (...)

Fortunately, the drug lords also serve as mayor of the favela and they take care of their community (...). They impose their own martial laws, forbidding any other crime besides the drug trade to take place inside of the favela, and police are definitely NOT allowed in (...).

A violent confrontation opposes, on one hand, bad/providing drug dealers (a mix of Zé Pequeno and Bcné) to good/passive favelados; and on the other, egotistic elites to concerned favela tourists and tourism promoters – all of it taking place under the eyes of an incompetent police force and an absent State. In fact, most interviewees did not seem to realize that the violence imposed onto the favela population is not only the result of the arbitrariness of the narco-traffickers or the egotism of the Brazilian elites (although both, of course, play a crucial role), but is equally an outcome of unjust economic arrangements of which the tourists themselves are an intrinsic part. This is what Hutnyk (1996), in a different but comparable context, points out as ‘the occlusion of inequalities through ideological work in even the most progressive and well-meaning of tourisms.’

Not all tourists, however, are necessarily oblivious to a reflexive and self-critical attitude. Some of them would interrogate the guides – and myself – on how far the favela presented by *City of God* deserves credibility. ‘According to legend, rumor and backpacker gossip, Rio’s favelas are infamous, notorious, glamorous (in a gansta kinda way) . . . but what’s really up there?’ asks Helen Clark on her virtual travel account. At the beginning of her narrative, she assumes a rather cynical tone: ‘Like many tourists I’d seen *City of God* (the movie) and heard the overexcited hype babbled by other foreigners (“Omigod Rio’s hardcore, like, they haven’t got shoes and they’ll kill you for them I heard”). Bollocks, I’d always thought.’ Further on, however, her account acquires a darker shade while she finds herself in the midst of the favela: ‘But it was different to squeeze past teenage boys with guns slung lazily across their laps in a lane barely big enough for one.’

Even if motivated largely by curiosity and the excitements derived from the cinematic favela, most tourists seem genuinely fascinated by the striking contrasts offered by Rocinha, and many seem moved by the encounters with the residents,¹² especially with the kids. Despite the initial reluctance, all agree that the trip offered a different view on the favela, on the city and on its people: ‘Looking round Rocinha, I now feel I understand the people of Rio on a much deeper level,’ writes on November 2005 a tourist going by the alias of ‘SmartLollypop.’ More often than not, they are eagerly positive about the tour around the favela and the visual accounts they were able to produce,¹³ enthusiastically recommending the experience. As SmartLollypop registers in the final lines of her travelblog: ‘A definite must-do when visiting Rio, it will enlighten your life and provide a unique insight into a fascinating place.’

Conclusion

Poverty tourism and fictional films that graphically depict landscapes of marginality and segregation tend to provoke similar reactions in the public arena. To their defenders, they have the capacity to improve the social conscience of visitors/viewers, bring visibility to sectors usually ignored, if not antagonized, by society at large. Their critics, though they may acknowledge the positive impact of certain one-off projects, point at two structural flaws, at least: locals never receive the benefits – ‘money and a lot of prestige,’ to paraphrase MV Bill¹⁴ – equally; rather less than political or social awareness, what the tours and films trigger is mostly a voyeuristic attitude in face of poverty and suffering.

As I attempted to demonstrate here, in the narratives of the touristic favela, the positive stereotypes presented by *City of God* – the favela as cradle of sensuous rhythms (from samba to funk) and home of beautiful shining bodies – are reinforced to a large extent. The negative stereotypes depicted by the film – the favela as ultimately poor, violent and uncivilized – are not completely surpassed, but displaced as subtexts. On attempting to contradict the film on its representations of the favela as ruled by the languages of violent crime, often the tours end up failing to engage tourists with the realization that the lives of people in Rocinha assume extremely unpredictable shapes due to other forms of violence – ‘expressions of a restricted, hierarchized and fragmented citizenship’ (Machado da Silva 2002: 223–4) – which are not so spectacular, but equally brutal.

Although more research under the mobilities paradigm is still needed in order to draw conclusive observations, it seems to me pointless to oppose so-called native representations of the favela to those produced transnationally, or ‘real’ to ‘fake’ encounters, or even ‘voyeurism’ to ‘compassion.’ As the tales of the cinematic and the touristic favelas show, we are facing the surging of a mobile entity, a space of imagination that is traveled to while traveling around the world – what I call the *traveling favela* (Frcire-Medeiros, forthcoming). Ultimately the result of interaction and influence between social actors who until recently had virtually no contact, the *traveling favela* cannot be labelled either autochthonous or foreign.

The long-term effect of cinematic and/or touristic encounters still need to be researched, but I would like to wrap up this article quoting J., a 28-year-old American we interviewed in the summer of 2007:

I think a lot of the appeal has to do with the perceived danger involved. In that sense it is a bit exciting.

(...) In my opinion, it is more important how the tours affect the favela. For the tourists, a few hours at a favela isn’t enough to make a significant impact. It is only a brief exposure to another way of life. (...). But the real question is: do we want the tour to change the favela? As the favela tours become more popular many more people will see it as a way to make money and perhaps the tours will change or the favela will start to change and maximize the amount of money is earned from the tourists. This would possibly present a better standard of living for the people. But as the standard of living increases, at some point, wouldn’t the favela cease to be a favela? So is the purpose of the tour to give travelers a look at the favela lifestyle, and preserve it for the future? Or is the purpose to give those in the favela exposure to the outside world, and a possible better way of life? Of course, there are many more factors involved that I know very little or nothing about, such as the drug cartels, but this is just my speculation.

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Notes

- 1 Cf. <http://www.dooyoo.co.uk/sightseeing-international/favela-tour-rio-de-janeiro-brazil/1203629/#rcv>
- 2 If until the beginning of the 1960s government policies towards the favelas oscillated between repression and tolerance, after the 1964 military coup the removal policy prevailed. Families were obliged to leave certain favelas and move to public housing complexes in remote areas. One of these complexes was Cidade de Deus, which Paulo Lins (1997) calls a *neofavela*.
- 3 The most recent example of the direct effects of *City of God* is *Dancing with the Devil* (UK, 2009) – whose working title, dropped for unknown reasons, symptomatically added ‘in the city of God.’ Directed by Jon Blair and co-produced by the Guardian’s Rio correspondent Tom Phillips, the documentary follows a police inspector from the narco-traffic division, a drug lord (killed shortly before the film was released) and a former drug-dealer who runs an evangelical church. It was severely attacked in Brazil for supposedly taking part in a list of international attempts to demoralize Rio’s bid to host the 2016 Olympics.
- 4 The research project ‘Touring Poverty’ involved long interviews with qualified informants (guides, tourism promoters, tourists, souvenirs producers/sellers and dwellers), field observation, participant observation in different tours, a photoethnographic approach, as well as brief incursions into the Cape Flats (South Africa) and Dharavi (India). Financed by CNPq and the Foundation for Urban and Regional Studies (FURS), it counted on a team of enthusiastic assistants: Alexandre Magalhães, André Salata, Andréia C. Santos, Cesar Teixeira, Joni Magalhães and Juliana Farias. I am grateful to all and especially to Palloma Menezes, Fernanda Nunes and Livia Campello, who have been ‘touring’ the favela with me for all these years.
- 5 The role of a cult film in spawning a wave of tourists toward non-obvious destinations is fairly common. Burkitsville, Illinois, and Forks, Washington, where *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Twilight* (2008) were set, respectively, spring to mind.
- 6 Although achieving unseen levels with *City of God*, the debates around the cinematic favela surpass it. As sociologist Marcia Leite (2005: 149) accurately remarks: ‘Film and documentary makers are finding themselves leaning increasingly towards the favelas, as they once did towards the northeastern sertão, in the eagerness and in the hope of rediscovering Brazil.’
- 7 The names are quite eloquent in their appeals to exoticism, authenticity and adventure: Be a local, don’t be a gringo; Exotic tours; Favela Tours; Jeep Tours; Indiana Jungle Tours; Private Tours; Rio Adventures.
- 8 The script was based on the eponymous novel by Paulo Lins, who, besides being raised in Cidade de Deus, worked as a research assistant on Alba Zaluar’s ethnographic project that led to a ground-breaking book in urban anthropology, *A Máquina e a Revolta* (1985). For interesting analysis on how novel and film dialogue, see Nagib (2004), Scharwz (2004) and Ribeiro (2005).
- 9 <http://matadorchange.com/the-favela-projects/>

- 10 Interestingly enough, tourists spend very little during their visits and it is not rare to find them bargaining with the souvenirs sellers (Carter 2005; Dweck 2004; Freire-Medeiros 2009b). As for donations in cash or goods, they are not unusual, but still far from being a real antidote against poverty.
- 11 Cf. <http://www.travelblog.org/South-America/Brazil/Rio-de-Janeiro/Rio-de-Janeiro/blog-46579.html>
- 12 On the favelados's impressions on the tourist activities in Rocinha, see Dweck 2005 and Freire-Medeiros 2009a.
- 13 Photographs by tourists constitute a main feature of the favela tours and provide a rich archive of theoretical possibilities. Cf. Menczes 2007; Freire-Medeiros and Menczes 2009.
- 14 The well-known rapper, who was born and still lives in Cidade de Deus, was one of the main voices against *City of God*, which he classified as disrespectful towards the community and harming to their population.

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