‘Theirs seemed like a lot more fun’: Favela tourism, commoditization of poverty and stereotypes of the Self and of the Other

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A Major Research Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master’s degree in Globalization and International Development

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Intro

When I visited Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2015, a few months before the city held the 2016 summer Olympics, a visit to the favelas – informal settlements located in urban areas throughout Brazil and especially Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo—appeared to be on every traveller’s bucket list. It seemed that every tourist I met and every tourism blog I read talked about favela tours, and that every hostel lobby sported the pamphlets of a company that offered these tours. As a matter of fact, favela tourism and favela tours, an activity in which tourists pay tour companies to visit a favela for a few hours, had at the time already become a “highly professionalized business” (Steinbrink, 2012, p. 214), a visit to the favela being considered a Rio de Janeiro “must do” that even appeared in some guidebooks such as *Everyman Guide to Brazil*, *Brazil: Footprint Guide*, the *Lonely Planet Guide to Brazil* and *Globetrotter* (Williams, 2008, p. 485).

Favela tourism, a relatively new phenomenon, which in Rio de Janeiro originated as early as 1992 when activists travelling to Rio during the Earth Summit demanded to see the favela first hand (Frenzel, 2012), and has seen a “significant increase after City of God’s international release in early 2003” (Freire-Medeiros, 2011, p. 23), has proven to be controversial. Indeed, while many, both in the academic sphere and in the media, have condemned favela tours and the larger phenomenon of slum tourism, proponents of favela tourism claim that the practice benefits communities by bringing much needed capital into the favelas, while also challenging narratives on informal settlements and breaking prevalent stereotypes.

This research will analyze both of these claims, aiming to answer the following questions: What economic impact does favela tourism in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil have on favela communities?

What impact does favela tourism have on tourists' perception of the favelas and of its inhabitants? Why?

Thus, in this memoir, I aim to critically analyse tour operators and other favela tourism proponents' claim that favela tourism in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil is economically beneficial to favela communities and is instrumental in changing positively tourist's perceptions of the favela and its inhabitants. I will argue that the wealth created through favela tourism does not benefit favela communities and stems from an ethically questionable commoditization of poverty that in turn leads to a naturalization and aestheticization of poverty and to confuse notions of authenticity. Moreover, I will demonstrate that favela tourism has not proven an adequate tool in challenging perceptions of favela communities but is rather instrumental in the construction of opposing identities, that of the Humanitarian Self and of the Happy slum dweller/Noble savage Other.

Methodology

To answer these questions, this research will build on favela tourism literature, the broader slum tourism literature, critical theory literature inspired by the works of authors such as Foucault, Said and Hall, and the social psychology contact hypothesis, which suggests that contact between different groups under appropriate conditions can effectively reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members. Moreover, while it is outside of the scope of this research to conduct a systematic analysis of internet discourse produced by tourists having taken part in favela tours, examples of this discourse will be used throughout this research to support the arguments made. This discourse, unless otherwise indicated, will be drawn from the English language reviews left on TripAdvisor for the activity "Favela Tour" between January 1st 2017 and September 30th 2019 as well as from blog entries written by various bloggers and published on their travel blog. I have chosen TripAdvisor reviews and travel blogs as sources of tourist discourse because they are

readily available and numerous. However, they might present some limitations. Indeed, there is no way to know without a doubt if those writing reviews or writing blog posts have truly taken part in a favela tour. Moreover, certain demographics or traveler types might be more likely to write reviews on TripAdvisor or to maintain travel blogs.

As for ethical considerations, the use of either of these as sources of data collection is a relatively new phenomenon in social science research and there seems to be no consensus as to the guidelines to be followed, but it remains essential to identify any potential ethical implications.

In the case of blog analysis, the ethical considerations revolve around three questions: A) Whether blogs should be considered public or private; B) Whether blog authors should be considered authors or subjects; C) Whether informed consent should be obtained.

To the question of whether blogs belong to the public sphere or the private sphere, Stainton and Iordanova (2017) respond that blogs are considered public if the information shared is not of an intimate nature and is not password protected. For his part, Hookway (2008) maintains that "blogging is a public act of writing for an implicit audience" p.105, 2008) and argues that those who do not wish their blogs to be public would take measures in order to maintain its privacy by using a password, while Snee (2010) suggests the bloggers she talked to as part of her research were well aware the blogs were public. It thus appears safe to say that blogs belong to the public domain and can be used for research.

As for authorship, Stainton and Iordanova (2017) maintain that "The researcher should decide whether the content used for research purposes acts as a primary data source (i.e. the travel blog content is the 'subject') or from a secondary data source (i.e. the travel blog content acts as

the author)" (n.d) when choosing whether to credit the author or to protect them through anonymity. For their part, Hookway (2008) and Snee (2010) advocate that one should "privilege the protection of participants' identity over credit to the author" (Hookway, p.106, 2008) and suggest that blog usernames should be modified and that any identifying information in blog quotations should be redacted. My research will also err on the side of caution and protect the identity of blog authors through the use of pseudonyms. Blogs will also not be listed in references.

Finally, on the question of consent, Stainton and Iordanova (2017) suggest that "informed consent is not necessary for those who have knowingly published the content to be researched in the public domain" (n.d), while Hookway claims that "blogs are firmly located in the public domain and for this reason it can be argued that the necessity of consent should be waived" (p. 105, 2008). Alternatively, Elgesem (2002) advocates that online research ethics are no different from the ethics of traditional research and maintains that NESH guidelines must also be followed when considering consent. However, these guidelines accept that consent may not be necessary in the case of observation in public spaces, lack of physical contact with participants, and the use of data that is not particularly sensitive (NESH, p.14, 2016), all of which are true in the case of travel blog data. Consequently, I do not expect it should be necessary to request consent in the context of this research, especially as anonymity will be upheld.

As for TripAdvisor reviews, similar ethical considerations are at play. Consent is assumed, as all reviewers have to agree to a privacy policy stating, among other things, that if they "choose to create a profile on TripAdvisor, certain information in [their] profile will be publicly viewable and identifiable via [their] screen name" (TripAdvisor, 2019). This information includes a mandatory screen name or username than can be chosen by the user and that does not have to make

any reference to their real name. It may also include a profile picture and the user's city and country of origin, but only if they choose to make this information public. Considering that none of this information has to allow the identification of the user, bearing in mind the public nature of these reviews, and recognizing prior consent, I believe that use of narratives collected through TripAdvisor reviews, as well as references to usernames and country of origin of their authors for the purpose of research does not infer any prejudices to TripAdvisor users.

The analytical framework

Critical Theory

First, I argue that favela tourism is not ahistorical and must be understood within a colonial context and the complexity of power relations. I thus believe critical theory and the work of authors such as Said, Hall and Foucault provide us with the tools to understand how and why favela tourism does not dispel stereotypes but rather leads to the construction of opposing views of the Self and of the Other. Consequently, the principles that will inform this research revolve around three main themes: Identities and Othering; Encounter and Stereotypes; and Knowledge and Power.

On the topic of Identities and Othering, I contend that human identities are constructed in opposition, through the establishment of an opposite, an Other (Said, 1978). Identities and experiences are constituted within discourse, through the meanings provided to the Self and the Other. Since discourse is not a closed system, and meaning is not fixed, people do not have static and coherent identities that are expressed through language, rather it is language which generates a temporary version of the Self (Eriksson Baaz, 2005). Moreover, I assert that there is always a relation of power between the poles of a binary opposition (Hall, 1997).

Secondly, my analysis of favela tourism is framed by an understanding of the encounter and of stereotypes that posits that the encounter with the foreign leads to an attempt at classification

based on the familiar, including textual accounts such as travel guides. This means that individuals will have a tendency to see new things as versions of a previously known thing, with existing dominant discourses providing meaning to new things (Eriksson Baaz, 2005). Moreover, stereotyping is a way of controlling what appears to be a threat (Said, 1978), it essentializes the Other to a few simple traits, and fixes difference (Hall, 1997).

Finally, regarding knowledge and power, I rely on the insight of authors such as Foucault and Said, who claimed that knowledge gives power, and that more power requires more knowledge. Knowledge of the subject gives the bearer of knowledge the power to control it, and power uses knowledge to advance itself (Said, 1978). Power is based on knowledge and power reproduces knowledge by shaping it so that it can better serve its intentions. Power is diffused and embodied within discourse (Foucault, 1972).

The Intergroup Contact Hypothesis

Favela tourism proponents' claim that "a visit to the slums may help in dispelling prejudices that tourists have been found to have about such areas" (Basu, 2012) is certainly reminiscent of the Intergroup Contact Hypothesis, a theory credited to Gordon Allport and his 1954 book *The Nature of Prejudice*, which suggests intergroup contact under appropriate conditions can effectively dispel stereotypes held by members of certain groups towards members of other groups. Over sixty years later, the Intergroup Contact Theory is still very current in fields such as psychology, criminology, sociology and other fields of the social sciences, and "the promotion of intergroup contact has arguably become the foremost strategy for reducing prejudice" (Paluck, Green & Green, 2018, p.2), with its efficiency having been proven by hundreds of studies and a series of meta-analysis (Davies, Tropp, Aron, & Pettigrew, 2011; Lemmer & Wagner, 2015; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2008, 2011). Yet, current literature on slum tourism and stereotypes has

not built on this theory, something that the proposed research aims to do as the intergroup contact theory well demonstrates how and why slum tours are not efficient forms of contact that have the power to dispel stereotypes and to reduce prejudice.

Indeed, Allport observed that intergroup contact did not always lead to a reduction of prejudice and warned that superficial contact, such as would be the case of contact during favela tours, could reinforce stereotypes (Allport, 1954, p.264). Consequently, he hypothesized that the conditions necessary for reducing prejudice through intergroup contact should include equal status within the situation, common goals, institutional support, and intergroup cooperation (Allport, 1954, p.281). Since this original formulation, studies have generally supported the importance of Allport's four key conditions for intergroup contact to reduce prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005; Stephan & Stephan, 1996) and researchers have come up with a wide array of additional conditions, friendship perhaps being the most influential one (Pettigrew, 1998).

The last 20 years have seen a shift in interest from conditions to mediators or mediating processes. Of these, three have received greatest attention: increased knowledge, anxiety reduction and enhanced empathy (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). If Allport believed that contact led to greater knowledge about the other and thus to reduced prejudice, Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) showed that increased knowledge and other cognitive changes represents only minor moderators, while the impact of affective changes such as anxiety reduction and enhanced empathy is much stronger.

Contextualisation

To critically examine the claim that favela tourism is a practice that is both economically beneficial to favela communities and is instrumental in dispelling stereotypes tourists might hold regarding favelas and their inhabitants, one must first understand the history of favela tourism and

the current state of the practice, but also the historical context of favela formation, the broader trend of favela consumption, and the global slum tourism phenomenon. This first section attempts to provide an overview of these considerations so as to place the subsequent analysis within its proper context.

A History of the Favela

In the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro, despite a history of precarious urban housing which could arguably date back to the beginning of Portuguese colonization (Queiroz Filho, 2011), the appellation favela is thought to have originated in the late 19th century and early 20th century to define the illegal settlements where, due to a process of urbanization combined to urban and sanitation reforms as well as to a lack of housing in what was then the Brazilian capital, long term Rio residents who were expulsed from the center as well as immigrants from all over the country found themselves living (Queiroz Filho, 2011).

For most of their history and still today, the favelas have been branded and signified as "terrifying and impenetrable" (Amar, 2013, p.166) and as "threatening and uncivilized" (McNally, 2017, p. 436). They have been portrayed as spaces of "poverty, crime and violence" (Williams, 2008, p. 484) where "moral degradation mixes with poor sanitary conditions" (Freire-Medeiros, 2008, p.2) through successive public policies that presented them as unsanitary and marginal spaces and made references to illegality, violence, poverty and risk to justify their (generally unsuccessful) policy of eradication (Dos Santos Moraes, 2017).

Indeed, while the favelas had been largely ignored by city and state government for much of the first half of the 20th century, their existence was recognized by the city's *Código de Obras* (Building Code) in 1937 and favela eradication programmes started as early as 1947 with the setup of a Squatter Settlement Extinction Commission. Full scale eradication campaigns followed in the

1960s and 1970s, and between 1962 and 1974 about 80 favelas were removed and "over 26,000 shacks were destroyed and 139,000 dwellers displaced, often to poorly constructed units 40 or 50 km from the city centre" (O'Hare and Barke, 2003, p.234). This eradication policy did not have an impact on the housing deficit in the city however, as the units built did not meet the needs of its inhabitants (being located too far from their place of work for instance), and were as a result often transferred to a wealthier demographic. Alternatively, poor construction led some of these units to deteriorate quickly into slum conditions (Fiori and Brandão, 2010). Moreover, the number of favelas increased from 162 to 283 between 1970 and 1974 alone (Valladares, 1978), well demonstrating the inefficiency of this policy in addressing the root causes of favela formation.

The government officially abandoned its eradication policy in the late 1970s (in favour of urbanization policies such as the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC) and public security policies such as the Pacifying Police Units (UPP). Many of the favela habitations, especially those in Rocinha, have evolved from poorly built temporary shelters made of wood and metal to more modern and permanent habitations made of masonry and reinforced concrete, leading Cummings (2014) to claim that the favela can no longer "properly be termed a 'squatter settlement' or a 'slum'" (p. 81). Nonetheless, favelas are still largely signified in a negative fashion and favela residents still face exclusion from regular urban infrastructure, poverty, social and racial marginalization, and violence resulting from drug trafficking and police brutality (Penglase, 2014).

Rocinha, the most populous favela of Brazil, was officially classified as a neighbourhood of the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1993 and "is many times referred to as an element of relativization of the current view that takes favela as a space dominated by poverty" (Pandolfi and Grynszpan, 2003) due to the high number of businesses within its boundaries (banks, restaurants, drug stores, beauty salons, etc), the services its residents enjoy (schools, a post office, bus lines), and the

widespread presence of television (Freire-Medeiros, 2013). It is also the first favela to have been visited by tourists and remains one of the most visited. Nonetheless, its inhabitants still face issues in terms of access to the urban infrastructure, poverty, and violence. For instance, Freire-Medeiros (2013) demonstrated that while most houses in Rocinha (99.82%) are served by the public electricity network, the web of cables in the streets causes numerous accidents. Meanwhile, 96.20% of households are linked to the public water network, but many residents often face water shortages. As for sewage and garbage collection, access is not as widespread, reaching only about 60% of households for the former and a dismal 10.15% for the latter, leading to the formation of unsanitary piles of garbage. Moreover, 21.89% of Rocinha's residents live below the poverty line, the community has the highest rate of tuberculosis of the entire state, and all find their daily lives affected by crime and violence (Freire-Medeiros, 2013).

Moreover, favelas are still growing, and attempts at hiding them are still made, especially in the context of large international events such as the 1992 Rio Earth Summit or, more recently, the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympics. Indeed, with a growth of almost 28% between 2001 and 2011, the total population of the favelas in Rio de Janeiro reached 1.4 million people in 2011, or about one quarter of the municipality's inhabitants according to the 2011 census (IBGE, 2011). Besides, in the years leading to the 2014 FIFA World Cup, a wall was built along the highway linking the Galeão airport to the city center, effectively hiding Maré, a grouping of several favelas in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, to the traffic. Later, in the months leading up to the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, the wall was repainted in vivid colours, depicting Rio's hills and beaches as well as its iconic Christ the Redeemer (Cristo Redentor) statue. If authorities present the wall as an acoustic barrier meant to protect those living in Maré from the constant traffic noise, those living within the favela are of the opinion that it was built to deny their

existence and have nicknamed it the Wall of Shame (Muro da Vergonha) (Madureira, Oliveira, Irving & Tavares, 2018).

Slum Tourism

Slum tourism, the broader phenomenon of which favela tourism is one important Brazilian expression, is broadly "understood as an activity in which tourists from the Global North visit impoverished urban centers in the Global South" (Nisbett, 2017, p. 38). There is, however, also the possibility of South-South visits, with tourists from other Latin American countries or even Brazil visiting Brazilian favelas. In its current global North/South expression, slum tourism is a relatively new phenomenon, but its roots can be traced as far back as Victorian England. Indeed, while modern slum tourism appeared in the 1990s in the townships of South Africa and the favelas of Brazil, motivated by international political activists who wanted to see them first hand (Frenzel, 2012), the practice can be traced back to Victorian England, where the wealthy of London were guided by police officers dressed as civilians and by journalists and clergymen to visit the slums of the East End under the guise of welfare and charity. These visits, which were given the name of 'slumming' as early as around 1850 (Steinbrink, 2012) later spread to "ethnic" neighbourhoods in various American cities, before most recently emerging in Brazil and South Africa and then spreading to all of the world's developing regions (Steinbrink, 2012). Today, slum tourism offers range from aerial tours over the sprawling *villas* of Buenos Aires in Argentina, to bus tours to the townships of Zimbabwe, without forgetting walking tours in the slums of Mumbai, on which much of the literature on slum tourism has focussed (Ma, 2010; Meschkank, 2012).

While the first modern slum tours catered to activists during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit in Rio and in the years leading to the end of apartheid in South Africa (Frenzel, 2012), today's slum tours have taken a new magnitude and no longer cater to political activists. Rather, most tourists

taking part in such tours are from the middle and upper classes of countries other than the one in which the slum is located. Moreover, slum tourism is already a "highly professionalized business" (Steinbrink, 2012, p. 214) in Brazil and South Africa, and the trend is one of the fastest growing niche tourism segments globally (Ma, 2010), being facilitated by prominent depiction of slum life in the mass media such as in Danny Boyle's 2008 film *Slumdog Millionaire* (Mumbai) or Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund's *City of God* (2002; Rio de Janeiro).

Rebranding the Favela

Favela tourism is perhaps only the most visible and controversial result of a larger process of so called 'rebranding' of the favela that is taking place both at home in Brazil and abroad. Various authors (Amar, 2013; Freire Medeiros, 2011; Kertzer, 2015; McNally, 2017) have observed this process, their research showing that the West seems to have developed a romanticized and exoticized notion of the favela through cinema, music, and other cultural products. Indeed, commercial films such as the very influential *City of God* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002), preceded by films such as *Orfeu negro* (Marcel Camus, 1959) or those of the Brazilian *Cinema Nôvo* school, whose leader Glauber Rocha believed that "cinema needs to be aggressive in order to truly expose extreme poverty" (Borges, 2011, p. 132), present the favela as a place of violence, crime and poverty, but also as one of sensuous rhythms, vibrant bodies and cultural richness (Freire Medeiros, 2011) and "have been most effective in molding, changing or reinforcing perceptions of favelas in Brazil and abroad" (Kertzer, 2015, p. 51).

In fact, commercial cinema, with films such as *City of God* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002) presenting an "extremely "sexy" and "cool"" (Freire-Medeiros, 2008) depiction of the favela, has paved the way for references to the Brazilian favela being used to market products and other forms of entertainment to a Western audience (Kertzer, 2015). Examples of the favela

being used to market entertainment include the appropriation by DJ Diplo of a form of music born in the favela called *funk carioca* (McNally, 2017) as well as the opening of nightclubs named 'Favela Chic' in London, Paris and Miami (Cummings, 2015), clubs "decorated in an over-the-top style with palm trees and several recycled materials, serv[ing] Brazilian food to the tune of an eclectic musical soundtrack" (Freire-Medeiros, 2008). As for products, favela imagery has been used to promote a wide variety of products, from Citroën and Nissan cars, to Havainas flip flops, Ikea furniture (Leu, 2004) and luxury furniture such as the 'Stray Bullet Chair' of designer Marcela Ripper Gueiros, a plastic like chair riddled by golden eyelet hardware that mimics bullet holes, or the 'Favela Chair' of designer Humberto Campana, a chair made of seemingly randomly glued woodblocks. While Gueiros' page on Behance claims the chairs are meant to "call attention for violence in slums" (Behance, 2012), Campana asserted in an interview on Dezeen that "the Favela Chair is not intended as an overtly political statement" (Hobson, 2017). However, for Kertzer (2015) all of these products only "interpret and appropriate a notion of [the] favela, often producing something hybrid, which tackles reality in a superficial way and does not truly depict it" (p. 53).

The Rise of Favela Tourism

While it is not easy to find documentation allowing to confirm the exact moment at which favela tourism made its debut in Brazil, the literature generally points to the 1992 Earth Summit that took place in Rio de Janeiro and reunited "over 30,000 people, including 100 head of states and 10,000 on-site journalists" (Freire-Medeiros, 2013, p.78). In preparation for this event which they saw as an opportunity to present Rio de Janeiro in its best light, authorities at all levels of government took measures which they argued would guarantee the safety of the visitors. Among those measures were the expulsion of the homeless – including street children – from the city's most prestigious neighbourhood, as well as the parking of Army tanks at the entrance of several

favelas (Freire-Medeiros, 2013). Therefore, in response to what they perceived as an attempt at hiding the favelas:

> Leaders from various indigenous social movements and Greenpeace organized a walking tour through Rocinha for summit delegates, representatives from local and international NGOs as well as 200 journalists. … Meanwhile private tourism agencies began to work at Rocinha in an unplanned manner and on spontaneous demand from international visitors … [who] became curious to see the favela. (Freire-Medeiros, 2013, p.79)

The tours continued after the closing of the summit and this new market expended rapidly in Rocinha between the 1990s and 2000s, at the initiative of large tour companies or small foreign entrepreneurs (Dos Santos Moraes, 2017). The early years of the new millennium however marked a turning point for the practice on many levels, from increased visitor interest which tour operators attribute to the global success of the movie *City of God* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002) (Freire-Medeiros, 2011), to growing governmental approval and the expansion of favela tourism to other favelas beyond Rocinha.

Current Panorama of Favela Tourism

Tour operators and touristic transit

While it remains hard to determine exactly how many tour companies operate in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro due to issues of regulation and lack of monitoring on the part of local authorities, it is generally agreed that Rocinha was the first favela to be visited by tourists and has remained one of the most visited (Dos Santos Moraes, 2017), the market of tourism in Rocinha being then and still now characterized by "an almost exclusive dominance of external agencies but little participation of the local population as well as scarce interaction between locals and tourists" (Frisch, 2012, p.320). When sociologist Bianca Freire-Medeiros studied favela tourism at the turn of the millennium, she observed that seven operators offered tours in Rocinha (with the addition

of an informal circuit tours by cab drivers and private guides), the tours lasting an average of three hours and costing around 35USD (Freire-Medeiros, 2008). They were conducted by various means of transportation such as on foot, in jeeps, corporate vans, or local transports such as motorcycle taxis or public vans (Freire-Medeiros, 2009, 2013) and together brought about 3.5 thousand tourists, mostly foreigners, to Rocinha each month (Dos Santos Moraes, 2017). However, touristic initiatives led by entrepreneurs, NGOs and *moradores* also developed around the same time in other favelas such as Vila Canoas, Pereira da Silva and Tavares Bastos, with lodging; Providência, with an open-air museum; and, Babilônia and Chapéu Mangueira, with ecotourism proposals; each attempting to present themselves as alternatives to the conventional package of agencies operating in Rocinha (Dos Santos Moraes, 2017).

The most recent numbers demonstrate that in 2016 there were still seven tour companies operating in Rocinha in much the same way, but also six in Santa Marta, three in Babilônia and Chapéu Mangueira, two in Complexo do Alemão and one each in Cabritos, Turano, Penha and Vila Kennedy (Dos Santos Moraes, 2017). As for numbers of visitors, there exists no official figure, but many operators have reported that visits have not increased according to expectations, especially during the Olympics of 2016. The Brazilian newspaper O Globo estimated that numbers of visitor fell up to 90% during the 2016 Olympics compared to 2014 FIFA World Cup numbers, a decline that was expressed in similar terms by various tour operators (Grandelle, 2016). For instance, Jeep Tour, a company operating in Rocinha, expected to be able to fill ten jeeps during the Olympics, but only succeeded to fill about three or four vehicles most days ("Notícias negativas", 2016) while the owner of Favela Tours by Marcelo Armstrong, also operating in Rocinha, estimated a reduction of about 40% in the number of tourists taking part in his tours during the Olympics period compared to peak period (Ouchana & Galdo, 2017). These frustrated

expectations were attributed by both tour companies as well as by O Globo to the image of the favelas as a dangerous space that was prevalent in international media before and during the Olympics ("Notícias negativas", 2016; Grandelle, 2016; Ouchana & Galdo, 2017) an image that is perhaps justified in view of the return in 2014 and 2015 of shootings in some pacified favelas, such as Rocinha, Complexo do Alemão, Santa Marta, Babilônia and Chapéu Mangueira, worsening further in 2016 and expanding to other pacified favelas such as Tabajaras and Cabritos (Dos Santos Moraes, 2017).

Tourist profile and expectations

In their research on the profile of tourists taking part in favela tours in the favela of Santa Marta in Rio de Janeiro, Freire-Medeiros, Vilarouca and Menezes (2013) found that the average tourist taking part in favela tours was from the global north, under 32 years old, educated, middle class, and a first-time visitor to Rio de Janeiro.

Indeed, the researchers found that most tourists came from the global North, with almost half of their sample consisting of European tourists (42.2% from Western Europe and 5.9% from Eastern Europe), followed by American travellers (14.2% from Latin America and 11.5% from North America). Moreover, the average age of their sample was of 40 years old, with over half of the respondents being under 32 years old. Their education levels were above average, with over 60% of respondents having earned a graduate degree. Furthermore, 28.4% declared annual incomes in the US$ 30,000 to US$ 60,000 bracket[1], with 28% reporting even higher incomes. Finally, nearly 86% of travellers had never visited Rio de Janeiro before, leading Freire-Medeiros, Vilarouca and Menezes (2013) to comment on the status of the favela as an "important contributor to the image of the city, especially when considering the competition with other attractions such

[1] [1] Based on Freire-Medeiros, Vilarouca and Menezes (2013)' report of a monthly income of between US$ 2,500 and US$ 5,000.

as Christ the Redeemer (Cristo Redentor), Sugar Loaf Mountain (Pão de Açúcar) and the beaches" (p.153).

As for tourists to Rocinha, Freire-Medeiros (2011) found that apart for a predominance of white, European tourists, there did not seem to be a specific visitor profile. Indeed, she claims both men and women, young and old take part in favela tours, citing a tour operator and Rocinha resident stating that "nowadays you don't really have a specific profile. You get from a hostel guy to a big executive from the Copacabana Palace [Hotel]" (Freire-Medeiros, 2011, p.25-26).

Interestingly, despite these two studies demonstrating a predominance of white, European visitors, Dos Santos Moraes (2017) reports that Brazilian tourists and Rio de Janeiro inhabitants from other neighbourhoods have now also started being interested in the favelas and are now more common tour participants.

Government perspective and community involvement

In 2006, nearly fifteen years after the 1992 Earth Summit and its all level government policy of favela concealment and isolation, Rocinha came to be recognized as a tourist attraction by the city of Rio de Janeiro through Law nº 4.405/2006 drafted by Councilwoman Liliam Sá of the PL (Liberal Party) and approved by Mayor César Maia in September 2006. Through this new law, Rocinha was included in the Official Guide and in the Tourist and Cultural Route of the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro. Meanwhile, in 2005, the municipality created the Open-Air Museum of Morro da Providência, a publicly funded open-air museum located in the Providência favela. This museum, essentially a series of pathways within the favela itself, was a project that was implemented from the top-down, without resident participation in the elaboration phase (Freire-Medeiros, 2006). It was later joined by the Favela Museum (MUF) in Pavão, Pavãozinho and Cantagalo in 2008, a project supported by the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC), a major infrastructure program of the Federal government of Brazil (Dos Santos Moraes, 2017). Finally,

2010 saw the launch in Santa Marta of the Rio Top Tour Program, a program for the development of tourism in pacified favelas, following the implementation of the first Pacifying Police Unit (UPP) in the community (Dos Santos Moraes, 2017). The project, resulting from an agreement signed between the Ministry of Tourism and the State Secretariat of Tourism and Leisure, was meant to be implemented in other pacified favelas such as Providência, Pavão, Pavãozinho and Cantagalo, and Babilônia and Chapéu Mangueira, but was in the end only fully implemented in Santa Marta. It included the implantation of tourism incentives such as the elaboration of a map of the favela's "touristic attractions", the construction of the Michael Jackson Space, and the installation of signage directed at tourists (Dos Santos Moraes, 2017).

These instances of public investments in favela tourism, which took place within the frame of the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC) and the Pacification Police Units Policy (UPP), led Freire-Medeiros and Name (2017) to claim that "favela tourism is now a public policy, part of a government plan which invests massively in grand scale projects" (p.6). These public projects, however, took a top down approach that involved little dialogue with the residents and created tensions within the communities involved, later leading to attempts to reclaim the tourist space through local initiatives (Dos Santos Moraes, 2017).

Notwithstanding, the death of a Spanish tourist who was shot by Rio police after the car she was in failed to stop at a roadblock in Rocinha in October 2017 brought favela tourism back into the public debate and shook the foundations of state support. The creation of a committee to establish regulations for tourism activity in favelas was announced by representatives of sixteen municipal and state agencies operating in the tourism and the security sector only days after the incident (Rodrigues, 2017). This was followed by efforts to regulate favela tourism, with the passing by the State of Rio de Janeiro of law 7884/2018, making reference to various communities,

including “favelas with a history of tourist visitation”, that makes it a requirement for agencies to primarily hire guides or drivers living in the favela communities they are operating in, and which “prohibits exploitation that exposes the inhabitants of these territories to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, as provided for in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (ALERJ, 2018).

For its part, bill 513/2017, proposing even stricter measures, such as the obligation to use vehicles featuring the company name and the need for law enforcement authorities to be consulted before each tour (Bergher, 2017), was discussed but was abandoned after receiving strong opposition from guides and agencies.

Community perspective

As for the perception of favela tours by favela residents themselves, the heterogeneity of favelas and favela communities makes it difficult to paint a clear picture. The literature presents both accounts of positive and negative perceptions of the activity.

Indeed, Freire-Medeiros (2010) reports that about 84% of the inhabitants of Rocinha she interviewed regarding their perception of favela tourism viewed it rather positively, even when they themselves saw no significant economic gain from their presence in their community. Most of those interviewed justified this positive attitude in terms of general economic gain for their community, with some also bringing forward the assumption that tourists’ first-hand encounter with the favela may dispel the stereotypes these may hold. However, Freire-Medeiros (2010) also found that most community members (76%) were unaware of the fact that tourists paid for the visit and were scandalized by the amounts disbursed for the tours when these were revealed to them by the researchers.

On the other hand, accounts of community members who vehemently oppose tourism in their favela are also prevalent in the literature (Freire-Medeiros, 2010; Aquino, 2013; Van Rompu,

2019). Their opposition often revolves around what they perceive as a lack of respect for their privacy and for their community on the part of tourists. Tourists peeking inside their homes or taking their picture without asking for permission were amongst some of the grievances, while others complained about agency vans blocking the streets, or were of the opinion that there was nothing for tourists to see anyway.

Finally, there are various accounts (Freire-Medeiros, 2010; Dos Santos Moraes, 2017; Van Rompu, 2019) of community leaders and community members who do not disagree with tourism in theory, but denounce the monopoly of external agencies, the way that their favela is depicted by these outsiders, and the unequal distribution of profits generated by tourism.

Commoditization of poverty and depoliticization

Tour operators and other proponents of favela tourism argue that the practice is beneficial to favela communities in that it provides them with capital, either directly through selling their crafts to visitors, or indirectly through NGOs funded by tour operators to channel their profits into charitable work. Some authors take the economic argument even further, going as far as to say that favela tourism, or slum tourism in general, "can contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger by … encouraging the supply of goods and services to tourist businesses by the poor, direct sales of goods and services to visitors by the poor, and by investing in the infrastructure stimulated by tourism" (O'Brien, 2011, p. 41).

This claim, however, does not seem to hold to scrutiny. While community-based tourism in the favela, such as the Favela Inn Hostel of the Chapéu Mangueira favela in Rio de Janeiro, has been shown to benefit the community economically (Rodrigues da Silva, Corbari, Cioce Sampaio, & Jurema Grimm, 2014), various authors (Frisch, 2012; Freire Medeiros, 2008) have shown that favela tourism, like slum tourism at large, is characterized by "an almost exclusive dominance of

external agencies but little participation of the local population as well as scarce interaction between locals and tourists" (Frisch, 2012, p.320). Moreover, while some tour operators reinvest some of their profit into the community, such as 'Exotic Tours', which trains locals as tour guides (Williams, 2008, p. 486), or 'Favela Tour by Marcelo Armstrong', which reinvests some of its profit into community schools in Rocinha (Favela Tour, n.d), this is not a trend that extends to all operators. Moreover, independently of whether or not these investments benefit the community, one could argue that they constitute a sales tactic, since those operators helping fund NGOs in the community make sure to highlight their contribution and to include the physical space (nursery, school, etc) in their circuit, using this contribution as an argument to justify the tourists' presence in the favela. Certainly, tourists seem to respond well to this argument, and themselves reuse it to justify their visit. Many tourists thus mention these "charitable endeavours" in their TripAdvisor reviews, in statements that are best expressed by travel blogger Britney[2], who wrote that "a percentage of proceeds from the tours go towards maintaining a kids' nursery school inside the favela. I hoped this would actually help the people here in the right way…". As for the argument of direct economic benefits accrued from sales from within the favela to the tourists, the evidence shows that tourists generally spend very little money during their visit (Carter, 2005) and that the capital generated by favela tourism "is only marginally re-invested in the favela, and always by way of charity" (Freire-Medeiros, 2008, p.15). Indeed, Freire-Medeiros, Vilarouca and Menezes (2013) found that only

> 36.6 % of the visitors [to the Santa Marta favela] made some kind of purchase during the tour to the favela at all. In all cases the amount spent was very low: 61.4 % spent only 5 R$ (i.e. about 2.50 US$) and only 7.1 % spent over 20 R$ (10 US$). Less than

[2] Pseudonym

> 10 % bought some kind of keepsake or artisan product, i.e. some kind of item produced directly by the community (p. 154).

Likewise, in their TripAdvisor reviews, a few tourists mentioned not having brought with them enough money to purchase such items in the first place, due to their perception of the favelas as potentially unsafe. In this light, the argument of the supposed potential of favela tourism to bring economic development to the favela appears rather weak and acquires the tone of self-justification. Nonetheless, ultimately, "as the continued growth of slums is stimulated and maintained by global factors, even if slum tourism was effective in terms of development, it would be at such a low level that it would have little impact against the march of neoliberalism" (Nisbett, 2017, p. 39). Indeed, favela and slum tourism do not address the root cause of slum formation, and the little money that is reinvested in the communities visited through minor purchases and charity initiatives is not sufficient to make a strong impact on their socioeconomic situation.

Having demonstrated that the economic argument in favour of favela tourism does not hold to scrutiny, I contend that rather than consisting of an economic activity that is beneficial to favela communities, favela tourism constitutes an ethically questionable commoditization of poverty.

Commoditization and Authenticity

First, the simple fact that favela tours constitute an experience that is priced, bought, and sold transforms it into a commodity. Indeed, favela tours do not come without a price tag: if Freire-Medeiros (2009) estimated that price to be about US$35 for a three-hour favela tour during her research in the first decade of the 2000s, Aquino (2013) noticed prices closer to US$65 to US$85 for a half-day tour when she conducted her study in Rocinha in the early 2010s. Commoditization, understood as "a process by which things (and activities) come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value, in a context of trade, thereby becoming goods (and services); developed

exchange systems in which the exchange value of things (and activities) is stated in terms of prices form a market" (Cohen, 1988, p.380), holds an important place in academic debates in tourism (Cole, 2007), and various academics (Greenwood, 1977; Appadurai, 1986; Cohen, 1988) have argued in one way or the other that tourism typically leads to commoditization of such things as landscapes or culture. Favela tourism is no exception, with tours capitalizing on the gorgeous views of Rio de Janeiro that can be observed from the touristic favelas (it is no wonder that favela tourism is concentrated in the favelas of Rio's Zona Sul, from which the tourist can enjoy breathtaking views of the ocean, while there is almost no tourism in the favelas of the Zona Norte or of Baixada Fluminense (de Oliveira Rezende, 2014)) and favela culture (samba, cachaça, capoeira, even the thrill of the danger associated with the drug trade). If the commoditization of landscape and culture is often problematized for a variety of reasons such as loss of authenticity (such as changes to traditions to accommodate tourists' expectations or schedule) and loss of value for local communities (Greenwood, 1977), commoditization in the context of low-income communities is especially problematic. Indeed, various authors (Cole, 2007; Mostafanezhad, 2013) have noted that in these contexts, tourists tend to find the line between poverty and culture rather blurry, reinterpreting issues such as poverty and inequalities as nothing more than cultural diversity.

Moreover, tourism and commoditization in the context of low-income communities bring about confuse notions of authenticity, where the presence of what is associated with the "modern" or the familiar in this space of the "Other" becomes associated by the tourist with a lack of authenticity (Cohen, 1988; Cole, 2007). This certainly seems to be the case in the favela context, as exemplified by this extract of an interview of a tour operator conducted by Freire-Medeiros (2008):

> In Rocinha you see the poor side as well as the more developed one. So it's kind of disappointing for tourists when you only stick to the commercial area. They keep thinking that Rocinha isn't poor enough, that it's not as poor as those miserable cities in Africa. (p.13)

Similar discourses are held by tourists, with some feeling that they were taken "to the nicer part of the favelas and didn't really get to see how people lived" (TripAdvisor user Expedition594878, 28 August 2019) or that they "didn't really delve into everyday life or get to speak to locals and … only touched on the periphery, … [with] the tour fe[eling] a little 'staged'" (TripAdvisor user Sangychamo, Leeds, United Kingdom, 6 April 2018). Moreover, some commented on the presence of what they perceive as luxury commodities in the favela, such as a tourist remarking "it was crazy to see some of the poorest people on earth living in the slums with flat screen tvs and everything you would find in a typical home in [A]merica" (TripAdvisor user Ashley D, Macomb, Michigan, 29 August 2018).

Commoditization and aestheticization through language

Second, the language used by tourists to talk about the favela following favela tours demonstrates an understanding of the favela as a commodity, as well as an aestheticization of the favela. Indeed, reviews of such tours on TripAdvisor and travel blogs show that tourists discuss whether the experiences and memories they got from the tour provided good value for their money, compare the favela to more "traditional" tourist attractions, and discuss the experience in terms of entertainment, while putting a strong emphasis on the contrast between the favela and the landscape they can contemplate from its rooftops.

Indeed, commodifying statements such as "This trip [to Rocinha] was such *great value* [emphasis added] [at] approx. £30" (TripAdvisor user Jenny C., United Kingdom, 19 August

2017), “We needed to fill in half a day before flying home on the same afternoon … the history gain[e]d and the experience given was well *worth it* [emphasis added]” (TripAdvisor user Richard P, United Kingdom, 14 October 2017), “Even though the weather wasn’t the best we still found the tour to be of *great value* [emphasis added] as the guide made us feel safe while also explaining the complexities of the community” (TripAdvisor user CherylP631, Adelaide, Australia, 27 September 2019), “Just like [C]hrist the [R]edeemer I think if you go to [R]io you have to go to [a] favela” (TripAdvisor user JCasNYC, United States, 29 September 2017) or even “Our tour was a bit slow and boring and when I compared tours that my friends did their seemed like a lot more fun” (Didem P, United Kingdom, 11 January 2017) came up often in reviews of favela tours. With these statements, the favela becomes an experience to squeeze in before flying home, a form of entertainment that can be “boring” or “fun”, a sight that is on par with “traditional” touristic landmarks. Thus, in tourist’s discourses favela tours are put on the same level of consumption as other touristic activities such as famous landmarks or museums.

Moreover, the aestheticization of the favela, and the commoditization of its landscape is apparent in the number of tourists that left reviews echoing in one way or the other the words of travel blogger Debbie[3] regarding her experience of a favela tour:

> But what was possibly most striking was the jaw-dropping view of this favela, built on a steep hillside overlooking Rio. We were able to see the favela in its full glory on a terrace of a house, looking at all the colorful houses being built on top of each other, stretching out towards the beach”.

Indeed, at the time of writing, of the 360 English language reviews that were left on TripAdvisor regarding favela tours, 41 mentioned the views, with many claiming these were a highlight of their

[3] Pseudonym

experience. Likewise, Freire-Medeiros, Vilarouca and Menezes' (2013) review of what tourists perceived as the greatest attractions of the Santa Marta favela found these to be the local architecture (56% of respondents) and the view of the city that can be seen from Santa Marta (41%).

This aesthetization of the favela and of its contrast with Rio de Janeiro's landscape explains why the Cidade de Deus (City of God) favela, despite its eponymous film being responsible for a marked increase in tourists' interest for favela, has itself been largely ignored by tourists. Indeed, the real Cidade de Deus is flat, far from other touristic destinations and, in the words of a tour guide in Rocinha "just plain ugly… [and not] aIlow[ing] for the contrast of the have and have-nots that is so striking for the gringo" (Freire-Medeiros, 2011, p.22).

Reinterpreting poverty and violence

Third, favela tourism constitutes a commoditization of poverty in that tour operators and guides create a narrative around life in the favelas that re-interprets poverty into something that is more easily sold (Frenzel & Koens, 2012). Indeed, tour operators and guides are the mediators of tourists' contact with the favela and they play a major part in influencing tourists' understanding of the space. They thus can "play a key role in aestheticizing and performing poverty and violence and converting disadvantaged spaces into a tourist product" (Dürr, Jaffe & Jones, 2019).

Accordingly, Rio's favela tours construct the favela as a space of community, solidarity and vibrant culture (Frenzel & Koens, 2012), presenting a "multidimensional and apparently more 'authentic' favela to contest the mediatized stereotype" (Dürr, Jaffe & Jones, 2019, p.3). The perception of danger and violence becomes part of the "thrill" of the tour and tour operators work to transform "insecurity and unfamiliarity into adventure and pleasure" (Dürr & Jaffe, 2012, p. 114), presenting themselves as the "mediators of a positive form of contact that will benefit the

favela socially and economically" (Freire-Medeiros, 2011, p. 28) while ensuring the safety of tour goers. Interestingly, this safety is not attributed by tour guides to measures taken by tourist agencies or to policy presence, but to the drug traffickers (Freire-Medeiros, 2011). Indeed, in many tours, tourists are told that safety in the favela is actually guaranteed by drug traffickers and are advised not to go back to the favela by themselves, as expressed by travel blogger Debbie[4] who wrote that "Marcelo also stressed that the favelas we would be visiting would be extremely safe, as they had not only been rid of the drug lords years ago by the police, but an agreement had been reached with residents not to harm tourists – and if anything did happen, there'd be serious consequences", or in the words of a TripAdvisor user that "the gangs took care of 'policing', but not to worry, if someone actually stole a purse from our group they would be hunted down quickly and shot (killed) and the purse returned" (TripAdvisor user jandl6915VY, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 23 May 2018). Tourists also receive instructions that are presented as safety guidelines, such as not responding if teased by locals, not handing out money to eventual beggars, and not blocking the narrow lanes (Freire-Medeiros, 2008), rules that ultimately frame tourists' interaction with residents and renew the emphasis on violence and danger.

Moreover, the thrill of violence and danger associated with the favelas is apparent in the discourses of tourists, with some seemingly expecting danger, and others writing five-star reviews mentioning scenes of violence or perceived danger not as things that made them doubt their security, but as things that seemed to contribute to their overall positive experience. For instance, travel blogger Melissa[5] posits that favelas are "dangerous" and that favela tours are "exhilarating" on one hand, and claims she felt safe and enjoyed the sense of community in the other:

[4] Pseudonym
[5] Pseudonym

> A place where even native Brazilians are scared to enter… The favelas have a reputation for being crime ridden and acutely dangerous, with many places flagged as no-go areas: infamous as the hangouts for criminals and the location of drug deals. And I hate to say it, but I was gripping on pretty tightly to my bag strap as we walked… It was fascinating and exhilarating – but I never once felt like I was in any real danger… While there's no doubt it's a dangerous place, Rocinha and the favelas of Rio certainly have their merits. Despite the clear evidence of drug traffickers and violence, that's not the only thing the favelas should be known for – because they're filled with communities that truly care for one another.

Ultimately, this focus on community and culture combined with the reworking of violence and danger as something that is exciting rather than threatening leads to tourists failing to see that poverty and violence in the favelas "is not only the result of the arbitrariness of the narco-traffickers or the egotism of the … elites … but is equally an outcome of unjust economic arrangements of which the tourists themselves are an intrinsic part" (Freire-Medeiros, 2011, p. 29).

In conclusion, favela tourism undoubtedly represents a commoditization of poverty. In the words of Iqani (2016), slum tourism means that "the daily struggles to maintain humanity and dignity in contexts deprived of basic services and resources taken for granted in middle and upper-income neighbourhoods, and the bare truth of deprivation are wrapped up into a shiny package tour for wealthy, privileged people to consume" (p. 83).

Stereotypes, prejudice, and identity

In addition to the claim that favela tourism benefits favela communities economically, which has been dismissed in the previous section, the other main argument in favour of favela tourism is that tours can contribute to dispel the prejudices tourists may hold regarding the favelas. Thus,

many tour operators claim that their tours to the favelas are educational and allow tourists to acquire a better understanding of the challenges surrounding life in the favela and to move past stereotypes which portray the favela as a place of poverty and violence (Freire Medeiros, 2011). Accordingly, 'Gray Line' invites tourists to "[m]eet the locals and gain insight into the challenges these communities face" (Gray Line, n.d) while 'Favela Tour by Marcelo Armstrong' claims that their "tour changes [the] reputation of areas related only to violence and poverty" (Favela Tour, n.d).

However, the literature indicates that stereotypes are rather reinforced through favela tours. Furthermore, as a result of favela tours, tourists construct various identities for the favela residents and for themselves, identities that are constructed along colonial lines: the Noble Savage/Happy Slum Dweller Other, and the White Saviour/Humanitarian Self.

This section seeks not only to demonstrate that stereotypes are reinforced through favela tours, but also to understand why this is so, and how it is problematic. To do so, I will use insight from both critical theory and the contact theory.

Reinforced stereotypes

Both Freire Medeiros (2011) and Dyson (2012) who have researched the issue of favela tourism and slum tourism respectively, have demonstrated that the practice does not contribute to a reduction of the prejudices tourists may hold towards favela communities. Indeed, Freire Medeiros (2011) found that despite first hand encounters with the favela through favela tours, tourists' understanding of the favela only reproduced and reinforced the positive stereotypes presented by the film *City of God* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002): the favela as a space of sensuous rhythms, vibrant bodies and cultural richness, while displacing negative stereotypes such as poverty, violence and drug traffic as subtext. Indeed, Freire-Medeiros, Vilarouca and

Menezes (2013) found that tourists most often referred to poverty, mess/disorder and filth when discussing their expectations of Rio de Janeiro's Santa Marta favela prior to their visit. If references to poverty remained most common following these tourists' visit of Santa Marta, references to mess/disorder and filth became much less prevalent and were supplanted by references to development, solidarity and happiness.

These "new stereotypes", stemming from tour companies' efforts to focus on community and culture, reproduce the colonial imagery of the "noble savage" untouched by the corruption of civilization. Indeed, favela tourism creates an image of favela inhabitants that presents them as the happy holders of a spiritual wealth that is lacking in the West, or what I would call the "happy slum dweller" imagery. In their discourse on their visit to the informal settlements of South Africa, Brazil and India, Iqani (2016) found that many tourists highlight how slum dwellers seem happy in spite of poverty, violence and insecurity, and how they have a spiritual wealth that is lacking in the West despite material poverty, how they, the tourist, felt educated and humbled by these people who have nothing. This discourse is omnipresent in tour operators' narrative as exemplified by 'Gray Line's invitation to "[l]earn how even through such difficulties the people of the favela are able to smile and welcome visitors". It is also present in tourists' accounts of their visit to the favela, such as blogger Janet[6]'s description of her visit to Santa Marta, which she depicts as a place that is "colourful and vibrant and [where] the sense of community is incredible, [where] kids played happily on the street, the soccer skills were phenomenal and upbeat music was being played around every corner".

While this discourse might seem a good thing as it sheds a different, more positive, light on favela inhabitants, it is problematic in that it represents a generalization that does not necessarily

[6] Pseudonym

come from how favela inhabitants see themselves, but rather from how tour guides portray them and how visitors perceive them without having significant interaction with them. Indeed, in his study of slum tours in Mumbai, Ma (2010) found that tourists, especially American tourists, "expressed little desire to interact with slum residents, which would have allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of slum culture, and hence a more authentic experience of slum life" (p. 35). If the same has not been showed in the case of tours to the Brazilian favelas, it is reasonable to contend that factors such as the language barrier and the fast pace of these short tours would limit the level of interaction that is possible between tourists and favela residents.

Moreover, in addition to being highly patronizing and paternalistic, this discourse "serves to minimize the violence of poverty" (Iqani, 2016, p. 74) just as the noble savage imagery served to minimize the violence of colonization. In other words, because poverty is reinterpreted in a way that makes it easier to sell, it is displaced as subtext, fostering the creation of a noble savage/happy slum dweller imagery. Thus, by shifting the focus away from poverty and its structural causes, favela and slum tours depoliticize and even naturalize poverty. When poverty becomes natural to visitors, so does privilege. People forget that the economic and political predicaments of the people living in informal settlements are not natural but are rather constructed by an inherently exploitative system. The status quo is thus strengthened because when poverty is displaced as subtext and "when suffering is erased from the picture of poverty, there is no need to change the system" (Iqani, 2016, p. 75). In sum, visits to the favelas do not really change people's perception of favela residents because tourists are comforted in their image of the noble savage, the happy slum dweller. This does not push them to action and allows them to forget "the fact that the tourists in a number of ways help to perpetuate the economic system that reproduces … inequality" (Holst, 2015, p. 286).

This stereotyping, both old and new, negative and "positive", can be explained by both critical theory and the intergroup contact theory.

First, the reinforcement of previously held stereotypes is unsurprising as the encounter with the foreign generally leads to an attempt at classification based on the familiar, including textual accounts such as travel guides. Indeed, new things are reinterpreted and understood as versions of a previously known thing, with existing dominant discourses providing meaning to new things (Eriksson Baaz, 2005). Poverty, danger and violence are part of this dominant discourse on the favela, and when visiting the favela or other informal settlements across the globe, poverty is what tourists expect (Meschkank, 2012; Steinbrink, 2012). Indeed, Freire-Medeiros, Vilarouca and Menezes (2013) found that poverty ranked first in terms of tourists' expectations of the Santa Marta favela, followed by mess/disorder and filth. Because poverty is also what tour guides are actively attempting to reinterpret, the reality that tourists ultimately experience during their visit is constrained by poverty and influenced by various discourses on the subject. In other words, the "ability to transform the negative image of slums is restricted by the very techniques [tours] use to position the slum as the archetype of 'reality'" (Franzel & Koens, 2012, p. 207).

Second, favela tours represent a superficial form of contact between tourists and the inhabitants of favelas, something Allport (1954) warned could do more harm than good. Indeed, contact with community members, many of which would know very limited English, can only be extremely limited over the course of a three or four-hour long tour, certainly not enough time to lead to the friendship authors such as Pettigrew (1998) present as important factors to the success of the contact theory. Moreover, Allport's four conditions for reducing prejudice through intergroup contact: equal status within the situation, common goals, institutional support, and intergroup cooperation (Allport, 1954, p.281), are not all present. Certainly, the status of tourists

as paying customers visiting what is being presented and understood by tourists and tour operators as a touristic landmark on par with Christ the Redeemeer (Cristo Redentor) means that tourists and favela dwellers do not have equal status within the situation. Likewise, there are no common goals shared by both groups, and tours are not conducive to situations of intergroup cooperation such as in mixed team sports games or other such situations promoted by contact theory. Arguably, the only condition that is met is that of institutional support, given Rio's government endorsement of tourism in the favelas. Similarly, while favela tourism proponent see reduced prejudice as a result of increased knowledge of favela communities, as exemplified by Favela Walking Tour's claim that the purpose of their tour is "to educate you about life in a Favela … see how residents live and learn about the difficulties" (Favela Walking Tour, n.d.), Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) have demonstrated that increased knowledge of the other group, as well as other cognitive changes have only minor impacts on the reduction of prejudice and stereotypes.

Finally, contact theory researchers Hewstone and Brown (1986) also warn against what they call the self-fulfilling prophecy: "stereotypes generate expectancies, and perceivers seem to want to see expectancies confirmed… disconfirming evidence tends to be ignored, but confirming evidence remembered" (p. 30) a prophecy that is echoed in much of the literature on slum tourism (Iqani, 2016; Nisbett, 2017). Moreover, the lack of generalization of more positive perceptions of slum inhabitants such as those reported by Dyson (2012) in Dharavi, where tourists leave tours having more positive perceptions of the community they visited but not of other slums is explained by contact theory by the fact that intergroup interactions are key components of generalization of more positive feelings towards an entire outgroup, as opposed to positive feelings only towards group members one has interacted with and may see as "exceptions to the rule". In other words, the way that slums tours reinterpret the informal settlement in which they take place means tourist

may perceive it as atypical, as an exception to the rule, leading to a change in their perception of that space but not to others who share similar characteristics.

Thus ultimately, contact alone is not enough. Pervasive inequalities between groups is at the heart of prejudice and stereotypes and "more radical social changes are a prerequisite" (Hewstone & Brown, 1986, p.42) to meaningful contact and broader reduction of prejudice.

Second, new stereotypes are perhaps not all that new, as they reproduce the long-standing stereotype of the noble savage that has been fostered by colonization. Moreover, if we consider that stereotyping is a way of controlling what appears to be a threat (Said, 1978), it makes sense that attributing happiness to favela dwellers would be used as a defense mechanism, a way for tourists not to feel threatened by the inequalities they witness in the favela, and to naturalize and maintain their privilege. Moreover, because human identities are constructed in opposition, through the establishment of an opposite, an Other (Said, 1978), this construction of the happy slum dweller allows tourists to also create a new, rather preoccupying, image of the "Self" during favela tours, that of the "Humanitarian Self".

Indeed, because there is always a relation of power between the poles of a binary opposition (Hall, 1997), tourists' representation of favela dwellers through their discourse of happiness and spiritual wealth allows them to create, through a discourse of feeling humbled, a temporary version of the Self as virtuous, conscious, humanitarian and ethical. Thus, Ekdale & Tuwei (2016) who looked at slum tours in Kibera, an informal settlement of Nairobi in Kenya, found that in their reviews of slum tours and in other discourses on their experience, "tourists construct a humanitarian Self through their firsthand engagement with suffering in the Global South" (Ekdale & Tuwei, 2016, p. 50). This seems true of tourists embarking in favela tours as well, with tourists rejecting narratives on poverty in favour of experiential knowledge, claiming that visiting the

favela is necessary for understanding poverty and for getting to know the "real Rio", and justifying their visit in terms of its economic impact. From there, it is easy for the favela tour to be constructed as a humanitarian act (Freire Medeiros, 2011) where privilege is something to be leveraged by "bringing resources" through paying for the tour and buying crafts or by "raising awareness" through recommending the tour and is not seen as what it is: an injustice that should be interrogated.

Interestingly, the online discourse analysed for this research also demonstrates that some of the tourists taking part in favela tours question the ethics of the practice while still ultimately choosing to partake in it, something that is only alluded to in the favela tourism literature. Indeed, although authors such as Van Rompu (2019) mention such questioning, claiming that some of the tourists she interacted with on a favela tour "had mixed feelings about visiting a favela" (p.80) and "were uncertain about whether barging into a poor community was exploitative" (p.80), this demonstration of a more complex ethical reflection on the part of tourists to the favelas of Rio de Janeiro has not been systematically studied in the favela tourism literature. However, TripAdvisor reviews and travel blog post clearly imply the existence of a tourist dilemma, with tourists questioning whether or not they should take part in a favela tour and feeling better about their participation once they choose a tour they perceive as more beneficial to the community, even if that is not necessarily the case. Indeed, in her travel blog, Allison[7] recounts that "after much research and reflection, [herself and her travel companion] decided [they] were going to visit a favela in Rio de Janeiro — and that the most respectful way to do so would be to take a walking tour with a small, locally owned company". Ironically, that same article shows a photo of one of them taking pictures trough a door's bullseye, and includes a picture of someone in their home.

[7] Pseudonym

Travel blogger Britney[8] also put this dilemma into words well, claiming that she chose a specific company because "they claim to help travellers discover the sites of Rio through the eyes of local people, and a percentage of proceeds from the tours go towards maintaining a kids' nursery school inside the favela". Yet, she "did feel uncomfortable at times, as if [she] was invading people's privacy". However, she rationalized this discomfort by claiming that the tourists' "contributions helped the people [they] visited, and it seems the nursery genuinely does benefit the residents and their families, so perhaps the intrusion is justified in that way". This justification based on charitable contribution to the community came back often in tourist's discourse, and so did the "learning experience" argument. Indeed, TripAdvisor user yota7 explains that they "could not [themselves] decide whether to [take part in a favela tour] or not" but were glad they did, claiming the tour they did was "not like looking at the people or pitying them or as some might say like in a zoo… It was more a learning experience" (August 19, 2019).

This question of experiential knowledge and of favela tours as learning experience were often mentioned. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, increased knowledge has been shown by Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) to have only minor impacts on the reduction of prejudice and stereotypes. Knowledge, however, is powerful, and knowledge interacts with the power relations, both explicit and implicit, that are inherent to favela tourism. Indeed, knowledge, like stereotyping, gives the bearer of knowledge the power to control the object of knowledge, to deny its agency and its singularity, to fix it (Said, 1978). Foucault (1972) claims that power reproduces knowledge by shaping it so that it can better serve its intentions, and that power is diffused and embodied within discourse. Therefore, the experiential knowledge tourists gain through their tour in a favela will only strengthen power relations, for instance through the focus on happiness and community

[8] Pseudonym

discussed earlier, a focus that allows poverty to be naturalized and depoliticized. Moreover, the emphasis on knowledge means that the experience becomes about them, the tourists, while the favelas are moved to the periphery, serving the enlightenment of the visitor (Iqani, 2016). Thus, for most tourists, gaining experiential knowledge is an end, not a means, because the knowledge is not used to challenge the system. Ultimately, "in the same way that slum tourism is often promoted and presented as the solution to poverty", constructions of the "Self" and of the "Other" informed by slum tourism follow "a post-colonial logic in which the visitor is not part of the problem, but brings and manifests the solution" (Frenzel, 2012, n.d.).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that favela tourism is failing to be what its proponents would like it to be. Indeed, the fact that favela tours are rarely run by the community means that the activity often does not benefit favela residents in a meaningful way. Moreover, considering that favelas are the result of an inherently exploitative system, economic capital entering the favela through tourism can only make a marginal difference in the community as a whole. Instead, favela tourism represents a commoditization of poverty, with tour operators and guides reinterpreting poverty in a way that makes it easier to sell, while tourists consume the favelas as they would any other touristic landmark or attraction.

Meanwhile, the claim that favela tours represent a learning experience that can help dispel prejudice against favela residents is more complex than it appears. While the experience does seem to lead to a certain shift in the perception tourists have of the favelas and of their inhabitants, this shift is both superficial and problematic in that it strengthens the status quo regarding the issues faced by these communities such as exclusion from regular urban infrastructure, poverty, social

and racial marginalization, and violence. Indeed, following guided tours to the favelas, tourists' negative stereotypes are displaced as subtext while positive stereotypes are reinforced. Moreover, tours reinterpret the favela in a way that downplays poverty and highlights culture while making tourists feel good about themselves. Thus, following their participation in favela tours, tourists are left with the impression that favela residents are happy and not so poor, and they thus do not see the need to challenge the structural issues behind their predicament.

However, it seems unlikely that this trend will disappear despite ongoing controversy in the media as well as this research's negative findings. Some (Dos Santos Moraes, 2017; Van Rompu, 2019) have argued that community-based tourism could be the answer to a more positive impact of favela tourism on favela communities, and in this regard, the past few years have seen some improvement, with more and more favela communities taking ownership of the tourism offer within their neighbourhood. However, while this is an appealing prospect, and certainly an improvement from a dominance of external actors, the findings of this study lead me to doubt that the impact, especially in terms of stereotypes, would be much different.

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