

## **Favela as a Brazilian Heritage Site**

### **The complexities and shifting realities from an ethnographic perspective**

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**Research Project: Shifting Perspectives and Realities**

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**Favela as a Brazilian Heritage Site, the complexities and shifting realities from an ethnographic perspective.**

*Favelas are a world heritage site since 2012. This particular fact triggers a binary opposition in informal settlements study: from the materialist perspective to the idealist one. That includes neoliberal effects, such as commodification, and a romantic depiction of the favela. An ethnographic study scrutinizes Brazilian society and embeds narratives against the contradiction of informal settlements theory. Interviews with favela inhabitants, policy makers, actors, and planners show how different society actors of society comprise favelas in Brazil. The aim is to study the controversial implications of a heritage legacy in the context of favela everyday life.*

**Key Words: Favelas, Heritage, materialism, idealism**

**Introduction**

The favelas are indisputable in Brazil; their permanence in the city is incontestable. They have emerged as a dwelling alternative for the unprivileged workers after the slave abolition period; they recall that the working rights and dwelling rights are intertwined. *Carnival, football, Baile Funk, and Helio Oiticica's Parangoles* are some of the numerous Brazilian arts that emerge from the favelas. For several reasons, the cultural expression of favelas is counting against their association with crime, violence, extreme inequality and poverty.

When favelas were acknowledged as a World Heritage site, back in 2012, several questions were raised in the Brazilian society. Questions such as: Would that engender an ideological shift in the society? Could that be related to a social transformation?

There are several contradictory implications of considering favela as a heritage site. First, the inhabitants of the favela often do not know that they live in a heritage site. Second, that the institutional strategies for both the preservation of such a heritage site are still a question mark.

In fact, what is in between the favela that is consumed and the favela that is real, must disassemble a social system within the contradictions of capitalism. On the one hand, tourism is taking place in the favelas at this time and moment. They are driven by private sector. Department stores and supermarket chains have been investing in the favelas. Favelas located in cosmopolitan cities are being shown as 'mottos' of change, whereas many other are lacking basic infrastructures, basic hygienic conditions, and access to services.

It seems that the concept of heritage has not contributed to mitigating a changing the perspective. It also seems that it has also not addressed the fact that favelas inhabitants are facing removals and are sheltered in tedious mass housing projects that lack sensitivity towards the favela existing context. There is also, no documentation about the acknowledgment of favela as an edible heritage, which has been built by many unprivileged workers. They address the right to the city.

Such heritage shows the contradictory aspects of capital and heritage. It seems that the intellectual discussion of the favela as a heritage site is consumed in different forms, by different agents of the society. There is an emergence of a concept of heritage which is

idealized for a few privileged and, that is concrete for many. That also seems not having brought a seminal discussion for favelas because, it needs to overcome an ideological process, and also to reflect the economic process that tackles the favelas. The study will thus illustrate how different actors of society assimilate heritage in relation to favelas.

## 1. Favela: Materialism and Idealism and the literature of informal settlements

A cacophonous narrative may describe the favela apart from the narrow line that separates a romantic narrative from a materialist narrative. In a nutshell, such binary way of understanding the favela also includes other forms of binary subdivisions. This study focuses in three of them, which were coined by the present author for discussing heritage and the favelas in Brazil. First, the *'materialist'* and the *'idealist'* perspective. Second, the *'gringos'* and the *'brasileiros'*. Lastly, the *'cosmopolitan favela'* and the *'specific favelas'*.

First, a recent study of this author on the literature informal settlements has revealed that there is an increasing tendency of references used at architecture theory to either to idealize or to look at the economic data about informal settlements (inequality and informality). Some authors are seemingly thriving an aestheticization of poverty or a museumification of poverty through their analysis (Dan Hancox apud the Architectural Review, 2014), whereas the materialist sources seem to explain some patterns of the unprivileged who live in informal settlements (Banerjee, Abhijit V., and Esther Duflo; 2012, Sen apud Hubbard, Phil, Rob Kitchin, and Gill Valentine, 2012). The article inquires is there is a manner to study about what is *'in between'* such binary conceptions.

Second, the subdivision of binary categories also includes that fact that many scholars and intellectuals tend to view favelas as *'gringos'* (western tradition, such as: Brillembourg, 2012; Angelil & Hehl 2012; Freireiss & Bouman 2011; Robert Neuwirth, 2005; Justin McGuirk, 2014) or as *'brasucas'* (global south: Freire Medeiros, 2006; Caldeira, 2000; Raquel Rolnick, 1985; Paola Jacques Berenstein, 2007; Erminia Maricato, 2007). Similarly, the *'gringo'* perspective is related to an ideal of cosmopolitanism in the favelas, trying to avoid a neo-colonial perspective of favelas. Whereas the *'brasileiros'*, focus mostly on the social patterns and struggles in the society, and on both the outcomes and the segmentation between rich and poor in Brazil

Finally, *'comopolitan cities'* and cities that are undertaking those processes see may understand favelas in a different manner (e.g. London School of Economic studies in Mumbai, Sao Paulo, Mexico City). Almost certainly, the favelas that are located in cosmopolitan spaces are much more exposed to the western world (Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Brasilia, Bahia, Curitiba). The knowledge about favelas that are located in other cities remains obfuscated. Those favelas are also important sources.

## 2. The favela that heritage consumes:

The favela that heritage consumes is *Cosmopolitan, gringa, and idealized*. Most of them are located in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Some favelas such as *Paraisópolis, Cidade de Deus, Santa Marta, Rocinha, Vidigal, Mangueira* and *Pavão Pavãozinho* are usually chosen to host innovative projects, such as the *"bondinho"*, the *"ferry cable"*, the *"elevator for communities"*, *"museums of the favela"*, *"scholls"*, *"star architects interventions"*, *"scenarium for music video clips"*, *"scenarium for telenovelas/Brazilian Soap Operas"*, *"tourism in the favela"*. (Carpes 2012;

The *favelas' slabs* have also been speculated as heritage sites by law projects from the Chamber of Deputies of Rio. That refers to the fact that most of the inhabitants of the favela make celebrations on the top of it. Such celebrations are not only frequented by the inhabitants of the favela but also, by people from all around Rio de Janeiro. For example, spending one night in the *'Favela Reveillon'* on the top of slabs costs from R\$ 150 up to R\$

250 (Bom dia Rio apud O globo, 2011, Freire, 2009). That corresponds up to 1/3 of a minimum salary in Brazil and that can be paid through installments.

The favela that heritage consumes is also gentrifying (Greta 2014, di Carvalho 2015, Gomes, 2015). Tourism is also increasing. Trip advisor, a tourist app, quotes 5 stars to Favela Santa Marta tour, and several guests recommend to visit the favela when in Rio de Janeiro.

Today, there is much more attention to the favelas. A Brazilian video clip of the MPB singer Vanessa da Mata and many other hipster music groups such as Pearls Negras, picture a favela in a inviting manner (VanessadaMataVEVO, 2015; Bolabo Records, 2014). The same occurs in the Telenovela/soap opera about the Favela entitled '*I love Paraisopolis*', from Rede Globo, the main mass media channel (Globo, 2015). They contrast with the apologies of crime, claimed by funk and rap music clips that are also related with favela culture and expose the conflicts between police and drug dealers. Also, an emerging character of favelas, 'the Gringo': Such as the '*Funk do Gringo*'. (MC Gringo Brasil, 2014).

The heritage of consumption also includes the fact that big chains of Supermarket, departments stores, and commercial activities are attracted to invest in the favelas. Most of these economic activities, however, are driven by communities which are located outside the favelas, and represent interest other than those of inhabitants and communities, and brings gentrification. The extreme commodification process forces inhabitants to move to other parts of the cities. Because they are often not able to accompany the standards induced by other capital incursions in the favela. Even the poorest of the settlements is commoditized, rent prices rise.

### **3. The Favela where heritage is lived: People and changes**

What is the heritage bring? Is it an example of development for other favelas? For whom?

#### **3.1 Vanessa, 14**

Vanessa Silva, a teenager of 14 years old who lives in a Favela of Maceio, told:

*"Favelas are very different in Rio. They are beautiful (...) I saw on TV that they have cable car"*.

She also tells: *"We are going to Rio because my Mom lost her job here, can't wait to be there"* (Vanessa, 2015).

#### **3.2 IBGE Worker**

An IBGE worker who asks to not being identified has defended the removal of favelas is legitime. Because favelas 'creates criminals' and because people who live in the favelas have 'no education'. He also did no know about the fact that Brazilian Favelas were a heritage site. He also explained that many favelas are very difficult to be studied with accuracy, and that post office workers or IBGE workers sometimes do not enter in the favela because it is too dangerous. He told that was robbed during a survey in the favela. The favela of Vanessa as no official address. Google maps, IBGE, post office and academia show different names for this favela.

#### **3.3 Middle-Class woman**

A high-middle class woman explained that favelas in Rio are a '*maravilha/ wonderful*'. She tells people that they '*look beautiful in Rio de Janeiro*' and that '*they look bad in Maceio*'. She thinks that the fact that the government of Rio de Janeiro takes more care about the favelas located there, turns them into less violent spaces. She also mentioned that she visited the favelas with a group of tourists and that they look cleaner than what she hears about the favelas in Maceio (she has never been in a favela in Maceio). Finally tells that she does not want to visit a favela in Maceio because she found horrible pictures of dead people if she googles it on the internet. This reinforces the fact that many institutions and middle class have a fear of favelas because they are seen as violent spaces. Newspapers often report people who

are being killed in a favela. Many well known documentaries and media cover such issue: “La favela criminale”. “Cidade de Deus” e “Tropa de Elite”.

### 3.4 Activists

A group of activists tried to Removal of a house of a woman who contested the municipality of Rio, tells a story removal and conflict in the *Favela do Moinho in Sao Paulo*. And others in Recife (Direitos Urbanos) and Maceio (Villa dos Pescadores). Social media is an important tool used by activists to claim the right to the city.

### 3.5 Educational purposes and Shifting Realities

Education and favela have been merging. Initiatives such as the School of Favela Architecture which tries to address the knowledge that exists in between ‘inhabitant of the favela’ and ‘academic/institutional knowledge about favelas. Or MOM a project of architects from the Universidade de Minas Gerais who aim to set experiments inside favelas of Belo Horizonte.

### Conclusion: real heritages of favelas?

The ‘consumption’ of idealistic view on favelas may have had different outcomes for those who live in informal settlements. Labour and favelas are strongly intertwined. However, implications of the economies generated within the favelas are not taken as elements for heritage discussion.

The claim is that the disruptive and cacophonous understanding of a favela is raising relevant questions about the ‘consume’, the contemplation, and the production of heritage. A mist of fascination and mystification of a favela may contribute to overlook the capacities of a neighborhood and the political, social and economic features.

Heritage of what? From whom? By whom? The community of a favela was homogeneous for a long period. However, nowadays, there is a ‘porous’ community who had been constructed inside the favelas. This specific porosity, grew of a context of Everyday practices in the favelas are to be understood.

In this case, the fact that the favelas are viewed as a heritage site, does not mean by itself, that it would bring changes for the community and for favela inhabitants. There must be a coherence with what the field is saying and what the society is able to embrace. In between all those concepts.

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