

## BOOK REVIEW

**Touring poverty**, by Bianca Freire-Medeiros, Oxford, Routledge, 2013, 224 pp., 80£ (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-59654-1

Gazing at poverty, violence, horror, conflict and disaster is not new in tourism, and there is a long lineage of works pointing at how discourses of voyeurism and authenticity promote a desire for these kinds of sites, despite their differences. But the growth and importance of slum tourism in the Global South in the last decade is exceptional. As a 2012 special issue of *Tourism Geographies* on Slum Tourism illustrates, the highly interdisciplinary emerging field of slum tourism is going through a scope and conceptual definition period, in what has been mostly a growing collection of case studies, particularly focusing on Cape Town, Johannesburg, Rio de Janeiro, and more recently Mumbai.

Bianca Freire-Medeiros, an urban sociologist/art-architecture historian, working at the Research Centre for Contemporary History of Brazil of the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, is one of the most active researchers in this field, and has written extensively about slum tourism. Together with a handful of other researchers she has been at the forefront of empirical studies of slum tourism in Rio de Janeiro.

The book, which recovers and combines Portuguese and English published materials with original research, is divided into two uneven parts. The first one (slumming: the discovery of the other half; touring poverty in the new millennium: places, people and practices), amounting to about one-fourth of the book, intends to frame and introduce the reader to the main issues at stake. The first is the highly controversial production of poverty as a commodity ready for consumption, which directly touches class boundaries and distinctions, and which is fully incorporated into the logics of the neoliberal economy. The second is the growth of 'reality tours' that promise safe access to marginal territories and landscapes, zooming through war zones as depicted in the media and films. While the book makes a strong contribution toward an internationalization of Brazilian research and fieldwork, and the author openly makes a critique of the unproblematized ways in which Anglophone researchers have dealt with language barriers which arise from research-residents interactions, it is rather disappointing how Chapter 1 is overwhelmingly Anglophone in its review of the terms and origins of slum and slumming. The Angolan *Musseques* or even the Portuguese *Bairro de Lata* (to stay within the Lusophone world), the North African *Maison en Bidon*, or the many other Latin American diverse forms (Barrios, Ranchos, Asentamientos, Cantegriles, Invasiones, Chacaritas, Villas Miserias and so on) are entirely absent from the discussion, and could definitely be used to enrich and enlarge a conceptual perspective arising from the Global South. Besides, this debate could have been combined with a more thorough discussion of the origins of Favela, which appears 30 pages afterwards, in Part II, Chapter 3. Moreover, and I will stop here with my hesitations about what I consider to be a welcoming refreshing book, there is a strong imbalance between experience/knowledge and research that the author brings to the book in relation to South Africa and India (no more than 20 pages of impressionistic transient work) and the Favela of Rocinha, in Rio de Janeiro. This circumstance should be clear at the start of the book, as the South Africa and India case studies serve only to contextualize the rest of the book. Perhaps, the book title

should have been more daringly affirmative about a study of Rio's Rocinha, located on prime real estate grounds overlooking Ipanema beach.

The second part of the book, the bulk of the work, is composed of five chapters, all of which are part of a case study of the Favela of Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro. They are rich in detail and result from extensive empirical research and deep knowledge of the place, Freire-Medeiros' comfort zone. It includes a chapter each on three groups of people involved in the fabrication of the favela: tour operators, the tourists and the residents or *favelados*. In between there is a chapter that looks at the role and implication of souvenirs as material objects that mediate residents and tourists. One of the strong points about this work is the use of a variety of mobile methods, openly inspired here by the Lancaster Centre for Mobilities Research, and the author assumes an autoethnographic discourse, using both preplanned as well as opportunistic movements.

After a standard discussion on the origins, historical development, urbanization patterns, government policies of Rio de Janeiro's Favelas, the book deals with the various processes which led tourism operators to establish themselves in Rocinha, but also to their relationships with residents, and unfortunately to a minor extent, with drug traffickers. These are important insights into an area which has been little investigated, and which is critical to the ways in which the Favela as a tourist space is being constructed and reinvented. Next, the author engages with the motivations and anxieties of tourists by conducting and analyzing 56 long interviews with tourists, as well as examining 28 tourists' travel blogues and photo logs, opening up multiple tourists' trajectories to the reader, casting some light into the many ways in which tourists drag narratives and imaginative geographies to the Favela terrains. Freire-Medeiros moves then to a significant analysis of the social biography of objects/souvenirs that are produced, exchanged and consumed within the context of Favela, and in the 'company' of Erving Goffman, she carefully looks at the dialogs that take place between tourists and retailers and their role in reshaping the Favela imagery. The last chapter provides an analysis of 178 residents' perspectives on tourism in the Favela.

The book is enriched by many valuable photos, and it draws heavily on media representations and constructions of poverty and slums present in novels, films, video games, urban design and art, from Marcel Camus' *Black Orpheus* (1959), to Fernando Meirelles' *City of God* (2002), emphasizing the idea that image, reality and experience are all intertwined dimensions of the Favela. Overall this is an elegant piece of work, that makes us embark on different dimensions of poverty tours, and it is of great interest to sociologists, anthropologists, urban scholars, geographers and a rewarding read to all those interested in the challenges tourism poses to people and to the uniqueness of places. The pace at which the Favela and Rio is changing, remarkably now due to the inferences of the 2014 Football World Cup and the 2016 Olympics Games organizations, demands a continuous detailed examination of the ways in which these impoverished lands are transformed by tourism and transform tourism, in strong connection to public urban policies and organized crime shifting patterns. Putting that into a Global South context, connecting it to multi-site ethnography particularly in South America, is an electrifying challenge that Freire-Medeiros and her colleagues have ahead.

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