

# < THE WAY I SEE TODAY >

**Realities, fictions and chains of representation in Cidade de Deus**

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of  
**Master of Philosophy in Ethnographic Documentary**  
in the Faculty of Humanities - School of Social Sciences.

< 2014 >

ANTONIA GAMA C. DE O. DA COSTA

**SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

**GRANADA CENTRE FOR VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

## LIST OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| LIST OF FIGURES  | 03 |
| ABSTRACT   | 05 |
| DECLARATION  | 06 |
| COPYRIGHT STATEMENT  | 06 |
| ADVICE TO THE EXAMINERS  | 07 |
| ON THE REGULATIONS OF THIS DEGREE                              | 07 |
| ON THE READING OF THIS THESIS                                  | 08 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS   | 09 |
| 1. INTRODUCTION: SITUATING THE FIELD SITE                      | 11 |
| 2. CIDADE DE DEUS: FROM URBAN MYTH TO SPACE OF RESISTANCE      | 21 |
| 2.1 PLACE AND PEOPLE   | 21 |
| 2.2 VIOLENCE AND ONGOING SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS                | 31 |
| 3. EXPERIENCING THE MAKING OF <i>THE WAY I SEE TODAY</i>       | 40 |
| 3.1 MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE CONDUCTION OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT | 40 |
| 3.2 FACING CHALLENGES IN THE FIELD                             | 45 |
| 3.3 SHAPING OUTCOMES   | 49 |
| 3.4 VIDEO-WALKING IMMERSION                                    | 55 |
| 4. CONCLUDING OVER AN OPEN-ENDED STORY                         | 61 |
| 5. REFERENCES  | 64 |

**Word count: 16.493**

## LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1:** In the map (A) represents the City Centre of Rio de Janeiro and (B) Cidade de Deus marked as a blue perimeter.....p. 14
- Figure 2:** Three examples of *City of God* book cover when published in 2002. The photos are stills from the film *City of God* (2002).....p. 16
- Figure 3:** Three illustrations of *City of God* international movie posters - the Brazilian, the Swedish and the French.....p. 17
- Figure 4:** Partial view of CDD in 1968. Photograph available at *Revista de Engenharia do Estado da Guanabara*.....p. 22
- Figure 5:** Wellington França during our interview at Casa de Cultura.....p. 23
- Figure 6:** Cleonice Dias during our interview at Local Development Agency.....p. 26
- Figure 7:** Valéria (left) and Cilene (right) during one of our encounters at Seed of Life Association (ASVI), an institution that hosts meetings related to the initiatives they are engaged with.....p. 29
- Figure 8:** Cilene showing the latest edition of the community journal *A notícia por quem vive*.....p. 30
- Figure 9:** CDD area (blue) defined by Márcio Gomes, the main collaborator of the research project.....p. 31
- Figure 10:** Front cover of the newspaper *Meia Hora* (left) published in 2008 with news about CDD and another publication regarding Rio's "pacified favelas" (2010).....p. 33

**Figure 11:** Lucinha (right) and other members of the Community Committee during the participatory timeline activity.....p. 37

**Figure 12:** Map of CDD divided by the three UPP perimeters.....p. 38

**Figure 13:** Still of Márcio filming cutaways of teaching activities for the project *Casa Nossa*.....p. 44

**Figure 14:** Fabiano from the music band Lamarca talking about the stills of *City of God*.....p. 48

**Figure 15:** Vinicius (left) and Flávio (right) performing after our conversation.....p. 56

**Figure 16:** Adany (left) and Edson (right) during the video-walking immersion.....p. 56

**Figure 17:** Cristiano (left), Márcio and Welbert (right) watching the extras of *City of God*.....p. 57

**Figure 18:** One of the sequences during the video-walking activities.....p. 57



**The University of Manchester**

**Antonia Gama Da Costa**

**MPhil in Ethnographic Documentary**

**The way I see today: realities, fictions and chains of representation in Cidade de Deus**

**07 February 2014**

## **ABSTRACT**

*The way I see today* is a collaborative audiovisual-based research project developed in the Rio de Janeiro favela known as Cidade de Deus (City of God). Through the perspective of a network of key local actors, the ethnographic documentary focuses on the outcomes produced by the novel and the film *City of God*, and unveils issues around control over representation as a consequence of the 'distortions' raised by the fictional narratives upon the reality of Cidade de Deus residents.

The companion text provides important aspects of the social history of the place and an overview of the research collaborators, as well as my own background of fieldwork experiences in Cidade de Deus. The text also presents some reflections on the use of film as a medium through which a collaborative relationship between the ethnographer and the research participants can be developed.

**Keywords:** favelas, collaborative methods, representation, self-perception.

## **DECLARATION**

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university, or other institute of learning.

Manchester, 07 February 2014.

## **COPYRIGHT STATEMENT**

The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the "Copyright") and she has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made only in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.

The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trademarks and other intellectual property (the "Intellectual Property") and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables ("Reproductions"), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.

Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=487>), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library's regulations (see <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/library/aboutus/regulations>) and in The University's policy on Presentation of Theses.

## **ADVICE TO THE EXAMINERS**

### **On the Regulations of this Degree**

This thesis is presented under the regulations for the MPhil in Ethnographic Documentary, which were formally approved by the University in June 2005. These require a candidate for the degree to submit for assessment a portfolio of film material, consisting of one or more pieces of work of varied character. This material should be presented on a DVD and have a maximum duration of four hours. It should also normally be accompanied by a written text of no more than 15.000 words. As stated in the original proposal approved by the University:

*The visual material on the DVD portfolio can also be accompanied by a written text which gives background information and may develop an argument about the relationship between concept and visual image. However, it should be emphasized that the main objective of the proposed programme is to demonstrate how visual media in and of themselves can be used to communicate ethnographic knowledge and understanding. The main intellectual 'added value' of the output will be contained in the way in which the subjects or topics to be filmed have been selected and then narratively structured with a view to providing a particular interpretation of the content of the film. In assessing the film, technical competence, whilst not of over-riding importance, would also be taken into account in the same way that literary competence is taken into account in the writing of assessed postgraduate*

*texts.*

### **On the Reading of this thesis**

This MPhil thesis is a combination of film (which can be accessed through the DVD) and companion text. I invite the examiners to view the ethnographic documentary first and then read the companion text.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Angela Torresan and Peter Wade, for their countless remarks and engagement throughout the making of this project. Thank you very much for all your support and encouragement along the way.

A special thank you to my dear friends and careful readers/viewers, Érica Peçanha do Nascimento, Bianca Lenti, Daniela Mothci, and Monique Carvalho, as well as to Silvia Ramos and Tatiana Bacal for writing such touching reference letters. To my *mana*, Érica Peçanha dos Nascimento, I actually owe more than special thanks. I will be forever grateful for her sensibility, her loyalty and kindness during so many Skype sessions.

I would also like to thank my dear friends Samar Kanafani, Ximin Zhou, Rebecca Toop and Giovanni Spissu, as well as the lovely "Portuguese-speaking community" in the social anthropology department: Luciana Lang, Inês Ponte, Patrícia Scalco and Flávia Kremer. All of them gave me tireless support and advice over the past year and I will be forever grateful for that. I owe special thanks to Luciana Lang for doing such thoughtful translation of the film, and proofreading of the companion text.

My deepest thanks to my family and to my caring and bright husband, Dirceu Esdras Teixeira, for their wholehearted support from the day of my application until now. I am forever grateful for the (long-distance) love each of you has given me over this learning process.

Finally, I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the research collaborators, grassroots institutions and projects from Cidade de Deus, for the inspiration and for giving me full access to your houses, stories and knowledge. *Seguimos juntos.*

A COMPANION TEXT TO THE FILM

**THE WAY I SEE TODAY**



## **1 > Introduction: situating the field site**

Favela, a tree associated with skin irritation, which belongs to a large family of flowering plants, can also be described as a multifaceted concept. The word favela was used for the first time as a local term for slums in the late 19th century by the soldiers who had fought during the War of Canudos (1896-1897), in Bahia, and were very familiar with Canudo's Favela Hill. After the end of the war, they were brought to Rio de Janeiro by the authorities and found themselves homeless. As a consequence, they settled in what would be later known as the Providência Hill at Rio's city centre and started using the term favela as a reference. Amongst the several definitions that the term acquired over time in Brazil, I call attention to the following passage from an important Brazilian social scientist:

General denomination of an urban phenomenon typical of Rio's development from the 1920s on, whereby settlers built precarious homes in land they did not own. By the 1950s it was extended to a national category used by the Brazilian census, and from the 1960s on it entered the terminology of the social sciences. Nowadays it stands in Brazil for a poor segregated area in the city and it is often seen contradictorily as an area of solidarity and sociability, but where violence, associated to drug dealing, is present in everyday life (Valladares, 2008).

In Brazil there is a large and growing body of literature focusing on favelas. An outstanding source on the many ways of defining the term and how it became an analytical category for Social Sciences is Licia do Prado Valladares (2005). The "equation poverty-marginality-favela" (Zaluar, 2000: 64 [my translation]) takes us back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when these areas were already identified as an unwelcomed "problem" by the then governors of Rio de Janeiro, firstly

because of its sanitary conditions and later as a result of its "moral" and "political" implications (Burgos, 1998). In the 1960s, the definition of favela was described in an official state report as an "informal agglomerate of underpaid workers lacking professional skills, associated with low standards of living, illiteracy, messianic followings, promiscuity, alcoholism, going barefoot superstition and spiritism, lacking healthy leisure time, hideout for criminals and outlaws, focus of parasites and contagious diseases" (Perlman *apud* Burgos, 1998: 54 [my translation]).

Nowadays 'favelaphobia' (from the Portuguese *favelafobia*) can be defined as a general feeling of insecurity and fear felt by non-favela residents and usually associated with spaces considered as peripheral to the city, according to geographic and/or social criteria (Silva, 2006). In general terms, the idea of favelaphobia can also be related to feelings such as disgust, aversion or repulsion, as well as to the idea of criminalizing or marginalizing the people that inhabit these places. As a result, residents of these spaces are often mistaken as the main agents of crime, especially in cities like Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Recife where the expansion of the favelas goes hand in hand with a framework of cumulative socioeconomic inequalities and progressive lethal violence associated with drug and gun dealing (Ramos, 2007). Within this context, the young-black-favela-resident is the social group which is most affected by the stigmas related to the phenomenon of urban violence; whether as criminals or as victims, they are the most recurrent fatal casualties of the local shootings between the police and the organized crime (or between rival factions).<sup>1</sup>

Consequently the stereotypes associated with marginality often resonate with hegemonic cultural representations (films, TV shows and drama performances) and public discourses (magazines, journalistic essays and social networks). Besides

---

<sup>1</sup> In 2004, Luiz Eduardo Soares brought attention to the current demographic deficit of young black boys aged 15 to 24 in Brazil, as a consequence of the increase in lethal violence that strikes mainly the urban peripheries all over the country.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that CDD is not located on a hillside – the topography where those popular houses were typically built in Rio, thus providing beautiful landscapes to both residents and tourists – and has been recognised officially as a neighbourhood of Rio in 1978, most of the CDD residents and



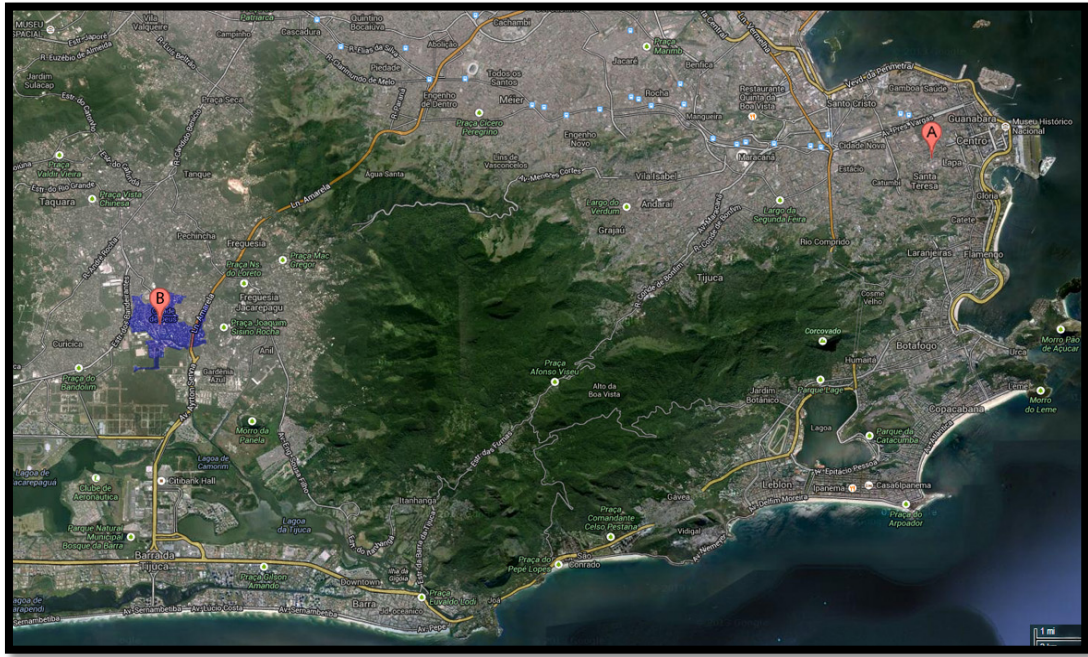
collaborating with the perpetuation of social stigma, ethnic/racial/class depictions can have different real-life effects on marginalized communities and provoke several local reactions (Shohat and Stam, 1994). On the one hand, they can give rise to manifestations by the civil society, processes of collective involvement, as well as fostering organizations in local communities, while, on the other hand, they can also be used as a means to acquire visibility, recognition and many supporters within the mainstream society (Da Costa, 2009).

Moreover, making use of Shohat and Stam's outstanding arguments, I would argue that: "the sensitivity around stereotypes and distortions largely arises (...) from the powerlessness of historically marginalized groups to control their own representation" (1994: 184). Even though, as I point out in this thesis, having the possibility of representing themselves does not prevent them of evoking to a certain extent such stigmatized representations.

Cidade de Deus – or CDD as it is often called by its residents – a favela situated in the western part of the city of Rio de Janeiro, approximately nineteen miles away from the City Centre, amounting to a minimum of a two-hour bus ride from most places in central Rio, might be classified as an iconic example within this framework.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that CDD is not located on a hillside – the topography where those popular houses were typically built in Rio, thus providing beautiful landscapes to both residents and tourists – and has been recognised officially as a neighbourhood of Rio in 1978, most of the CDD residents and institutions' representatives with whom I talked to over the years identify the site as a favela (also referring to this space as a "community"). Generally speaking, other residents of Rio de Janeiro, civil society organizations and public governors/managers also recognize CDD as a favela or as a neighbourhood that has gone through the process of favelisation.



**Figure 1:** In the map (A) represents the City Centre of Rio de Janeiro and (B) CDD marked as a blue perimeter.

Over the 1980s, Alba Zaluar's doctoral research carried out inside CDD became a benchmark study of the connections between urban poverty, criminality and people's organizations. Published under the title *The Machine and the Rebellion: People's Organizations and the Significance of Poverty* (1985), the research has been recognized as a classic of Brazilian anthropology, not only for its content but also because of its methodology. After concluding her doctorate, Zaluar kept developing researches within the locality that would be used later as the foundation for an essay collection called *The Devil's Condominium* (1994), which would focus on the phenomena of urban violence, marginality, drug dealing and poverty.

One of Alba Zaluar's research assistants from 1986 to 1993, Paulo Lins – who was raised in CDD – would become a very well-known Brazilian novelist after publishing a by-product of one of Zaluar's researches: the novel *City of God* (1997).<sup>3</sup> Released

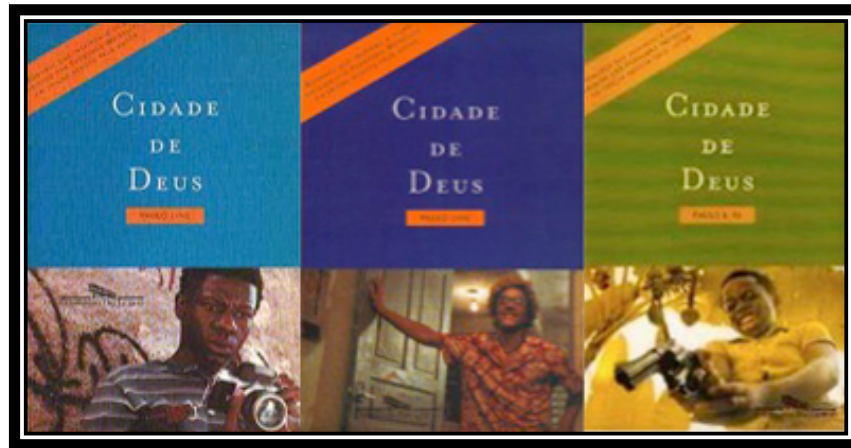
<sup>3</sup> Since his childhood, Lins used to write fictional essays and take part in literary contests. In the 1980s, Lins was accepted as an undergraduate student in Literary Studies at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and it was during this academic experience that he got involved with some poetry independent movements which were spreading out across the city. Alba Zaluar invited him to be her research assistant precisely because he was an university student and also a resident of CDD.

by one of the most prestigious publishing editors in Brazil, his novel narrates in third person the story of CDD social transformations having violence, drug dealing, *samba* and the sociability between residents as the background for the narrative. Zaluar was the main supporter of Lins's work and at the time hailed the book as the "first Brazilian ethnographic novel" (Ribeiro, 2005: 04 [my translation]). Moreover, she was the person responsible for putting Lins in contact with Roberto Schwarz, one of the most distinguished literary critics in the country, which not only recommended Lins's work to the above mentioned publishing editor but also wrote a favourable review which had a great impact on the literary field. In his analysis, Schwarz stated that Lins's book should be "celebrated as a happening" in virtue of its content, its insider point of view, its rhythm grounded in action and adventure and, above all, because of its mixture of prose and scientific investigation (Schwarz, 1999).

After Schwarz's legitimating review, several literary critics praised the new author for his innovative storytelling techniques: "combining ethnographic research, literary naturalism and cinematic flashes in order to reveal an explosive scenario of social exclusion and violence" (Jaguaribe, 2004: 333).<sup>4</sup> In addition, many writers and scholars pointed out Lins's novel as a historical and aesthetical reference for the literature that was emerging from Brazilian urban peripheries on the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Nascimento, 2009), along with a whole set of cinematographic and television productions focusing on marginalized spaces (Nagib, 2004). Consequently, the novel *City of God* (1997) became a commercial success, having its publishing rights sold to another 15 countries around the world.

---

<sup>4</sup> Many scholars classify Lins's novel as one of the pioneering works of the post-1970s movement of Marginal Literature (*Literatura Marginal*) in Brazil. However, Paulo Lins often rejects these terms; instead, the author likes to be classified under the label of 'urban literature'.



**Figure 2:** Three examples of *City of God* book cover when published in 2002. The photos are stills from the film *City of God* (2002).

Later Lin's novel was adapted to the feature film of same name,<sup>5</sup> directed by Fernando Meirelles and co-directed by Kátia Lund. Released in 2002, *City of God* had an unknown and unprofessional cast composed mainly by black favela residents, which were trained through acting workshops specifically designed for the film. This methodology resulted in a dramaturgic composition based on the spoken and corporeal language of Rio's favelas (Hamburger et al, 2011). The film became one of the biggest box offices of the period known as Renaissance of Brazilian Cinema (from 1994), reaching 3,3 millions of viewers all over the country. Later, *City of God* (2002) was nominated for the Best Foreign Language Film at the Golden Globe Award (2003) and in another four categories at The Oscars Academy Awards (2004).

<sup>5</sup> Published originally with 550 pages, the second edition of the novel *City of God* (1997) was revised and reduced by the author to 401 pages at the time of the release of its namesake in 2002. In the meantime, the book became a Brazilian best-seller. According to some research collaborators, the novel's title was meant to be *Pipas ao Longe* ('Kites in the Distance'). However the publishing editor decided for the title *Cidade de Deus* (*City of God*) and imposed that as a condition for the publication in virtue of its commercial appeal.



**Figure 3:** Three illustrations of *City of God* international movie posters – the Brazilian, the Swedish and the French.

The film has a first-person narrative of a young black boy who wants to become a photographer, contrasting with the supposedly common fate of criminality that is usually associated to the black youth that inhabit Brazilian favelas. In spite of that, the fictional narrative focuses on the armed conflict between gangs inside “Cidade de Deus” over the 1970s-80s period, emphasizing violence as a day-to-day experience in the lives of CDD residents and granting special attention to those characters (or prototypes of real-life residents from CDD) who got involved with criminal activity in that community. *City of God* was brought into the limelight not only because of its improvised dialogues, fast-paced cutting and montage techniques, and commercial success, but also due to the brutality of many of its scenes, above all those that involved murdering sequences and the presence of children subjected to violent situations (Hamburger, 2008).<sup>6</sup>

The novel and the film contributed decisively to CDD visibility outside academia and

<sup>6</sup> The outcomes of the newly released documentary film titled *City of God - 10 years later*, which strictly accounts for the effects of the film *City of God* in the lives of the its cast, are yet to be analysed. I attended the première screening of this documentary film (along with one of my research collaborators) as one of my (off-site) fieldwork activities. It might be relevant to emphasise that amongst the 15 actors that are interviewed in this documentary, four got involved with criminal activities after the film (some had a criminal background even before the film). One of those actors is the child (now a young man) who played the role of the little boy from “caixa baixa” gang (“low gang”) who weeps when he is shot in the foot by another child. In his statement, he reports that he was “trained” during the acting workshops to fear the actor who played the great villain in *City of God*, i.e. the character of Li'l Zé (Zé Pequeno). The trailer of *City of God – 10 years later* is an interesting complement to this discussion, available at: <https://vimeo.com/user17945122>.

projection onto the national and international public scene. However, I believe that the debates surrounding the representations in the cinematic narrative might have been stronger amongst people, including non-Brazilians, because cinema is generally identified as a more popular expression than literature. Along with this, in a "media-saturated world" texts can acquire different meanings depending on a "multiplicity of forces" embedded in the relationship between these and the social subjects that 'read' them (Ang, 2006: 176-7; 180). As Ien Ang has noted, the "dialogical relationship" between media vehicles/producers and audiences has to be investigated empirically in order to understand "certain historical and social structures, but also other texts - that simultaneously act upon the subjects concerned" (op. cit., 2006: 177). The author, therefore, criticises the analytical approaches merely concerned with the "textual structures", as if meanings could not be re-signified by the viewers/social subjects.

Thus when it comes to understand the bleeding behind the reception of fictional narratives in a given society through the perspective of audience studies, "rather than constructing an opposition between "the" media and "the" audience, as if these were separate ontological entities, and, along with it, the application of a distributional theory of power", we might benefit more from a critical analysis of "media consumption as a site of cultural struggle, (...) an ongoing struggle over meaning and pleasure which is central to the fabric(ation) of everyday life" (op. cit., 2006: 181; her quotation marks).

After the release of the film *City of God* (2002), the discourses in many places worldwide were divided between: (1) the strikingly realistic language of the film and, subsequently, the forcefulness of that visual representation (Nagib, 2004: 239); and (2) the criticism of the "spectacle of violence" and the "'popification' of poverty" (Melo, 2004: 479). These issues are part of an arena of discussions concerning the aestheticisation of violence in film and documentary, which have been focusing on the influences of cinema not only on perceptions, but above all on distinct performances of political violence (Brink and Oppenheimer, 2012: 16).



In the Brazilian case, literary and cinematographic representations of the favela as a fetishist and fragmented space on the city relied basically on the “aesthetics of realism” – or “shock of the real” – and have been increasing exponentially from the 1990s onwards (Jaguaribe, 2004: 327-8). Esther Hamburger (2008: 553) identifies this cinematic trend as “favela situation”, in which socio-economical inequalities are portrayed in situations of endemic violence. On a different moment of time, however, images of poverty, misery and violence were highlighted in fictional cinema through a combative/stylistic/methodological approach – summarised by the expression “aesthetics of hunger” formulated by Glauber Rocha and hailed by the *Cinema Novo* movement over the 1960s – to address Brazil’s pressing social issues, in a clear opposition to Hollywood and the Brazilian artists “for whom misery becomes a form of exoticism ‘that vulgarizes social problems’” (Chanan, 2012: 125-7). Looking from the CDD residents’ and social actors’ point of view, when it comes to questions related to “realism”, this “struggle over meaning” might be crucial because fictional narratives can lead the spectators – who do not have a deep understanding of the social complexities – to believe in a representation which is in fact a “fundamental misreading” of what they assume their reality(ies) to be (Shohat and Stam, 1994: 179).

In that sense, despite being credited for “shifting the paradigms of production within the Brazilian cinema” by many film critics, the film *City of God* was also greatly criticised by others for spreading a “negative image” of the favelas, reduced to a place of violence associated with drug dealing, and with the corruptive and discriminative police (Hamburger et al, 2011: 281-2). Against that background, a whole set of reflections and discussions emerged from the sociocultural scene involving specialized critics, politicians, artists, social activists, grassroots institutions and favela-dwellers (including some from CDD) regarding the aestheticisation of poverty, urban violence, socioeconomical inequalities and the inefficiency of the Brazilian state in tackling these problems (Freire-Medeiros, 2011; Nagib, 2004; Ribeiro, 2005), thus *City of God* is part of a repertoire which from the 1990s

onwards gave visibility to the contradictions and issues of contemporary Brazil (Bentes, 2007; Hamburger, 2008; Jaguaribe, 2004).

A final issue – apparently less analysed by scholarly literature and less questioned in general – was the social stigma that was reinforced for the population of CDD and the consequences upon their realities. Therefore, I decided to undertake this MPhil project with the objective of developing an open-ended reading – through the agency of an ethnographic documentary film – of Cidade de Deus in the social imaginary of a network of key local actors. I was highly influenced by my previous experiences in CDD, firstly as an ethnographic researcher, secondly as a sociocultural project coordinator and later as a public manager for state and local governments. I was also motivated by the concern I shared with CDD residents regarding the stigmas reinforced by the film. My ethnographic film, in turn, contributes to an understanding of the real-life effects caused by these fictional works and unveils issues around control over representation as a consequence of the ‘distortions’ raised by this chain of representations upon the reality(ies) of CDD residents. It is also a critical commentary on persistent issues in Brazilian society such as urban violence, lack of government protection, and class and racial prejudice.

During the film/fieldwork experience, I came across a wide range of ethnographic data about the social history of CDD. Due to the great complexity of the footage for the ethnographic documentary and its several contextual layers, I was not able to focus on much of its social history, as well as in the groups/institutions descriptions and characters/collaborators profiles. Therefore, it might be helpful to use the space of this companion text to present some of these contextual gaps (Chapter 2), amongst other theoretical and methodological reflections on the use of film as a medium through which a collaborative relationship between the ethnographer and the research participants can be developed (Chapters 3/4). In order to do this, I will make use of data gathered on and off-camera through participant observation, during a few individual interviews and over the (pre-)discussion meetings, in which I



made use of complementary research techniques (photo/film elicitations, participatory timelines and "walking with video" activities [Pink, 2007]). Thus, my intention with this companion text is to provide a far-reaching experience to the viewers of *The way I see today*.

## **2 > Cidade de Deus: from urban myth to space of resistance**

In this section, I will introduce some of the research participants, especially those involved in CDD's grassroots institutions with a background of social militancy in the community (some included in the film). At the same time, I will present an overview of the sociopolitical background of the place, in relation to some of the existing literature on favelas.

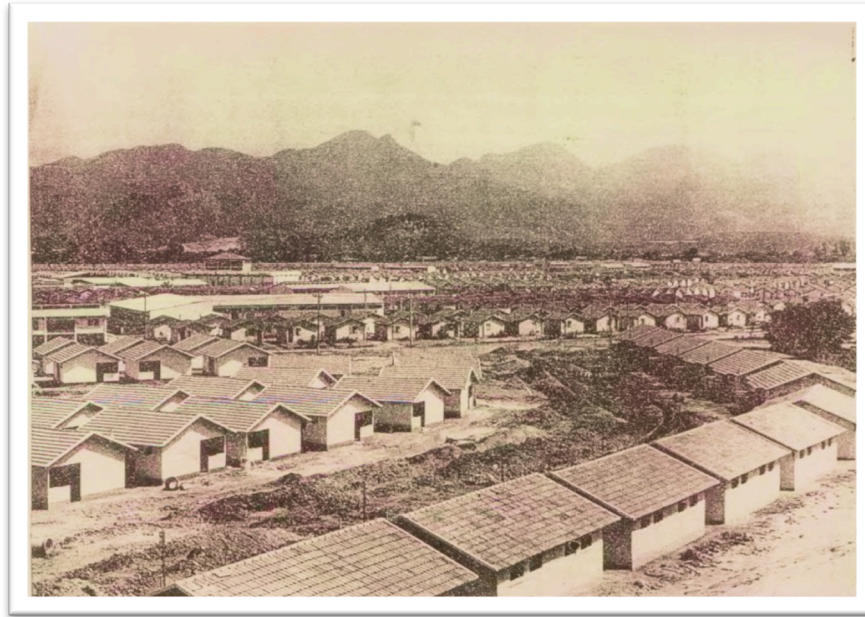
### **2.1. Place and People**

Cidade de Deus is one of the four major housing estates which were either built or had the construction initiated between 1962 and 1965 by the Popular Housing Company of the State of Guanabara (COHAB) (Zaluar, 2000: 66).<sup>7</sup> These housing projects were funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of a program called Alliance for Progress: a 10-year cooperative project between the United States and Latin American countries the object of which was the socioeconomic development of the latter while, at the same time, achieving the political goal of curbing communist influence in the subcontinent as a result of the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959).<sup>8</sup> Not by coincidence, the construction of the houses followed a North American pattern. One of the CDD residents described the houses as single storey houses with French roof tiles and no brick walls between houses, characteristics that can also be seen in Figure 4.

---

<sup>7</sup> From 1960 to 1975, Rio was not a municipality, but a Brazilian state.

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/AllianceforProgress>.



**Figure 4:** Partial view of CDD in 1968. Photograph available at *Revista de Engenharia do Estado da Guanabara*.

Wellington Moraes França is a 57-year old northeastern descendent who arrived in CDD coming from a different peripheral area in 1967. As presented in the ethnographic documentary, Wellington has a long history of association with social movements inside CDD. In the 1980s, he acted as one of the leaders of Cidade de Deus Board of Residents (COMOCID), also known as the first experience with associations within the area.<sup>9</sup> Nowadays he is one of the most active members of Casa de Cultura Cidade de Deus (Cultural Centre), a sociocultural institution linked to the Roman Catholic Parish Church called *Pai Eterno e São José*.<sup>10</sup> He teaches karate to youth groups inside Casa de Cultura and he is also a poet, author of two poetry books. More recently, Wellington has been one of the founder members of the Street Corner Poetry, a literary movement which started in 2010 in CDD, where he is also known by the pseudonym Wellington Guaranny.

---

<sup>9</sup> COMOCID was created in 1968 by some of the newly arrived CDD residents with the purpose of being a political mediator between the community and state and local powers.

<sup>10</sup> This Church Parish also supports two chapels, one child-care centre, two institutions for the elderly, and the NGO Seed of Life Association (ASVI).



**Figure 5:** Wellington França during our interview at Casa de Cultura.

There are several accounts on the reasons behind the construction of CDD and other housing estates. For example, Wellington presented me with an account of CDD's original name, according to his own words, an "urban legend". As he recalls, the area was supposed to be named as Conjunto Habitacional Juscelino Kubitschek after the Brazilian president. However, because of unknown reasons the then State of Guanabara ran out of money to complete the housing constructions and the government had to borrow funds from the Banco da Providência, a non-profit organization founded in Rio de Janeiro by Dom Hélder Câmara, a Roman Catholic Archbishop also known for his support of the Theology of Liberation, movement that would have a great influence on the social history of CDD.<sup>11</sup> According to Wellington, the religious name of the community as well as the biblical name of the majority of CDD streets and squares (which were originally defined by sequential numbers) was an imposition of this agreement.

---

<sup>11</sup> The Theology of Liberation (or Liberation Theology) is a political movement initiated by members of the Roman Catholic Church from the 1950-60s, firstly in Latin American countries and later all over the world. The movement stands for poor populations and their freedom from material oppression and exploitation.

However in the Community Online Portal (which will be described ahead)<sup>12</sup> it is possible to have access to an interview with Giuseppe Badolato conducted by the CDD resident Rosalina Brito in 2009. Badolato was the chief architect of COHAB, and responsible for the design of CDD, amongst many other housing estates in Rio over the 1960s. During the interview, Badolato reported that CDD was the original name of the housing project. In addition, he stated that CDD was initially designed to accommodate the workers (and their families) who would provide services to one of the ascending nearby neighbourhoods were emerging along the coast, nowadays identified as the "rich expansion" of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Nevertheless there is a consensus among Brazilian social scientists that these public interventions were actually implemented to serve the policy of favelas removal, which started in the 1940s with the construction of a few housing projects and reached its peak in the 1960s when the mentioned housing estates were built (e.g. Burgos, 1998; Perlman, 1977; Valladares, 2005; Zaluar, 2000). From 1941 to 1943, three housing projects called *Parques Proletários* were built in the neighbourhoods of Leblon, Gávea and Penha with poor quality infrastructure, i.e. consisting basically of provisional houses. Over this period, favela residents were relocated to these spaces under the argument that their favelas of origin would receive urban improvements. Nevertheless, the residents remained living in *Parques Proletários* until the region became valuable and was considered a real estate asset, when they were again removed by force by the authorities.<sup>13</sup> This first "removal" experience reflects public practices which would be recurrent over the 20th century in Rio and in many other Brazilian cities depending on political and/or material interests (Burgos, 1998).

Later on, from 1968 to 1975 – coinciding with part of the period in which Brazilians were living under the military dictatorship regime (1964-1985) – around 100.000

---

<sup>12</sup> [www.cidadededeus.org.br](http://www.cidadededeus.org.br).

<sup>13</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that *Parques Proletários*, located in upper-class neighbourhoods such as Leblon and Gávea, were extinct to give place to buildings and condominiums, while the one located in the neighbourhood of Penha, in Rio's North Zone, is still there.

people were removed by force and about 60 favelas were eradicated in Rio, mainly those located close to the City Centre and upper class neighbourhoods (Burgos, 1998: 38; Perlman, 2005). At this time, the policy of mass removals carried out mainly by Carlos Lacerda, the then Governor of the State of Guanabara, was justified by a “moralistic ‘blaming the victim’ narrative” in which favela residents are perceived by the rest of society as disorganized and economically incapable, isolated from Brazil’s urban and political contexts, and, consequently, identified as “criminals” responsible for “all forms of deviance, perversity, and criminality” (Perlman, 2005: 07-8).

Janice Perlman (1977; 2004; 2005) conducted an ethnographic research project in the late 1960s in three favelas in Rio de Janeiro. She argued that those propositions about “marginality” and, as a consequence the “deeply-rooted stigma” (2005: 02) surrounding favela residents, were “empirically false” and “analytically misleading” (2005: 07). Instead, the American anthropologist proposed the idea that the urban poor were “tightly integrated (and functional)” to the system, “but in a perversely asymmetrical manner” (op. cit., 2005: 04). However, during the 1990s Janice Perlman (2005: 18-22) re-analysed her earlier work and argued that the “myth of marginality” had turned into “reality” as a result of the persistent social and economic inequalities, which strikes mainly those who live in the city’s outskirts and, above all, due to the exponential growth of lethal violence that reached Rio’s favelas.<sup>14</sup>

The arguments developed in these outstanding studies about favela removals and marginality are supported by a number of statements I have collected during the field/filmwork experience in CDD. One of the most memorable reports was from Cleonice Dias, a 61-year old pedagogue who lived in CDD for 36 years and until today maintains her sociopolitical and affective ties with the place. Cleonice moved

---

<sup>14</sup> It might be relevant to relate Perlman's studies to two specific sequences in the film: the first, during the video-walking immersion, when Márcio and his fellows discuss the nature of violence and social discrimination, why they think kids end up joining the drug traffic; and the second one, when Cristiano (from *Estilo Favela*) argues that CDD should be understood as an integral part of the city, and CDD residents as people with rights to full citizenship.

to CDD in the 1970s for romantic reasons and – influenced by the mentioned Theology of Liberation disseminated in CDD through Father Julio Grooten's figure – got involved in the ongoing left-wing movements inside CDD, especially those related to the rights for the poor to officially own their properties within the area. At the time, these demonstrations were mainly mobilized by the members of the aforementioned Cidade de Deus Board of Residents (COMOCID).

Cleonice is, until today, a great reference for community agents inside CDD, especially those associated with the Community Committee and the Local Development Agency, which were both developed with her support (these initiatives will be described ahead). Nowadays Cleonice works for Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (FIOCRUZ) and is associated as a volunteer with the Centre of Studies, Cultural Initiatives and Citizenship (Centro de Estudos e Ações Culturais e de Cidadania - CEACC),<sup>15</sup> a grassroots institution from CDD created by former members of COMOCID and previously funded by ActionAid.



**Figure 6:** Cleonice Dias during our interview at Cidade de Deus Local Development Agency.

During our interview (not included in the film), Cleonice explained that the abolition of some favelas and the subsequent relocation of residents which were originally from the same community in different areas all over the city's outskirts was also a

---

<sup>15</sup> This NGO works with children, adolescents, and youngsters developing cultural and sports activities inside CDD. See: [www.ceacc.org.br](http://www.ceacc.org.br).

governmental strategy to suppress the *favelado* identity that was emerging as a political agent, i.e. by putting political leaderships in different and distant areas, they were not only "solving" the "sanitary" and "moral problem", but also disturbing the sociability and the political ties between the most mobilized groups of *favelados*. In another moment, Cleonice also argued that in order to meet the interests of real estate investors (which, I would add, are also some of the usual donors to election campaigns), state and local powers (allied with a massive exposure to the media) intentionally allow the crime rates to grow exponentially within these areas, letting the situation become nearly insoluble. As a consequence, on the one hand the general public opinion tends to think that the solution for these problematic spaces is through their removal or eradication – what could be classified, according to Cleonice, as an "indirect removal" (also generally called in Brazil as "white removal"). This is also the reason why *favelados* are hardly ever able to secure formal deeds to their property, so as to make their removal or eradication easier for the public interventions whenever it is convenient.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, favela residents are also driven to informally sell their houses and move out of the community, thus opening the space for investors and the phenomenon of urban gentrification. As reported by Cleonice, the COMOCID played a very important role of resistance, literally knocking on people's houses to persuade the residents to remain in CDD.

In actual fact, CDD inhabitation process started in 1966 after the massive flood and the landslides which left thousands of residents of other favelas homeless in Rio de Janeiro. After a period living in some of the city's football stadiums, the government housed some of them in emergency accommodation in a large area of CDD, despite the fact that houses and the infrastructure were still unfinished. Along with this, as

---

<sup>16</sup> The phenomenon of favela removals is still very present in Brazilian society, especially when it comes to areas with high risk of landslide or poor sanitary conditions. There are also removals related to infrastructure works and environmental conservation. In Rio, this issue is extremely polemic and complex, because the residents' relocations usually take place in distant and neglected areas of the city and the indemnities involved in this process are frequently delayed or forgotten. Worst of all, some removals are justified by the authorities as related to urban development, although they are actually implemented with commercial purposes, and more recently, due to tourism.

argued earlier, in the 1970s CDD was occupied by the families who had been removed by force from more than 63 favelas located all over the city, even though the majority of families (around 70%) came from six different favelas, not by chance all of them located in Rio's richest zone. According to Alba Zaluar (2000: 71), 19,2% came from Praia do Pinto, 15,2% from the mentioned Parque Proletário da Gávea, 14,5% from Ilha das Dragas, 7,3 % from Parque Proletário do Leblon, 7% from Catacumba and 6,3% from Rocinha.

During the field/film-work experience, the collaborators shared with me many memories from this traumatic episode in their personal history. Cilene Vieira, for example, is a survivor from the 1966 massive flood, which also affected Rocinha, where she and her family used to live. She arrived in CDD during her childhood after a period living provisionally at one of Rio's football stadiums, along with several other families who had gone through the same tragedy. Since her undergraduate course in Social Work, Cilene started to engage with some of the grassroots initiatives within the area, where she (along with her mother) is very well known because of her work with the drama collective called Raíz da Liberdade. As mentioned by Wellington in the film, this is one of the local groups that symbolises resistance and the struggle against racial prejudice within CDD. Nowadays, Cilene keeps attending to many community meetings as a sign of her engagement with CDD's pressing social problems, even though she has a full-time job outside the favela as an educator at FAETEC, a state technical school.

On the other hand, Valéria Barbosa was a former resident from Praia do Pinto, one of the two favelas which was burnt out under mysterious circumstances in the 1960s, in what many believe was a response from the Brazilian state which was facing resistance from the part of residents against their removal. Valéria and her family – as well as many other families who had been removed from the burnt-out communities – were transported to CDD in public waste removal trucks, an image that stuck in her memory and which is used until today as an example of human rights abuse during the military dictatorship regime. Valéria arrived in CDD when



she was 13 and lived in the Apartments locality until a few years ago, when she moved to a nearby neighbourhood. Having graduated in pedagogy, Valéria worked for many years in a philanthropic institution called Cruzada do Menor located in CDD's frontier with Jacarepaguá neighborhood, which supports children and elderly people from CDD. She is also a poet and the author of two books set in CDD. Even though she does not live in CDD anymore, Valéria has been working as a volunteer at the Cultural Centre Tupiara, an informal institution located in the Pantanal locality (at one of CDD's edges) which promotes cultural activities for youngsters and elderly residents. In addition, Valéria is one of the collaborators of the literary movement that is currently emerging in the western part of the city influenced by cultural events such as FLUPP (Festival Literário das UPPs) and FLIZO (Festa Literária da Zona Oeste).



**Figure 7:** Valéria (left) and Cilene (right) during one of our encounters at Seed of Life Association (ASVI), an institution that hosts meetings related to the initiatives they are engaged with.

Cilene and Valéria are also members – and two of the most engaged collaborators – of the aforementioned Community Online Portal. The Portal is an outcome of a research project made by a university student in 2009 with the collaboration of sixteen institutions from CDD. After completing his master degree, Celso Alvear developed the collective site to improve the communication amongst the

grassroots institutions, and also between them and the World Wide Web.<sup>17</sup> Later the same group of people/institutions created what can be identified as a by-product of the online portal: the community journal *A Notícia Por Quem Vive*. In our meetings, Cilene and Valéria referred very proudly to these community projects as a medium through which they can present "the good things about CDD that were not represented in the film *City of God* and in the general media" to the rest of the world.



**Figure 8:** Cilene presenting the latest edition of the community journal *A notícia por quem vive*.

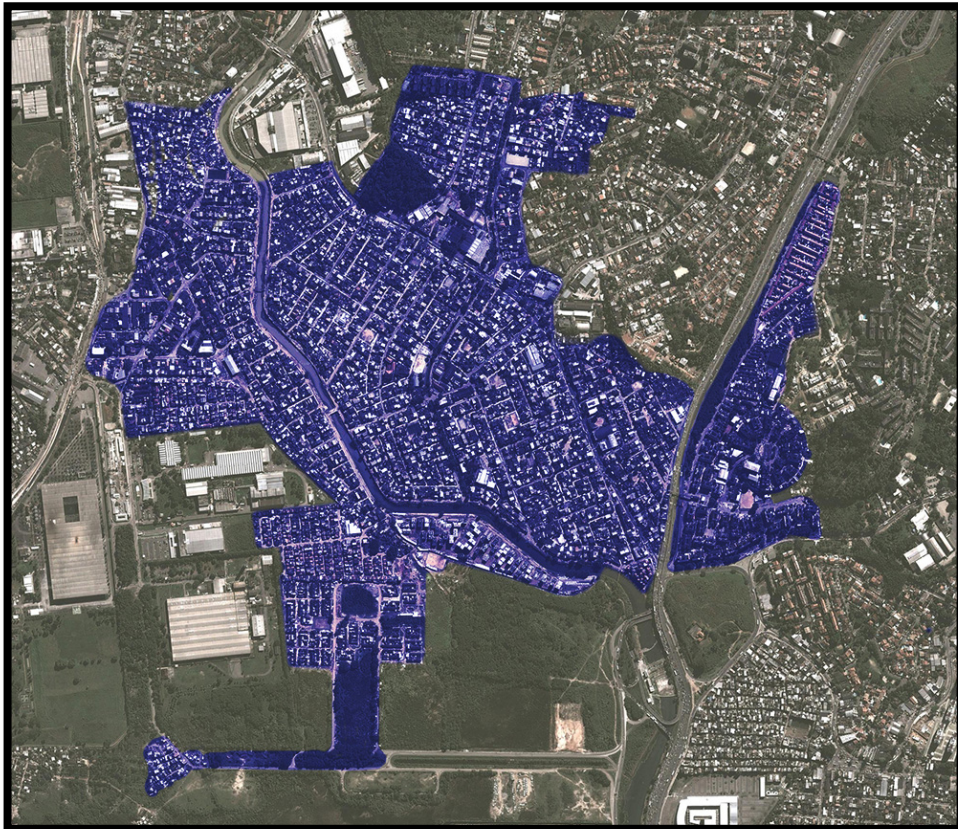
Throughout the past few decades, CDD has undergone great geographical expansion as a consequence of formal and informal settlements, reaching a total area of around 1.517.119m<sup>2</sup> (Figure 9).<sup>18/19</sup> The original architecture of the single storey houses changed gradually over the years in order to accommodate families that were getting bigger: the residents built second floors, and in some cases third floors, as well as smaller houses in their backyards. As a result, one may notice in the same urban space today, highly contrasting localities and residences, from popular buildings and houses made of brick (with 1 to 3 floors) to wooden shacks

<sup>17</sup> Since 2009 the Community Online Portal had 164.000 visits by people from 133 different countries.

<sup>18</sup> In 2010, according to the Planning Department of Rio, 88% of CDD dwellings were classified as formal and 12%, informal.

<sup>19</sup> According to the *Estimativa IPP 2010*, a social index developed by Instituto Pereira Passos.

with no sewage system, or provisional houses that are inhabited until today (known as Triagem and represented in the film by Adany's house). The self-build housing techniques followed the significant population growth in the favela, currently reaching around forty seven thousand people and a high rate of demographic density (around six times higher than Rio's average rate).<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 9:** CDD area (blue) defined by Márcio Gomes, the main collaborator of the research project.

## 2.2. Violence and ongoing social transformations

In the 1980s, the social political configuration of CDD suffered another major impact. As I argued in my MPhil research proposal, when Brazil became one of the main trafficking routes of cocaine for the United States and Europe, Rio was transformed into “a central node in the subdividing and trans-shipment of drugs

---

<sup>20</sup> Idem.

(mainly cocaine), with most of the activities being conducted within the territory of the favelas” (Perlman, 2005: 17). In addition, the lack of government protection and the widespread corruption of the police allowed drug trafficking to join forces with the gun trafficking. From the 1990s onwards, Rio’s situation became even more severe when crack started to be consumed and trafficked all over the country. At that time, the city’s fame worldwide was already associated with the frequent shootings between the police and the drug dealers, as well as between different armed drug factions.

Consequently, many studies have proved that the levels of homicides and *autos de resistência* (homicides in confrontation with the police) have affected mainly the favela residents and, as argued before, both those who are involved with criminal activity, and those who are not. In CDD, for example, over the years of 2007 and 2008, respectively 19 and 26 people were killed in situations of confrontation with the police officers.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, like many collaborators have reported during the film/fieldwork period, this scenario of increasing lethal violence has been and still is the main target of several TV shows and newspapers (as illustrated in Figure 10), which publicises this type of data as literary device for transforming those daily facts into urban tragedies. As stated by Cilene and also by Wellington, within CDD there is a saying amongst the residents that goes like this: "squeeze the newspaper and you will get blood all over your hands".

---

<sup>21</sup> According to the Public Security Institute (ISP) associated with the State Department of Public Security of Rio de Janeiro.





Figure 10: Front cover of the newspaper Meia Hora (left) published in 2008 containing news about CDD and another publication regarding Rio's "pacified favelas" (2010).

Following a profit-making trend, different kinds of mass media representation have contributed to the dissemination of old and persisting stereotypes related to the social group of *favelados*<sup>22</sup> or to marginalised communities in general (Shohat and Stam, 1994). From the 1990s, the so-called “*programas policiais*” – i.e. TV shows focusing on daily crimes and seizures – called *Aqui, Agora* (SBT, 1991), *190 Urgente* (CNT, 1996) and *Cidade Alerta* (Rede Record, 1998), to name but a few, restrictedly portrays episodes that take place in the peripheral neighbourhoods of some of the major Brazilian cities (Nascimento, 2011: 12 [my translation]), as if crimes were not a specificity of many urban centres.<sup>23</sup> In the following decade, the aesthetics of violence related to the favelas and urban peripheries in general, was used as the main background of Brazilian films like *Orfeu* (1999), *Carandiru* (2003), *Elite Squad* (2007; 2010), as I argued earlier. Consequently, besides “revealing oppressive patterns of prejudice” these representations unveil the perversity around the

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to point out that in Brazilian society the term *favelado* is generally used on the one hand by the favela residents as an expression that denotes their place-identity and territorial pride and, on the other hand, by middle and upper classes as a pejorative adjective for a disorderly, impolite or even dirty individual.

<sup>23</sup> More recently, other TV shows are being produced framing the favelas and urban peripheries as “objects of entertainment”, such as *Turma do Gueto* (Rede Record, 2002), *Central da Periferia* (Rede Globo, 2006), etc. See Nascimento, 2011.

“social functionality of stereotypes”, i.e. to exert “a form of social control” over marginalised communities – as “prisons of image” (Shohat and Stam, 1994: 198).

Against that background, over the past years the State Department of Public Security has made a few attempts to control the situation, implementing different and experimental public policies.<sup>24</sup> Some of these public security projects were more consistent than others, but were all discontinued when a new governor was elected. From December 2008, the State Government started putting into practice an ambitious public security project called Police Pacification Units (abbreviated as UPP). This project aims to regain control of the areas previously controlled by armed organized crime, with the daily presence of the military police, even though the force has been frequently called by the State Department and by the media in general as “pacification” or “community police”.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, as I claimed in my MPhil research proposal:

“Many critics have argued that this is a consequence of the fact that Rio will be hosting important international events, such as the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016. To support these events, the government and the private sector are investing vast amounts of resources in public initiatives, making such security projects possible. However, these investments are unequally distributed over the city’s heterogeneous spaces, once more following historic governmental practices that target favelas located around Rio’s touristic area. This is also related to an attempt to

---

<sup>24</sup> Such as *Mutirão pela Paz*, *GPAE (Grupo de Policiamento em Áreas Especiais)* and *PPC (Posto de Policiamento Comunitário)*.

<sup>25</sup> The expressions “pacification police”, “pacified favelas” and “pacification project” are often used by the police forces and members of the State Department of Public Security to contrast with the proposition that there was a “war” in these areas. These expressions have been appropriated by Rio’s and Brazilian press and by the public opinion in general. However favela-dwellers and scholars with different backgrounds constantly criticize the use of these expressions because they are also related to ideas of “pacifying” or “civilizing” these populations (Machado da Silva, 2010).

reshape Rio's public image worldwide, i.e. from a violent and unordered area to a safe and touristic city."

Thereby, in addition to taking into account the criminal rates, the "visibility" of these favelas and the subsequent exposure to the media is one of the most important elements when it comes to define which areas will supposedly benefit from the presence of the "pacification police", whether because of its proximity with Rio's touristic zone or "as in the case of Cidade de Deus, by the fact that it became internationally famous" (Machado da Silva, 2010: 03; [my translation]).<sup>26</sup> This visibility might also explain some over-publicized visits to CDD from important politicians in the past few years, such as the former Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the current president of United States, Barack Obama. Leandro Firmino da Hora, the actor that played the leading character of Li'l Zé (Zé Pequeno) in the film *City of God* which still lives in CDD, was at the time invited to greet the president Obama, but for unknown reasons decided not to go.

Therefore, the visibility and recognition granted to what was historically a place neglected by the state and local powers, considerably improved the dialogue between the public sector and the most significant grassroots organizations in CDD, although in an intermittent and asymmetrical way. Moreover, as I argued in my research proposal, it has influenced many governmental interventions made within CDD in the past decade, from the inclusion of the area in Rio's political and developmental agenda to the implementation of recent public projects (such as the UPPs, the housing policy called *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* and the urbanization project known as *Bairro Maravilha*, etc).<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> According to the State Department of Public Security ([www.upprj.com](http://www.upprj.com)), CDD is one of the 34 areas in Rio that currently has Police Pacification Units. At present, the total amount of favelas which are part of the programme comprehend 233 communities with nothing less than 8.592 police officers, the majority of them trained very recently to join this project. The State Department announced that the goal is to deploy 40 UPPs in Rio by 2014 (year of the World Cup in Brazil).

<sup>27</sup> The supposition that the visibility generated by the film is a positive outcome tends to result in polemic discussions amongst CDD residents. Whilst some say that the visibility promoted a number of public investments inside CDD, many argue that no good or "real changes" came even with the community exposure to the media.

An example of that would be what many members from Cidade de Deus Community Committee and Local Development Agency have referred as "intervention": according to the Agency's president, Ana Lúcia Serafim (also known as Lucinha) and her Committee colleagues, right after the film *City of God* was released a group of institutions' representatives from CDD were invited by the then National Secretary of Public Security, Luiz Eduardo Soares (also a widely known Brazilian anthropologist), to participate in an "intervention" with the purpose of "solving the problem of drug dealing" within CDD. State and local governments, as well as many institutions from the private sector were also involved in this so-called "intervention". Lucinha reported that the group of grassroots institutions were very sceptical about this public initiative because, being social activists who fought for the implementation of fundamental public policies inside the spaces regarded as peripheral, they were much more concerned with the absence of other governmental programmes. As stated by Lucinha:

Our problem is not only the drug dealing, our problem is also the lack of educational, health and employment policies, and these people approached us as if violence was our biggest concern because of what they saw in the film.

As a result, the proposal was rejected by the group of institutions' representatives and, as a response to this "intervention", they decided to create in 2003 the aforementioned Community Committee and the Local Development Agency in 2006. The Community Committee is a political network formed by institutions and agents involved with militancy for the social development of CDD, while the Local Agency, is a formal organization through which they can implement projects and initiatives within the area with the support of public and private partners.





**Figure 11:** Lucinha (right) and other members of the Community Committee during the participatory timeline activity.

Until the implementation of the UPPs in Cidade de Deus, the favela was in fact classified as a high-crime area. The confrontations between the rival gangs resulted in a territorial division into many different localities in CDD, a situation that was shown in the film. After decades of conflict, an armed drug faction called *Comando Vermelho* (Red Command) took exclusive control of the traffic in the whole area. CDD is often seen as one of the cradles of this criminal organization. According to NuPESP (Research Centre for Criminal Justice and Public Security from the State Department of Public Security), during 2007 and 2008 (thus before the UPPs were deployed) the police department responsible for the area reported 29 and 36 homicides respectively, 86 and 96 drug apprehensions and 70 and 62 guns seizures.

Due to the geographical extension and complexity of CDD, three Police Pacification Units were implemented in February 2009. Interestingly, their position adheres to the division imposed by the drug dealing territorial control: as shown in Figure 12, one UPP is located in Karatê (1), one in the localities named Thirteen and Fifteen (2), and another covers the Apartments area, including nearby localities (3). These localities are presented throughout the video-walking immersions with the young collaborators. The division of CDD in different areas can be explained not only by geographical and spatial aspects, but also as a result of the continuing construction of sub-housing projects (such as Rocinha 2, Tangará, Pantanal and so on). Moreover, as highly emphasized by Bom and his fellows from the local soccer team, these borders are also related to the dividing lines imposed firstly by the rival gangs during the 1970-1980s, and later by the following drug lords that controlled each

area (aspect highlighted by some research participants over the film).



**Figure 12:** Map of CDD divided by three UPP perimeters in blue.

Even though the crime rates when compared with the aforementioned ones dropped considerably in 2012 (for example, the UPP reported 5 homicides, 300 drug apprehensions and 13 guns seizures), there is a large volume of works being published about the issues involving the permanent presence of the military police within the favelas, such as the persistent cases of corruption, the violation of basic human rights by the police officers and the imposition of control on the social lives of the residents (arbitrary prohibitions), amongst many others.

Based on the film/fieldwork experience, I argue that even the issues which were initially pointed out by scholars and public security managers as being successful within the “pacification project”, like the “ceasefire” and the liberty to walk freely across these areas, have been failing recently. During the period in which I was in Brazil (from April to October 2013), two shootings between the drug dealers and the “community police” took place in two different localities within CDD and a

woman and a police officer were murdered by firearm shots. In addition, over the period I was doing fieldwork (around 4 months), I was able to observe (and also confirm my impressions with the collaborators) the existence of at least two permanent and active “*bocas de fumo*” (corners where drugs are commercialized). People running those corners were based within specific localities, even if in a much more discrete way than during the pre-UPP period. Precisely because of this situation (and following the instructions of some research participants), two of CDD’s many localities could not be included in the “walking with video” (Pink, 2007) activity (which will be further discussed below).

In this chapter, whilst presenting some aspects of CDD social and political background, I have described a few examples of real-life situations and episodes in which the fictional narratives and the subsequent exposure to the media have played an influential role. Within this framework, a whole set of questions might be addressed such as: If CDD had not become internationally famous after the release of the film *City of God*, would it still have received a UPP? Would Barack Obama have visited Rocinha or Vidigal instead? Would the local organizations have had the same reaction to the public interventions? Would the social imaginary of these people and institutions around CDD have changed as a result of the fictional narratives?

With these questions in mind, Hans Belting’s (2005a, 2005b) *image-body-medium* iconology might be useful in order to understand the dynamics between our internal or “mental images” and the physical or “external images” to which we are constantly exposed. The concept of *image*, as Belting notes, has to be approached anthropologically and should be understood mostly as a “symbolic entity” (2005a: 42). The *body*, on the other hand, relates to the quality of perception to which a “person” or “mind” is needed. And, finally, the *medium* amounts for the “agent” or “physical form” through which transmission will take place (Belting, 2005a; his emphasis). This “critical iconology”, as Belting argues, is much needed in our current over-mediated society as it allows to better understand the field of “politics of

images" or, in other words, the collective "*imaginaire*" of different societies (op. cit., 2005b: 303-4; his emphasis).

Moreover, as the author asserts, "images successfully testify to the absence of what they make present" (Belting, 2005a: 52). In that sense, "mental images are inscribed in external ones and vice versa" (op. cit., 2005a: 49). Likewise, I would argue, fictional narratives exercise influence on realities and vice versa.

### **3 > EXPERIENCING THE MAKING OF *THE WAY I SEE TODAY***

My reflections on the making of *The way I see today* are tightly connected to the conceptual and methodological choices I made to carry out this project. Since the very first moment I began thinking about this work, I aimed to deploy a collaborative audiovisual-based research project, partly because I had the desire to engage with visual anthropology and collaborative methods of research and partly because I had been influenced by my previous experiences inside CDD.

#### **3.1. Motivations behind the conduction of this research project**

Fieldwork is a spatial, interactive and embodied practice, based on relationships between the researcher and the research participants (Clifford, 1997). Not by chance, there is a great number of critical accounts in contemporary social anthropology pointing out the issues involving researchers' positionality in relation to the field site s/he is embedded in, and the implications for the nature and quality of the anthropological data that s/he will be able to collect during her/his fieldwork experience (Loftsdóttir, 2002; Narayan, 1993; Schramm, 2005; to cite but a few). Multicultural elements, political preferences, academic and professional background, as well as the researchers' previous contact (or lack of) with the field site, are all components that affect the way research participants will perceive and interact with the ethnographer. In this section, I will describe the pluralistic identities I have already assumed in CDD, which allowed me to establish a long-

standing relationship with many of the participants of my MPhil research project. I will also explore the influence of this background on the dynamics of access to place and people within CDD.

In 2008, I carried out a research project for my Master Degree in Social Sciences in which I discussed the emergence of new political-cultural actors in Rio de Janeiro's favelas, mainly linked to the hip hop movement. The one-year ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in CDD accounted for the use of audiovisual means by members of the Central Union of Favelas (CUFA) not only as a way to express and represent their ideas, but also as a local reaction to the stereotypes of marginality and lack of resources to which they are constantly associated.<sup>28</sup> At the time, CDD was going through one of the most violent periods of its social history (first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) and my ability to move within the area was limited by the drug dealing activities, which explicitly imposed spatial limits for the outsiders. My work was at times interrupted by the warnings of local shootings. My thesis – titled "Doing it our way": the audiovisual aids for "re-signifying the favela" (Da Costa, 2009) – was examined by a social scientist, called Silvia Ramos, specialized in public security, as well as on local community responses to exclusion and urban violence.

In the following year, Ramos became sub-secretary of the State Department of Social Welfare and Human Rights and invited me to carry out an ethnographic research in CDD about the impact of the recently implemented Police Pacification Unit. It was during this work that I was able to circulate freely inside CDD for the first time and had the chance to become familiar with its many localities, squares, (back) alleys and *quebradas*.<sup>29</sup> Along with this, I was able to visit several grassroots institutions and interview residents and community agents, many of whom would become great collaborators throughout the next few years. It was also over the

---

<sup>28</sup> The Central Union of Favelas (abbreviated as CUFA) is a NGO founded in 1998 by several favela-dwellers of Rio de Janeiro, mostly related to the hip-hop universe and influenced by black and other civil rights movements.

<sup>29</sup> The term *quebradas* is slang used by periphery-dwellers for street corners and/or alleyways which are very common within informal urban spaces. The expression started to be used in São Paulo and nowadays it is also part of the oral language of Rio's favelas.

course of this work that I realized how engaged these people and organizations were with their fight for fundamental rights and basic needs.<sup>30</sup>

From 2010 to 2012, as a consequence of the commissioned ethnographic research, I worked as a local manager and later as a fieldwork supervisor in the social reintegration program of the so-called “pacified favelas”, titled UPP Social, which was originally developed under the scope of the State Department of Social Welfare and Human Rights. Later on, this project was implemented by the Planning Department of Rio de Janeiro (Instituto Pereira Passos) and co-sponsored by UN-Habitat, the United Nations regional agency for urban development on human settlements.<sup>31</sup> UPP Social was designed to be a coordinating platform of the local government interventions inside this set of favelas based on a non-stop process of collaborative data collection conducted by a team of fieldwork researchers (coming from diverse scholarly backgrounds) along with the inputs of numerous key local actors. The final goal was to provide an expert social diagnosis of each and every different site (also combining what the local government had to offer with what the community elected as priorities) in order to promote the social and urban development, as well as the cultural and symbolic integration of these favelas to the rest of the city. Considering that public policies and social programmes in Brazil hardly ever involve the communities (any type of community) in the process of political decisions, UPP Social was in theory a pioneering methodology in which public managers and community residents could jointly work for the same purposes.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> During the MPhil fieldwork, one of the off-camera collaborative activities I conducted was the development of a timeline of CDD social history with some of the members of the Community Committee and Local Development Agency. During this activity, we came across a total number of 48 initiatives in Cidade de Deus: 32 devoted to sociocultural projects; 11 purely devoted to social purposes; and 5 Residents Associations spread over the territory. The majority of the initiatives are formally institutionalized, however some run their activities informally and a few are, at present, less active than they were in the past.

<sup>31</sup> UPP Social was designed by the economist Ricardo Henriques.

<sup>32</sup> Since mid-2012, when Ricardo Henriques decided to leave his post at the Planning Department, UPP Social is being led by the public manager, Eduarda La Rocque. She has shifted the main focus of the project from social and urban development to the promotion of economic development in areas where the UPPs have been deployed, following the local and state governments' intentions of making Rio a great deal for the private sector and foreigner investors.



Accordingly, as a local manager inside CDD, my daily routine was based on open-ended interviews and on the promotion of meetings with and between NGO representatives, members of Residents Associations, religious leaders and other public managers and administrators. Thus, even though I was working for the public sector, the nature of my post was essentially ethnographic and involved implementing social and collaborative projects on a daily basis. Considering that the favela residents are historically object of unfulfilled public promises, as a public agent I always took great care not to make promises and commitments that I could not actually carry out. Despite all the inherent tensions when it comes to relations between representatives of the public sector and members of civil society (and in spite of the fact that the original methodology had been affected by political and economic interests), these working experiences granted me many friendships and cooperative relationships based on mutual trust, honesty and partnership. This academic and professional trajectory not only allowed me to gather social, cultural, political and geographical knowledge about CDD, while giving me freedom of mobility within the area, but it also made me part of a local network of social actors engaged with the social development of the region.

My background with the field site was also influenced by a short but still very important experience in 2011. Over a 4-month period, I was responsible for coordinating a sociocultural project called *Agência de Redes para Juventude* (which has now its British version called Agency) in CDD and 5 other favelas with the presence of the UPPs.<sup>33</sup> The main objective of *Agência* is to support the development of sociocultural ideas and projects from young favela residents and, at the same time, promote their autonomy and social potential to change and intervene in their communities. It was during this experience that I had the opportunity to work with Márcio Gomes, who continued working at *Agência* as a local producer and later as a field researcher until the beginning of 2013.

---

<sup>33</sup> See: <http://agenciarj.org/>.

Márcio (the collaborator that conducts the film narrative) is a resourceful 29-year old young man who is involved in a wide range of social, cultural and political organizations inside CDD. Still in his teenage years, Márcio got involved with the social and cultural activities promoted by the mentioned Roman Catholic Church Parish called *Pai Eterno e São José*. Later, along with the other regular members of the religious institution, he founded the Parish Church Social Sector. Nowadays, he works as a volunteer teacher at the NGO Seed of Life Association (ASVI), giving photography and graphic design workshops to children and youngsters from CDD. Márcio is also currently engaged with some of the sociocultural collectives that resulted from the aforementioned *Agência* (some of which I was able to include in the film - I will return to these groups further ahead).



**Figure 13:** Still of Márcio Gomes filming cutaways of teaching activities for the project *Casa Nossa*.

Márcio and I have been reflecting on how my MPhil research project would turn out after we had this first work experience together. Since then, he had shown a great interest in the research theme. Besides, considering that recently he has been engaging with video/cinema collectives inside and outside CDD, the audiovisual component of the project and the fact that the main outcome is a documentary film, attracted him to the project. Consequently, Márcio worked closely with me



throughout the main stages of the film/fieldwork experience. He naturally took on a research assistant role from the very beginning, helping me to locate people, giving me technical support, taking me to meet groups I had not met before in my past experiences in CDD, and above all, reflecting with me on the complexities of the research project itself.<sup>34</sup> Either on or off-camera (many times helping with the sound recording and cutaways), Márcio was able to participate in the majority of the conversations, interviews, and fieldwork activities, in which he often played an important role as 'leading character' or "narrative voice" for the documentary (MacDougall, 1991: 150).

The acquaintanceship and partnerships established with CDD residents throughout the past few years are directly associated with the facilitated access I had to the institutions and local projects during my previous and last experiences. Moreover, this background provided me the capacity to gradually develop a factual and, at the same time, deep intuitive understanding of CDD as a social and political space, however I would never reduce my history with this community to this. This background has been crucial for the development of my personal and professional maturity; it has been the basis of my reflections as an anthropologist.

### **3.2. Facing challenges in the field**

During the first month in the field, some interlocutors questioned my seven-month absence and the reasons why I decided to quit my job to study abroad. As I expected, for some subjects it was necessary to redefine my identity in the field, from "our friend from UPP Social" – as Lucinha referred to me in public – to a returning university researcher. However this issue did not come up as often as I expected it would do, and taking into consideration that I had already assumed multiple identities in CDD.

---

<sup>34</sup> After a few exchanges, Márcio and I agreed that it would be fair to reward him for his work and considerable time devoted to the research project, since he was not only collaborating but also literally working as a research assistant. This possibility had been contemplated in the consent form I wrote specially for the role of main collaborator.

The purposes and outcomes of the current research project, on the other hand, were usually the main target of questioning and interrogation in the field, even for those subjects with experience at university level (and consequently familiar with the universe of scholarly research) and who had known me for some time. I believe that this might be related to the fact that favelas are generally classified by their residents as over-researched topics. In addition, it is very common to hear them arguing that only the academia benefits from social researches while, for favela residents, there are no positive outcomes from being "informants" or "objects" of research. It is also very common to hear them saying that they never have access to the findings or "final results", whether they are qualitative and/or quantitative. When I was a project manager in CDD, I experienced this situation myself a few times. Even though this was not part of my set of responsibilities, I gave some university researchers the access to important CDD local actors and taught them how to move around the area (providing them with maps from the Planning Department and so on). In other words, despite the fact that I am not a resident, I have already played the role of informant within CDD.<sup>35</sup> After the researchers got 'familiarized' with the place and I was no longer necessary, they usually disappeared. If I never received any feedback from them, it seems fair to assume that CDD residents/local actors have gone many times through a similar experience. As a consequence, they do not always cooperate with academic researchers.

Not by chance, this was the main issue I faced during the several pre-interview/conversation meetings I carried out (with many groups more than twice), especially in those involving representatives from traditional local grassroots institutions, which had already been through different research experiences in CDD. Wellington, for example, who later became one of the most engaged collaborators of my MPhil project (providing me with a great deal of information about the social

---

<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, over this period I also played the role of informant for a few CDD social workers (as well as former residents) who needed information about a CDD locality that is generally known as being difficult to circulate in.

history of CDD, as shown in his individual interview at the beginning of the film), asked me, in our first exchange, how CDD would "benefit from this research project" and how I was planning to give them a "feedback about the research results". Over the course of the fieldwork (and also influenced by my previous knowledge about the field), it became clear that this kind of reaction was not a matter of personal rejection to my research project or even to myself. On the contrary, it was related to their concerns of having their experiences and stories reinterpreted in a fetishist or exotic way (as usual), or even having their local meanings and knowledge appropriated by scholars that would then be able to speak for them in the public arenas of discussion (Nascimento, 2011: 06). Correspondingly, this resistance is also related to what Shohat and Stam (2006: 446 [my translation]) define as "ethnic isolationism": a critique to direct connections between certain certificate of origin and ideologies of authenticity or legitimacy.

Iara Oliveira – co-founder of Grupo Alfazendo, one of the most important grassroots institutions of CDD, which was also part of Community Committee – used Paulo Lins's work as an example to illustrate her concerns. During our first meeting, Iara explained that Lins used all the interviews collected by a team of research assistants that worked for the anthropologist Alba Zaluar as the raw material for his novel. However, none of the assistants were even mentioned in the book or credited properly as collaborators of this work. It is interesting to point out that whenever we faced that kind of questioning, Márcio usually argued: "the difference between this research project and others that have been done about Cidade de Deus is the fact that it involves a documentary film". According to his analysis, the research findings would be available to anyone who is interested in seeing the documentary film, and for that reason they will not be the privilege of the academia or of a single university researcher.

It is interesting to reflect on Márcio's sentence since it seems quite paradoxical to argue for the advantages of being portrayed in a documentary film, when it is quite consensual amongst CDD residents that the way they were framed in the film *City*

*of God* is extremely problematic, and also an iconic case in which "pre-existing stereotypes were reused by the cinema" (Shohat and Stam, 2006: 286 [my translation]). In addition, I believe that Márcio was also referring to the "index/icon quality of cinematographic images" in opposition to the access of knowledge through texts (Torresan, 2011: 121), because even though texts can be easily accessible, many people tend not to read them. A good example might be the fact that, although CDD residents with whom I have interacted were generally aware of Paulo Lins's novel, only a few declared having read it. Conversely, nearly everyone has seen the film *City of God* (and many, more than once on TV) and was very familiar with the photo stills of the film that Márcio and I chose to use as objects of elicitation. Consequently, questions regarding the film *City of God* seem to encompass many other questions related to the repertoire of cultural representations that have been made about CDD (as one can tell by watching *The way I see today*).<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 14:** Fabiano from the music band Lamarca talking about the stills of *City of God*.

In addition, as I argued in my research proposal, in spite of the fact that the film *City of God* was based on a book wrote by an 'insider', CDD residents in general not only feel misrepresented by these fictional works, but also excluded from the process of representing what is supposedly a story about 'their community'. Even though I had

---

<sup>36</sup> A few research participants declared that they decided not to see the film *City of God* because of the bad repercussion it had in the community after its release in 2002, when a première screening was arranged for CDD residents in a nearby neighbourhood. It is also relevant to emphasize that awareness about Alba Zaluar's anthropological research is by no means widespread amongst CDD residents. Except for the members of Casa de Cultura, Grupo Alfazendo and Community Committee (generally composed by people from the same generation as Paulo Lins), hardly anyone knew about the doctoral research and, in the majority of cases, people were introduced to Zaluar's book for the first time during our time together.

developed the original idea of this research project based on the many conversations I witnessed in the past regarding the impact of the novel and the film – as if the subjects themselves wanted to make their side of the story public (Camas Baena et al, 2004: 130) – I could not help wondering if they would feel the same with regards to the ethnographic film that is part of this research project. How could I avoid, as an author, the reproduction of the same stereotypes and "deeply-rooted stigmas" already surrounding the people from CDD (Perlman, 2005)?

Therefore, the political and ethical implications of representing others were not only the kick-start to design the research questions, but also a great concern of the main visual research outcome. Besides being interested in the discourses and styles of argumentation regarding the impact of the repertoire of representations made about CDD, I also had a parallel intention of investigating whether (or how) exploratory and collaborative tools could help shape the ethnographic documentary. In addition, I also wanted to explore to what extent the research collaborators could become active parts in the process of representing themselves and the social space where they live.

### **3.3. Shaping outcomes**

The challenges and dilemmas I experienced over the film/fieldwork period are by no means a prerogative of this research project. The relationship between the researcher and research participants has been the target of several discussions since the emergence of anthropology, especially after ethnographic fieldwork became a specificity of the discipline. Later on, the researcher-subjects interaction became one of the main focuses of the post-modern critique concerned with debates surrounding the representation of "others" (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Fabian, 1983; MacDougall, 1991; Taussig, 1993).

More recently, "new approaches to ethnographic research" – many of which involve the use of visual and sensorial means – are being developed proposing "an

emphasis on *processes* of research and representation" (Pink et al, 2004: 03). In that context, one of the most significant current discussions concerns the use of collaborative-exploratory approaches and its connections with the idea of reflexivity (Camas Baena et al, 2004; Fluehr-Lobban, 2008; Pink et al, 2004; Ruby, 2000).

Following a similar analytical trend, Grant Kester (2011: 11) describes the emergence of collaborative-based experiences as part of a "cyclical paradigm shift" involving not only the field of contemporary art, but also the crossing of several "zones of symbolic production". These changes, according to the author, might be closely related to the "complex and contradictory mixture of cultural and geopolitical forces" such as the establishment of the neoliberal tendency, the immigrant intolerance, and the increase of right-wing movements combined with fundamentalist influences (op. cit., 2011: 09-11). On the other hand, this framework is also responsible for a "growing sense of political renewal" and, consequently, for the development of many routes of resistance. As Kester affirms (op. cit., 2011: 12):

This is a time of both peril and opportunity, as the dominant political narratives used to explain and justify social and economic inequality, the distribution of resources and opportunities within society, and the relative responsibility of the state to the public at large, are being contested and destabilized. As these narratives lose their legitimacy, space is opened for new stories and new visions for the future.

Influenced by the crisscrossing of these forces, we find contemporary (art) projects based on collective practices and politically committed. In a clear opposition to "object-based" projects, collaborative and participatory projects imply a "process-based experience" as a structural part of the production of art-related content and different forms of knowledge (op. cit., 2011: 15).

Against that background, even though collaborative methods of research have not

been defined “explicitly” (Marcus, 2008: 07) – which means that one has to find its own way of deploying it – the knowledge I have accumulated about this field site over the past few years justifies my perceptions that an “ethically conscious” method of research could not only be more successful, but also result in a “better research” because it “involves research participants/collaborators as partners in the research process” (Fluehr-Lobban, 2008: 175).

Therefore, in line with the objectives of the research project, one of the first activities Márcio and I developed in the field was to establish a list of residents, institutions and groups we would like to meet. Throughout the process of contacting and approaching our original list of subjects, these people were gradually getting more engaged in the process of selecting and finding the participants for the ethnographic film. Accordingly, they started to point out a great number of people who they believed Márcio and I should talk to, and whose opinions about the film they would like to hear and see as part of the “video-recording”. Their suggestions included long-term residents of CDD, former residents that took part in Alba Zaluar's researches (like Paulo Lins), people related to the real-life prototypes of the characters of the film *City of God* (such as the mother of the real-life Li'l Zé, who unfortunately I was not able to find) and a whole set of people that we could not contact in our four-month research. During this process, Márcio and I agreed that it would also be interesting if this first list of interlocutors could suggest the other members of the conversation we were arranging to discuss the research questions. In that way, they would not only be sharing with us some important decisions from the perspective of the research execution, but also broadening the possibilities for reflection and interaction, as well as helping us to establish a more encompassing and richer network of voices.<sup>37</sup> The result of this horizontal approach was the creation of different groups of discussion, which in the ethnographic film are represented by the network of people gathered at the event

---

<sup>37</sup> I had several pre-conversation meetings with the groups not only to address the purposes of the research project, but also to explain that the main outcome would be an ethnographic film (as mentioned in the information sheet that accompanied the consent form).

named *V Café Cultural* (the first conversation of the film inside Casa de Cultura).<sup>38</sup>

In the past few years, Casa de Cultura promoted four of these meetings (one in 2011 and 3 in 2012) with the objective to discuss and recollect important aspects of CDD social history, as well as personal stories of (former) residents and social activists related to the place. During our meetings to discuss the role of Casa de Cultura in the film, the current president of the institution called Roma Maria decided to promote this year's event in connection with this research project, turning it into a filming/research activity through which we could have better access to "multiple" and "polyphonic perspectives" about the research questions (Fluehr-Lobban, 2008: 175). Along with Wellington and other members of Casa de Cultura, she decided who should be invited to take part in the event. She also publicized the event by email under the theme "Cidade de Deus, other stories", in a clear opposition to the "story" told by the film *City of God*. Therefore, even though she appears very briefly in the film, Roma acted as an important mediator research and collaborator, mobilizing the participants within a timeframe that Márcio and I would hardly be able to match it ourselves.

It is worth mentioning that my intention with this research project was never to focus merely on individual structured interviews and observational scenes, even though some of the latter were included to convey the specificity of important figures and groups in the film (like the local collectives that will be described below). On the contrary, I acted in an interventionist and collaborative way and used the video camera as a catalyst device to arrange encounters and provoke interactions between different local actors, thus placing together distinct generations, backgrounds and life experiences. By acting this way, I was able to explore to what extent the different opinions about the novel and the film *City of God* were also related to the different positioning the collaborators have within CDD. For example, during the *Café Cultural*, while Wellington was interested in

---

<sup>38</sup> For example, while selecting who would take part in the conversations, Valéria Barbosa chose Cilene Vieira, Bom decided which members of the soccer team should be part of our conversation, Lucinha suggested Cleonice Dias and so on.



emphasizing that the novel and the film were fictional works and could not be “judged as having good or bad effects” over the community – which is clearly related to the fact that he is himself an author of the literary/fiction field – other people were more concerned with discussing the real-life effects brought about by the film *City of God*. Over the course of the *Café*, for instance, Márcio Montenegro, Tio Azo and Roma described work-related situations in which they felt embarrassed or even oppressed by their colleagues' and employers' questioning with regards to the fact that they were residents of CDD. Elsewhere Laudelina Ferreira, a social agent from the Community Committee, reported to me an even worse situation. She was dismissed from her job at a retail store in one of Rio's many shopping malls after the owner became aware of her home address, which she was unable to disguise in her professional profile (as many people from CDD used to do) because her street name is called Avenida Cidade de Deus. There is a general agreement amongst CDD residents regarding the fact that *favelados* are always in disadvantage in the search for employments when compared with residents from the “formal city”. The research participants also tend to agree that it became even harder for CDD residents to find jobs as a consequence of the stigmas reinforced by the film regarding their local identity.

Although “asking people to actively cooperate in the making of a film about their lives naturally increases their power” (Ruby, 2000: 208), the collaborative film-making process is not “problem-free” and is constantly permeated by social negotiations between the researcher and the participants (Camas Baena et al, 2004: 122). For instance, even though I had the desire to work with a great number of collaborators, due to my previous experiences in CDD I tended to give special attention to representatives of grassroots institutions. My expectations were that they would enhance the reflection on my research questions because of their long history of social militancy in CDD. In actual fact, they were very important in the composition of answers and questionings about the impact of the film (represented more explicitly in the documentary by the role of Wellington). Márcio, on the other hand, tended to emphasize the importance of working with the local youth projects

because they would provide us with less rhetorical and more contemporary perspectives. In that sense, Márcio played a very important role, not only by introducing me to these groups, but above all shifting my perceptions that younger residents would have less memories, questionings and critiques about the repertoire. It was from my interactions with these local collectives that I also had access to relevant ethnographic data, like the historical account of the territorial rivalry in CDD provided during one of our video-walking activities (I will explore this research tool further ahead). During these activities, the youngsters (Márcio, Adany, Edson, Flávio and Welbert) were constantly discussing the tensions between fiction and reality(ies) on and off-camera. This is also explicit in the group discussion in *Casa Nossa*, when they contest that in actual fact there were no kids involved in drug trafficking, nor such heavy firearms in the period portrayed in the film *City of God* (1960s-1980s). These interactions also reveal that the ethnographic film could be developed as a critical commentary of issues concerning "the nature of the 'real', the fabrication of society, the viability of cities and the nature of violence" (Jaguaribe, 2004: 334), and fostering discussions that the film *City of God* itself started about 10 years ago.

Following the phenomenological approach, it might be interesting to connect the filmmaking experience to Jean-François Lyotard's (1971) ideas around the opposing concepts of "discourse" and "figure". The idea of "discourse" is directly associated with the experiences around "language", "communication" and "interpretation", whilst "figure" relates to direct and sensorial experiences such as "form", "color", and "designs" (Carroll, 1989: 30). According to David Carroll's interpretation, Lyotard's critical work analyses art as a heuristic device to unveil the "limitations of theory" and "treats the figural as a disruptive element that is, at the same time, within and outside discourse in general" (op. cit., 1989: 24).

Over the course of the video-walking practices (as I will exemplify in the next section), as well as during other filming situations, whilst research participants criticised the stereotyped images associated to their social group perpetuated by

the Brazilian cinema and within the dominant media in general, at the same time they ended up themselves contradicting their discourses while reproducing to a certain extent the same images through a similar process of selective violence in their narratives. In other words, interpretations (whether ethnographic or artistic) are always charged with problematic dynamics, and an insider perspective does not necessarily mean that representations will be more or less assertive.

### 3.4. Video-walking immersion

The youth collectives presented in the ethnographic film were developed as by-products of *Agência* and are involved with different sorts of cultural activities, such as music, fashion, street dance and cultural events.<sup>39</sup> After a few talks, Márcio and I decided to work closely with three youth collectives (being also the same groups presented in the film):

(1) *Casa Nossa* (Our Home) is a group formed by members of the metal rock band called *Lamarca*, which appear at end of the film. Márcio, Marcus Vinicius, Flávio Weber e Rodrigo Martins use the terrace of Vinicius's house to teach music lessons to children from the locality where they live and were raised. This area is known as Rocinha 2 (presented at the beginning of the film) and is usually untouched by social, cultural and public projects, not only because of its geographical position (around twenty-minute walking distance from CDD central region), but also as a result of the embedded presence of drug dealing activities.

---

<sup>39</sup> I define collectives (or youth collectives) as a group of people gathered formally or informally to work for a common objective and usually involving interventions within specific urban spaces or localities. The term is commonly associated with art and cultural activities and is not necessarily profit making.



**Figure 15:** Vinicius (left) and Flávio (right) performing after our conversation.

(2) Following a similar methodology, *Movimentos* (Movements) is a project led by Adany Lima, a 30-year old dancer, who was born in CDD. Adany runs this project with the help of a secretary who is also a dancer, Edson Knowlles. Both played a very active role filming during the walking tours over CDD's area, and bringing relevant aspects to the debate as well.



**Figure 16:** Adany (left) and Edson (right) during the video-walking immersion.

(3) *Estilo Favella* (Favela Style) is a fashion label created by Cristiano Maciel and Welbert Coni, developed not only to create and sell T-shirts, but above all to convey a political message and change the predominant image usually associated with CDD residents and favela-dwellers (as both participants argued in the film).



**Figure 17:** Cristiano (left), Márcio and Welbert (right) watching the extras of *City of God*.

I believe that the "walking with video" activities (Pink, 2007) – which Márcio also called "visual immersion" – developed with members of the projects described above, might be the most explicit result of the exploratory-collaborative approach developed during fieldwork. As Paul Henley has argued, ethnographic film-making "offers a very powerful means of evoking a sense of place, both in terms of the aural as well as the visual qualities of a particular environment" (2012-in press: 2). In that sense, the video-walking experience worked as a direct route to ethnographic knowledge which could not have been produced by text (Torresan, 2011).



**Figure 18:** One of the sequences during the video-walking activities.

Sarah Pink defines these video-walking tours or immersions as a:

Phenomenological research method that attends to sensorial elements of human experience and place-making. As a simple method this means walking with and video-recording research participants as they experience, tell and show their material, immaterial and social environments in personally, socially and culturally specific ways (2007: 240).

Noticing how familiar the youngsters were with the use of audio-visual means, I proposed to them to use their own cameras (whichever they feel more comfortable) in addition to mine.<sup>40</sup> As a result, the set of 3-4 cameras involved in the shooting accounts for, amongst other issues, the counterparts' reactions to the on-going social and urban changes which have been taking place in the area, especially those related to the post-UPP period, when different government programs started to happen in those spaces. As the group said repeatedly off-camera during our walks, had the UPPs not been present inside CDD, we could never have done this kind of research/filming activity.

Considering that I know the site very well geographically, one of my purposes was also to experience "a sense of place" in a different way, through their "exercise of experiencing and imagining", and also as a recollection of memories (Pink, 2007: 240). So, besides taking on board their options of how to frame CDD from different localities, I also provoked their memories and reflections asking the simplest questions. One of the outcomes that called my attention during the editing process was how comfortable they were filming some situations, and shooting scenes that I would feel awkward or even ethically compromised to film myself. For instance, the scene captured by Edson of one resident taking some things out of the trash while pushing a baby in his pushchair, or the framing by Adany of a sofa floating down the river. From my perspective, filming these scenes created images that were in direct conflict with what I believed should be depicted, since I feared they could reinforce

---

<sup>40</sup> I also made available to them other two cameras I had (an 'old' PD-150 and a GO-PRO) to be used as they wished.

the already deeply rooted middle/upper-class stereotypes of favelas as underprivileged spaces. Moreover, these images might serve as arguments for state and local managers to justify the already unequal distribution of public services in spaces regarded as peripheral to the city (as I heard many times whilst I was myself a project manager inside CDD). This might still be the case; however it was a decision that places the viewer in direct contact with the collaborators' visual choices and perspectives.

These concerns are also related to the ambiguities around the processes of shifting from the condition of *objects* to *subjects* of the discourses and representations (Da Costa, 2009). For example, many times during the field/filmwork the research collaborators showed their discomfort regarding the way their identity of *favelado* is negatively portrayed in the film *City of God*. However, is very common to see them using the same category as a strategy to acquire recognition, visibility, or their inclusion in a certain domain (e.g. to claim funds for their social projects, to build partnerships within the mainstream society). In other words, the idea of *favelado* can be used as a relational category depending on how it is operationalized by the subjects (Nascimento, 2011: 17).

The fact that many research collaborators have addressed the film *City of God* as a problematic interpretation of CDD reality mainly because it connects the fictional narrative to the community is also symptomatic. They explained many times that, considering that *City of God* is a fiction film and, precisely because of that, it has some form of poetic allowance, they would not feel uncomfortable if the film had focused on a hypothetic community with a different name. In other words, it became clear that some research collaborators resent being excluded from the process of representing 'their community', and as important as questioning the stereotypes and real-life effects on CDD, is the struggle over the possibility of detaining control of the processes of representation.

As Jay Ruby has argued, in spite of the fact that research outcomes based on

collaborative approaches might unveil a perspective "dissimilar to the dominant practice" (2000: 196), according to the same author:

For a production to be truly collaborative, the parties involved must be equal in their competencies or have achieved an equitable division of labor. Involvement in the decision-making process must occur at all significant junctures (2000: 208).

I believe that the building of an audiovisual-based collaborative approach goes beyond that, bearing in mind that in the case of this research project it was more radically represented through the experience of the video-walking activities where the participants had their own "data-gathering device" (Henley, 2004: 116). It is also related to the fact that Márcio worked closely with me in the research execution and played a vital role involving and convincing other residents that collaborating with us would allow them to be part of the process of producing knowledge about CDD which, as I argued before, they all wished to do. In that sense, the documentary film acted as a "type of intervention that serves the documentary's protagonists" (Camas Baena et al, 2004: 132), as well as my own scholarly motives.

Although I have consulted Márcio many times during the editing process, especially regarding some scenes which I was particularly concerned with, and we have made some decisions together, it is worth highlighting that the whole experience (and the nearly 100 hours of footage) in the end are highly edited by me (film and text).<sup>41</sup> It was over the editing process that, as Paul Henley (in press: 15) noted, I had to "re-engage with the material", starting from the viewing and selection of the rushes and the challenge of electing the subjects and conversations that would lead the ethnographic film, to the exhaustive search for a narrative shape. Moreover, in

---

<sup>41</sup> After watching together a very rough cut of the film, we decided to cut out information that seemed merely speculative to us, such as that regarding the prohibition of the shooting of *City of God* inside the community imposed by the drug faction, amongst others. We had no intention of nurturing the controversy associated with an already over-exposed theme and, above all, we did not want to spread any rumors based on unreliable data.



order to convey the objectives of my research project and the dynamics involved in the making of *The way I see today*, I have also made use of the voice-over as an elucidating/stylistic device which makes even more explicit my authorial interference.

Even though authorship happens throughout all phases of the fieldwork process and even before them, as Henley suggests (op. cit.), it was mostly during this post-fieldwork stage that basic structures of hierarchy and control are explicitly retained by my role as an anthropological researcher and as the main author of the ethnographic film.<sup>42</sup>

#### **4 > CONCLUDING AN OPEN-ENDED STORY**

In this research project, my intention was not to focus on the depiction of the novel and the film's "mistakes of representation" (Shohat and Stam, 2006: 285 [my translation]) or to depict 'reality as it is' as opposed to the supposedly 'unreal' way that CDD was depicted in the past. In a context of a society where ethnic, racial and class distinctions apparently shape people's perceptions of others, my intention with this thesis was to amplify the access to different voices and representations *from* and *about* Cidade de Deus, and at the same time, unveil the ambiguities surrounding these depictions and the contested terrain around them.

Angela Torresan (2011: 121) argues that films "may not contain the whole story, they may not tell everything", however these objects might "provide us with a form of understanding ethnographic realities that is sensorial, direct, and immediate, while also imaginative and suggestive of wider arguments". Thus, the ethnographic film explores the bridges between fiction and realities, not as opposing binaries, but

---

<sup>42</sup> It might be relevant to state that, in order to meet the deadlines imposed by my progression from the MPhil to the PhD programme, I have worked on a narrative structure which is not necessarily equivalent to my intended final version of *The way I see today*. I have already planned a few screenings of this newly edited version at CDD and I will keep working on the ethnographic film after my MPhil graduation. Accordingly, I will stimulate the interference of the research participants in the editing process.

as complementary categories. Even though the research participants know that there are many ways of depicting what they understand as their realities, the story told by the fictional film does not satisfy their perception that people have of themselves, and of the place with which they so deeply identify. This position becomes very clear when the collaborators contest why there were so many concerns with "reality" or realism in the film *City of God* which used non-professional actors and real-life settings and situations, and so little when it comes to historical issues such as the types of guns and the children involved in the drug-dealing business? To what and to whom this 'cinematographic excess' serves? It is quite consensual amongst CDD residents that the film *City of God* creates even more racial and class prejudice, beyond what was already there, especially because the film's narrative is not about any favela in Rio de Janeiro. Rather, it depicts one specific place, Cidade de Deus, which became the symbol of the marginality associated with such urban spaces. Therefore, CDD residents in general bear the weight of this image and some are constantly struggling to construct images and representations to counterpoint such stereotypes. After all, "every negative image of a "minority" group becomes (...) overloaded with allegorical meaning", whilst images associated with the dominant sectors of society are part of a "variety which cannot be generalised" (Shohat and Stam, 2006: 269; their quotations marks [my translation]).

Therefore, marginalised communities can be the most critics of the spectacularization of images of violence. Even so, when they have the camera or the control over the framing, they feel authorised to depict the same issues, even if anecdotally, probably because they understand their insider label as a legitimating device. Consequently, while trying to "free" themselves from the domination of certain relations of power and oppressive and exclusionary stereotypes, in different contexts this "struggle over representation" can contribute to the emergence of new forms of cultural domination and social segregation. Nonetheless, as Shohat and Stam (1994: 345) point out, the "denial of the reality of marginalisation is a luxury only those not marginalised can afford".

Even though I am aware that there is no way to control what the viewers might conclude from this MPhil thesis, which will also depend on how much the viewer knows about favelas, the main contribution of this research project might be the debate surrounding the effects (whether real-life or not) of the association between this social space and marginality. If something was truly and entirely shared in this project, it was the desire to use the ethnographic documentary as a medium through which the viewer could have access to different images and perceptions of CDD. The film thus serves mutual interests and political agendas: to have the possibility of shifting people's perception of Cidade de Deus and its residents, and of favela-dwellers in general; and this is where this project might contain an applied strand.

## 5 > REFERENCES

- ANG, Ien (2006). On the Politics of Empirical Audience Research. In: Durham, Meenakshi Gigi and Kellner, Douglas M. (eds.). *Media and Cultural Studies: keywords*. Blackwell Publishing.
- BELTING, Hans (2005a). Toward an Anthropology of the Image. In: Westermann, Mariet (ed.). *Anthropologies of Art*. Clark Studies in the Visual Arts.
- BELTING, Hans (2005b). Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology. *Critical Inquiry*, 31(2): 302-319.
- BENTES, Ivana (2007). Sertões e favelas no cinema brasileiro contemporâneo: estética e cosmética da fome. *Alceu*, 8(15): 214-255.
- BRINK, Joram Ten and OPPENHEIMER, Joshua (eds.) (2012). Introduction. In: *Killer Images. Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence*. Wallflower Press. A Columbia University Press E-book.
- BURGOS, Marcelo Baumann (1998). Dos parques proletários ao Favela-Bairro: as políticas públicas nas favelas do Rio de Janeiro. In: Alvito, Marcos e Zaluar, Alba (orgs.). *Um século de favela*. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas.
- CAMAS BAENA et al (2004). Revealing the hidden: Making Anthropological documentaries. In: Pink, S., L. Kurti, and A. I. Afonso (eds). *Working Images*. London: Routledge, p. 120-134.
- CARROLL, David (1989). *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida*. Routledge: New York & London.
- CHANAN, Michael (2012). Revisiting Rocha's 'Aesthetics of Violence'. In: Brink, Joram Ten and Oppenheimer, Joshua (eds.). *Killer Images. Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence*. Wallflower Press. A Columbia University Press E-book.
- CLIFFORD, James (1986). In: Clifford, James and Marcus, George E. (eds.). *Writing Culture: the Poetics and the Politics of Ethnography*. University of California Press.
- CLIFFORD, James (1997). Spatial Practices: Fieldwork, Travel, and the Discipline of Anthropology. In: *Routes: travel and translation in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century*.

Cambridge: Harvard UP.

- DA COSTA, Antonia Gama C. O. (2009). *“Doing it our way”: the audiovisual aids for “resignifying the favela”*. MA Dissertation in Social Sciences, PUC-Rio (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro).
- FABIAN, Johannes (1983). *Time and the other: how anthropology makes its object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- FLUEHR-LOBBAN, Carolyn (2008). Collaborative Anthropology as Twenty-first-Century Ethical Anthropology. *Collaborative Anthropologies*, vol. 1, 175-182.
- FREIRE-MEDEIROS, Bianca (2011). ‘I went to the City of God’: Gringos, guns and the touristic favela. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia*, 20(1), 21-34.
- HAMBURGER, Esther *et al* (2011). “Cinema contemporâneo e políticas da representação da e na urbe paulistana”. In: MARQUES, E.; KOWARICK, L (2011). *São Paulo: novos percursos e atores*. São Paulo, Editora 34, p. 279-299.
- HAMBURGER, Esther (2008). Expressões fílmicas da violência urbana contemporânea: *Cidade de Deus, Notícias de uma guerra particular e Falcão, meninos do tráfico*. *Revista de Antropologia*, 51(2): 547-574.
- HENLEY, Paul (2004). Putting film to work: observational cinema as practical ethnography. In: Pink, S., L. Kurti, and A. I. Afonso (eds). *Working Images*. London: Routledge, p.109-130.
- HENLEY, Paul (2012-in press). *The Creative Witness: authorship and ethnographic documentary film*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- JAGUARIBE, Beatriz (2004). Favelas and the aesthetics of realism: representations in film and literature, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia*, 13:3, 327-342.
- KESTER, Grant H. (2011). *The One and the Many. Contemporary Collaborative Art in A Global Context*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- LINS, Paulo (2002). *City of God*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- LOFTSDÓTTIR, Kristín (2002). Never forgetting? Gender and racial-ethnic identity during fieldwork. *Social Anthropology*, 10(3): 303-317.

- LYOTARD, Jean-François (2011 [1971]). *Discourse, figure*. University of Minnesota Press.
- MACDOUGALL, David (1991). 'Whose story is it?' *Visual Anthropology Review*, 7(2), p. 2-10.
- MACHADO DA SILVA, Luiz Antonio (2010). *Afinal, qual é a das UPPS?* Available from [www.observatoriodasmetrololes.ufrj.br](http://www.observatoriodasmetrololes.ufrj.br).
- MAGNANI, José Guilherme C. (1996). Quando o campo é a cidade: fazendo Antropologia na metrópole. In: Magnani, José Guilherme C. & Torres, Lilian de Lucca (Orgs.). *Na Metrópole - Textos de Antropologia Urbana*. São Paulo: EDUSP.
- MARCUS, George E. (2008). The End(s) of Ethnography: Social/Cultural Anthropology's Signature Form of Producing Knowledge in Transition. *Cultural Anthropology*, 23(1), p. 1-14.
- MELO, João Marcelo (2004). Aesthetics and ethics in City of God. *Third Text*, 18(5): 475-481.
- NAGIB, Lúcia (2004). Talking Bullets. *Third Text*, 18(3): 239-250.
- NARAYAN, Kirin. (1993). How native is a "native" anthropologist? *American Anthropologist*, 95(3): 671-686.
- NASCIMENTO, Érica Peçanha do (2009). *Vozes marginais na literatura*. Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano/Fapesp.
- NASCIMENTO, Érica Peçanha do (2011). *É tudo nosso! Produção Cultural na Periferia Paulistana*. PhD Thesis in Social Anthropology, Universidade de São Paulo.
- PERLMAN, Janice (1977). *The Myth of Marginality*. University of California Press.
- PERLMAN, Janice (2004). The metamorphosis of marginality. *Latin American Research Review* 39 (1): 189-192.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2005). The Myth of Marginality Revisited: the case of *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro, 1969-2003. World Bank [cited 17 June 2011]. Available from <http://abahlali.org/files/perlman.pdf>.
- PINK, Sarah et al (Ed.) (2004). *Working Images*. London: Routledge.
- PINK, Sarah (2007). Walking with video. *Visual Studies*, 22(3): 240-252.
- RAMOS, Sílvia (2007). Jovens de favelas na produção cultural brasileira dos anos 90.

- In: Almeida, Maria Isabel Mendes de et al (orgs.). *“Por que não?” – Rupturas e continuidades da contracultura*. Rio de Janeiro: 7Letras.
- RIBEIRO, Paulo Jorge (2005). *Entre ressonância e encantamento: Cidade de Deus e a crítica cultural contemporânea*. PhD Thesis in Social Sciences, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.
- RUBY, Jay (2000). *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- SCHRAMM, Katharina (2005). "You have your own history. Keep your hands off ours!" On being rejected in the field. *Social Anthropology*, 13(2): 171-183.
- SCHWARZ, Roberto (1999). *Seqüências Brasileiras*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- SHOHAT, Ella; STAM, Robert (1994). *Unthinking Eurocentrism: multiculturalism and the media*. London: Routledge.
- SHOHAT, Ella; STAM, Robert (2006). *Crítica da imagem eurocêntrica: multiculturalismo e representação*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify.
- SILVA, Jaílson de Souza Silva (2006). Online interview for Banco do Brasil Foundation. Available at: <https://www.fbb.org.br/reporter-social/entrevistas/entrevista-jailson-de-souza-e-silva.htm>
- TAUSSIG, Michael (1993). *Mimesis and alterity: a particular history of the senses*. London: Routledge.
- TORRESAN, Angela (2011). Round Trip: Filming a Return Home. *Visual Anthropology Review*, 27(2): 119-130.
- VALLADARES, Lícia do Prado (2005). *A invenção da favela: do mito de origem à favela.com*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV.
- VALLADARES, Lícia do Prado (2008). Social sciences representations of favelas in Rio de Janeiro: a historical perspective. Available from *Lanic Etext Collection*: <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/vrp/valladares.pdf>.
- ZALUAR, Alba (2000). *A Máquina e a Revolta: as organizações populares e o significado da pobreza*. São Paulo: Brasiliense.