



Tourism as a Tool: Rehumanizing Rio de Janeiro's South Zone *Favelas* Through Community-Based Tourism Narratives

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Abstract. This article proposes a conceptual framework for community-based tourism in Rio de Janeiro's South Zone *favelas* that benefits these communities. The article sheds light on how local guides use tourism as a tool to counter the prevailing negative perception of *favelas* and how these guides seek to rehumanize the *favela* by providing an alternative cultural narrative that challenges existing stereotypes, making these tours a form of everyday resistance. The article covers the material impact of these tours by highlighting tourists' perceptions before and after visiting a *favela* and including the opinion of local *favela* residents about these tours.

Keywords: Community-based tourism; guided visits; *favelas*; social marginality; stereotypes (Social psychology); Brazil.

Introduction

While waiting for the tour guide to arrive, I observed the group of tourists and noticed their mixed feelings about visiting a *favela*.¹ Some were uncertain about whether barging into a poor community was exploitative, while others were more concerned about their own safety. The group's discussion came to an abrupt end when a young woman approached us, smiling from ear to ear, and said "Hi guys, I'm Anna and I'll be your guide for the next couple of hours through my community! I'll start explaining some things once we're in the *favela*, so let's go!"

Our guide led us through the broad streets of Ipanema to the *General Osório* metro station nearby, where we expected to board the train. Surprisingly, we took a left turn at the alleyway before *General Osório* Station and waited in an orderly queue for one of the two elevators to arrive. The combination of a cleaning detergent (likely due to daily cleaning), the pungent smell of tinned sardines (a local favorite) and the presence of a uniformed elevator operator, suggested that this particular elevator was in high demand. As we ascended, it was still unclear where we were heading until we finally exited the elevator and stepped out onto a pedestrian bridge. A few meters after crossing the bridge, narrow alleys with winding staircases and red bricked houses came into view: the entrance to *favela Cantagalo*.

Anna, our guide, explained to us that the elevator was built in an attempt to integrate the *favela* into the more 'formal' neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro and provided us with some historical background about *Cantagalo*. The pedestrian bridge was crowded – people heading busily in both directions, there were throngs of uniformed children, people hauling heavy plastic bags, and a pair of men carrying an armoire up the stairs. "Listen guys, please walk single-file on one side of the stairs and alleys so that people can always pass." Our group continued to climb the stairs, passing by a few empty bars, which had no customers but still felt lively – samba music poured out the speakers and the waitresses smiled at me and offered a greeting in Portuguese.

As we passed bars and little shops, all filled with women working, Anna gave us a blunt explanation of gender roles in the *favelas*:

"It's a hierarchy where the grandmother is at the top, then come the daughters, and then the granddaughters. The women are the warriors here, working, taking care of the children and the

1 *Favelas* are settlements characterized by informal buildings, low-quality housing, limited access to public services, high population density, and insecure property rights (CatComm 2016).

household, whereas many men just sit on their lazy asses and drink beer.”

While heading to the main road through narrow alleys and staircases, we passed women doing laundry in buckets of water in front of their doorsteps, and then we bumped into Anna's handyman. “Sorry guys, he's doing work on my house and has a few questions.” After speaking with Anna for few minutes he greeted us and then turned right and walked away as one of the group members started to ask him why all the houses don't collapse since the construction seemed so haphazard. Anna started laughing and replied “We don't know – the architecture must be the work of God” and continued up the stairs. Arriving at the busy main road, we saw locals hauling bricks in wheelbarrows, heard samba rhythms from the open windows of *Cantagalo's* samba school, and were overcome by the smell of garbage, until finally reaching a massive building complex which, according to our local guide, was supposed to become one of Rio's most luxurious hotels. However, developers were unable to secure the necessary permits, so the building was ultimately donated to the community. While walking through the alleyway, we passed a massive library sponsored by the U.N., a ballet school sponsored by Lufthansa, and a kickboxing school. The group then gathered atop a set of stairs leading down to a basement level. “Time for our break with a great lunch at Mary's Restaurant – follow me down here!” Anna announced.

While sitting at a table in Mary's Restaurant, my negative preconceptions about *favela* tours had already begun to change. The receptive and welcoming locals and a knowledgeable local guide exposing us to her community, combined with the idea that bringing tourists can help support local businesses (such as Mary's Restaurant), made me realize that some tours might even aid in improving global perspectives on *favelas*. This realization served as the catalyst for the central research questions posed in this article: 1) How does *community-based tourism* contribute to the deconstruction of stigmatization of *favelas*? 2) How do these tours impact foreign visitors as well as *favela* residents themselves?

In a globalized world, where international travel has become attainable for many people and communication technologies have enabled vast populations to immerse themselves in cultures all over the world, questions of belonging have become extremely complex (Bauman, 1998). John Urry (2012) highlights that our social world is constructed through the mobility of imaginative travel, movements of images and information, as well as through virtual and physical movement (Urry, 2012: 3). With regard to Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*, people across the globe have become familiar with these

informal settlements, as a consequence of the spread of images associated with poverty, criminality, and drug violence, which are consistent with the Brazilian ruling class's prevailing ideological conception of *favelas*. The Brazilian media's crime-filled representation of *favelas* and the production of crime movies about *favelas* not only frame how Brazil's ruling (not majority) class think about *favelas*, but it also spreads a particular "knowledge" about *favelas* on an international stage, which has led to a stigmatized conception of *favelas* more globally (van Rompu, 2017).

This article sheds light on how local *favela* residents empower themselves against this globalized stigmatization of their communities and, moreover, shows how through storytelling, these *favela* guides weave local knowledge and culture into a larger set of cultural meanings (Wynn, 2005) that help to reshape tourists' perceptions about *favelas*. Most of the classical literature on the political economy of tourism (e.g. Judd, 1995; Fainstein & Gladstone, 1999) is characterized by scenarios in which city planners have promoted tourism in order to contribute to the transformation of city spaces. The *community-based favela tours*, which are central to this research, operate in a different context to the tourism outlined in the abovementioned research, as they function without government support or promotion, because *favela* tours promote narratives that run counter to those perpetuated by the country's dominant classes. In response to the overriding and decontextualized crime narrative which has defined *favelas* (van Rompu, 2017a), *favela* residents have decided to use tourism as a tool to contribute to the *humanization* of their neighborhoods. I define these tours as *community-based tourism*, understood as a form of tourism that takes social and cultural sustainability into account and which is managed and owned by the community, facilitating visitors' increased awareness and understanding of the community and local ways of life (Suansri, 2003).

This article consists of several sections: 1) a broad overview of *favela* tourism; 2) a conceptual framework of the *community-based tours* in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* researched for this article; 3) a discussion of how these specific tours empower *favela* residents by providing a counter-narrative that opposes the dominant discourse on *favelas* that permeates global capitalist society; and 4) conclusions about the social impact of this community-based cultural narrative, tourists' perceptions before and after visiting *favelas*, as well as local opinions about these tours.

Methods

This article draws on the results of a larger study investigating social constructions of *favelas* in tourism and film narratives, carried out in 2016 for

the author's master's thesis (part 1 of this study is published: van Rompu 2017a). The study is based on 55 in-depth, semi-structured interviews and informal interviews with fifteen tour company owners and local tour guides (thirteen *favela* residents and two 'outsider' tour operators) from Rio de Janeiro's South Zone *favelas*; fifteen local *favela* residents from these same *favelas* (seven shop owners and eight residents); 21 international tourists, predominantly from the United States and Northern Europe (which is representative of the nationalities most commonly taking part in *favela* tours); and four Brazilian experts who helped validate the general information on political and police issues provided by tour guides.

Additionally, data were drawn from participant observation of *favela* tours in Rio de Janeiro's South zone *favelas*, including *Rocinha*, *Santa Marta*, and *Cantagalo*, and by living in the small *favela* *Chapéu Mangueira*. This embedded ethnographic work allowed me to gain a deep familiarity with the workings of this community, which helped provide me with an intimate understanding of the people living there. What is more, owing in part to the "*favela* rules" prohibiting the exploitation of people living within the *favela*, I in fact felt safer while *inside* the *favela* than outside of it. And although as a researcher I was never able to fully shed my outsider status and participate entirely in the community (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), I came to feel accepted due to the receptiveness of the locals and my efforts to integrate into the community.

My landlord and neighbors served as crucial community gatekeepers, inviting and taking me along to community events, such as barbecues, *bailes*,² and the weekly grocery truck (which sold fresh fruits and vegetables). I was able to increase my interaction with various locals by using the main community entrance (rather than the much quieter back entrance closer to my house), which allowed me to walk through the entire neighborhood, and also through regularly dining and drinking at the local *favela* bars, as well as those located in the neighboring *favela*. What started with non-verbal greetings developed into full conversations and eventually friendships with community members, largely as a result of my various efforts to make myself visible in the community, and my improving Portuguese language capabilities. This allowed me to engage in daily activities that helped me understand *favela* community life and grasp locals conceptions of community and how these ideas organize their world.

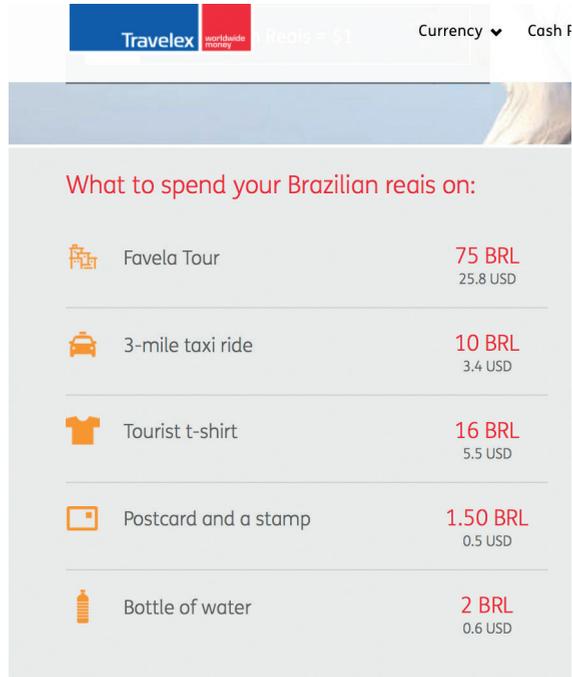
2 During the first *baile* (dance gathering) at the community meeting point, my landlord acted as 'information officer' by whispering locals' "functions" in my ear and introducing me to them.

Prior to carrying out this fieldwork my conception was that films depicting *favelas* and *favela* tours both contributed to dehumanizing narratives, which at once stigmatized and stereotyped these communities. In retrospect, my conceptions were largely influenced by negative media portrayals and reports on slum tourism. However, being there in person, interacting with locals on a daily basis, and engaging with local tourism initiatives, I experienced quite the opposite. My interviews with local guides quickly revealed their recurring desire to change outsiders' perceptions of *favelas* by showing them their communities' reality. The revelations from these initial interviews served as the catalyst for exploring to what degree this local narrative has been successful in altering outside perceptions, which I did by interviewing tourists before and after their first-ever visit to a *favela*. After witnessing how tourists drastically changed their viewpoint on *favelas* after their tours, I added another layer to my before-after method, creating word clouds depicting tourists' changed perceptions of *favelas* (as illustrated on p. 19).

1. *Favela* tourism: an overview

An average of two million tourists visit Rio de Janeiro per year and *favela* tourism represents a legitimate form of alternative tourism, with an estimated 50,000 tourists visiting *favelas* annually (Braga, 2015). In fact, on the Travelex website, a *favela* tour is included on the 'what to spend your *reais* on' list (see figure 1). This illustrates that the *favela* has become a globally recognized attraction, although it remains unclear when *favela* tourism emerged as a "booming business."

Figure 1
Listed at the top of the list.



The image is a screenshot of a Travelex website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Travelex logo, a search bar containing 'Reals = \$1', a currency dropdown menu, and a 'Cash F' button. Below the navigation bar is a blue header with the text 'What to spend your Brazilian reals on:'. The main content area is a light gray box containing a list of five items, each with an icon, a description, and the price in Brazilian Reals (BRL) and US Dollars (USD).

Item	Price (BRL)	Price (USD)
Favela Tour	75 BRL	25.8 USD
3-mile taxi ride	10 BRL	3.4 USD
Tourist t-shirt	16 BRL	5.5 USD
Postcard and a stamp	1.50 BRL	0.5 USD
Bottle of water	2 BRL	0.6 USD

Bianca Freire-Medeiros (2009) talks about “the myth of origin” in one of her articles on *favela* tourism. According to her sources, the 1992 Earth Summit (Rio Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development) is what caused the *favela* to become a tourist destination. According to Freire-Medeiros (2009), who interviewed the owner of Jeep Tour in Rio de Janeiro, the tours were a spontaneous result of the curiosity of tourists who passed through *favela Rocinha* en route to the Tijuca Forest Tour. Nearly all of the tour owners and tour operators interviewed for this project stated that films such as *City of God* (*Cidade de Deus*) and *Elite Squad* (*Tropa de Elite*) increased the global curiosity for *favelas*.³

These films have contributed to the dehumanization of *favelas* through depictions that largely deprive *favela* residents of their positive human qualities (van Rompu, 2017a). And although Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard (1998:138) see the phenomena of tourists visiting film locations as

3 Because of this, I included these films in my film analysis which has been published in another article (van Rompu, 2017a).

leading to the commodification of urban areas, these *community-based tours* employ specific strategies that favor local residents. This article illustrates how community tours play a part in the *humanization* of *favelas*. The process of *humanization* results from the tours' efforts to reverse the damage done by dehumanization, by rehabilitating outsiders' perception of *favela* residents.

Conceptual ambiguity

The global popularity of the *favela* has been studied by a variety of researchers with different cultural, theoretical, and methodological backgrounds. The varying disciplinary lenses through which *favelas* have been studied helps explain the disparity in terms used for this tourism phenomenon: *social tours* (Freire-Medeiros, 2009; MacCannel, 1992), *cultural* or *ethnic tourism* (Jaguaribe & Hetherington, 2004), *poverty tourism*, *safari tourism*, or *poorism* (Weiner 2009; Gentlemen, 2006) and *slumming* (Steinbrink & Pott, 2010; Frenzel, Koens & Steinbrink, 2012).

Despite differences in terminology, two overarching groups can be defined. On one side, opponents identify these tours as a form of “bad” tourism, due to its objectification (commodification and glamorization) of poverty and the denial of residents' autonomy and dignity (Frenzel, Koens & Steinbrink, 2012). These types of arguments are often supported by data that show that there is little to no involvement of locals and that the tourism companies remain the only financial beneficiaries, which constitutes exploitation of the communities; these arguments are predominantly based on empirical research of larger *favela* tour companies (Ramchander, 2007; Freire-Medeiros, 2012). On the other side (to which my research belongs) scholars argue that these issues are not ontological but based on pragmatic arguments: depending on each individual tours' practices, which differ from place to place, these tours can prove beneficial to a given community either financially or socially (Selinger & Outterson, 2010).⁴

2. Community-based tourism

The ambiguity surrounding the concept of *favela* tourism depends largely on the type of tour operator involved. In this article, drawing on empirical evidence, I propose various minimum requirements to ensure that tours maximize benefits for the communities in which they operate. As a result of existing literature on tour operators affiliated with *RioTur*, the tourism

4 Selinger & Outterson (2010) provide an extensive overview regarding all critical arguments against *favela* tourism and will therefore be adduced throughout this article regarding arguments against *favela* tourism.

board of the city of Rio de Janeiro, or with *EMBRATUR*, the national tourist organization (such as large outfits, Jeep Tours), as well as tour operators from outside the *favelas*, I deliberately avoided the models of *favela* tourism that have been researched and often criticized by other scholars. This present research fills a gap in the literature by focusing on tours run by *favela* residents and which employ local *favela* tour guides – referred to in this article as *community-based tours*.⁵ Although these types of tours are not representative of all *favela* tours conducted in Rio's *favelas*, this does not make them any less important or irrelevant, as will be explained in the following sections.

The empirical focus of this research are five tour companies (tour operator 1, 3 & 5 are based in *Rocinha*; tour operator 2 is based in *Cantagalo*; and tour operator 4 in *Santa Marta*). Of these five tour companies, four are operated by *favela* locals and one operated by an outsider (a non-*favela*-resident Brazilian), as well as other local and non-local tour guides. Although tours can be conducted by outsiders, it is recommended that local resident insiders be involved in the tours in some capacity as they are most familiar with *favela* life.⁶ Based on the empirical findings of the research, the *community-based tours* are characterized as:

- a) Tours that employ *local guides* who are able to provide information about the daily life in their community and residents' personal experiences;
- b) *Walking tours* that increase visitors' spatial interactions with the *favela* and its residents;
- c) Providing benefits to the community, such as direct financial support for social projects or the local economy, or indirect social benefits such as debunking stereotypes.

The next section will discuss these characteristics in detail and illustrate how *community-based tours* differ from the prevailing larger, outside tour companies operating within *favelas*.

2.1 Feature 1: by locals, for glocals

The most important component for the responsible and sustainable operation of a tour is the information provided by the tour guide. When a tour

5 "Community-based tourism" is not a new phenomenon, as research on similar forms of tourism has been conducted in various countries (in British Columbia by Murphy 1988 and in North Queensland by Blackstock in 2005). However, this type of tourism in Rio's *favelas* has not been researched or analyzed thoroughly.

6 Consideration of "outsider" tour companies is beyond the scope of this paper and has therefore not been addressed here (for further discussion of such tour companies, see: van Rompu, 2017a).

guide is well informed about the history of the *favela*, the rituals of everyday life and community politics, and can effectively convey their own personal experiences of living there, these tours can help blunt the negative depictions of popular films, and ultimately help to fully rehumanize the people of the *favela* (Gorman, 2014). By contextualizing social issues occurring within the *favelas*, these tours can help modify tourists' perceptions of these areas.

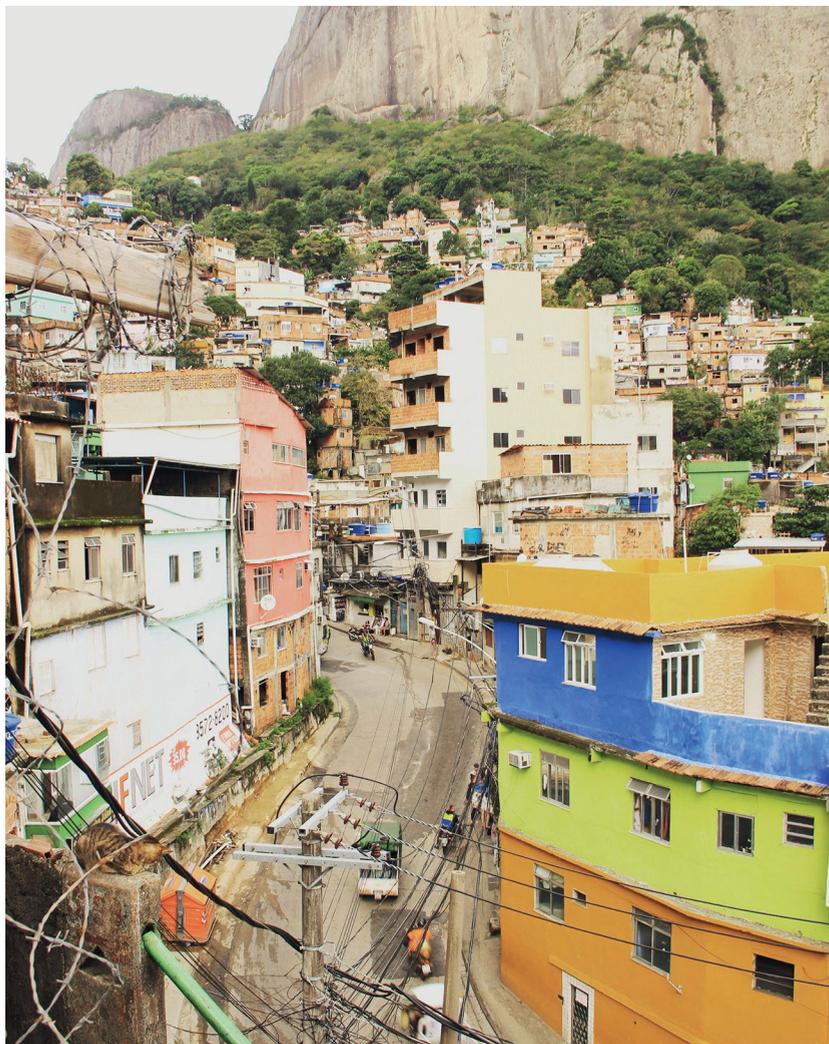
The tours that form the central focus of this research provided information with regards to the practical organization of the *favelas*, domestic relations, social services and public infrastructure, social relations (i.e., gang activity and local community leaders' endeavors), political issues between the *favelas* and local governments, community-police relations, effects of the pacification of the *favelas*, and community residents' perceptions of social exclusion.

Anthony Giddens (1991) argued that in many respects global relations have intensified because distant locations are linked in such a way that local debates and conflicts are increasingly influenced and shaped by events taking place miles away. These *favela* tour websites reflect the consequences of globalization, as their portrayal of *favelas* has clearly been influenced by perceptions that have been formulated outside of Brazil. How these local guides wield their relative power (Bourdieu in Wynn, 2010) and shape visitors' perceptions of their urban landscape is discussed in the following section.

2.2 Feature 2: walking the walk

In order to argue in favor of walking tours, it is important to first clarify various arguments against tours conducted in cars, vans or "safari Jeeps." Interviews with locals about *favela* tours revealed that overall, there was one type of tour that was largely seen in a negative light.

Figure 2
There is much more to see than just Rocinha's main road



Source: photo by author.

These tours are conducted in open “safari Jeeps,” which give tourists a full 360 degree view while seated in the vehicle. The company that predominantly utilizes this form of transportation is Jeep Tour. In the face of ethical criticism of *favela* tours, Jeep Tour’s owner has promoted the company:

“In the beginning, the company was concerned about how the tours would be received by *favela* residents, but that hasn’t been

a problem. Today our tours through *favelas* are a part of the local communities who totally recognize and approve of what we do” (Gorman, 2014).

Despite the general rejection and disapproval of *favela* tours by Rio’s elite, the government in fact promotes specific tour companies (Freire-Medeiros, 2010). Correspondence with *RioTur* and *Embratur* revealed that these organizations only promoted the Jeep Tour, despite the negative experiences that *favela* residents reported having with this tour. This illustrates the disconnect between governmental institutions overseeing tourism and the local residents affected by tourist activities.⁷

In contrast with the promotional content of competing websites, Jeep Tour’s website claims that its services are “transforming moments into good experiences by observing the city’s natural landscapes.” Because of its focus on sight-seeing in the *favela* environment from within a Jeep, this approach maintains a sort of ‘artificial fence’ between the tourists and community members, reinforcing what Urry (2001) refers to as a “tourist gaze.” Similarly, Foucault sought to explain the power of both gaze and surveillance in various settings. In the medical realm, Foucault noted how medical workers observed deviant “crazy” persons; he also described the impact of the panopticon, whereby prisoners felt they were under constant surveillance (in Urry, 2001). Similar to observing crazy persons behind bars, tourists visit developing countries and gaze upon the “real authentic locals”, which necessarily intrudes on the lives of these locals, who feel as if they are being observed and surveilled.

In this scenario, *favela* residents are observed by tourists who sit “safely behind bars” (i.e., inside the Jeeps) and no interaction between tourists and locals is possible; instead, tourists simply point fingers at locals and take pictures of them without their permission. For locals, this makes them feel that they are being observed through the “voyeuristic lenses” of tourists’ cameras (Maria, personal conversation, 2016). Despite Jeep Tour’s claim that they lead walking tours through the *favela*, the tours seem to focus mainly on driving through *Rocinha’s* main roads, which has caused locals to become

7 Councilman Célio Luparelli proposed a bill responding to the negative news coverage regarding tourist companies from outside the community. Bill No. 1599/2015 seeks to regulate tourism, stimulating community based tourism under a specific urbanization regime (Municipal Bill 1599, 2015). Although the law was passed to the Justice & Drafting Commission and was expected to be voted on in the first quarter of 2016, the municipal bill is still awaiting a vote. Although many support the bill, others fear *de facto* implementation will distort the central objective of strengthening community tourism through fees and requirements for certification, thereby bolstering outside initiatives to the detriment of those from the community. (Lisboa, 2015).

acrimonious towards the company, claiming that tours have generated a “safari feeling” in their community (Luciano, personal conversation, 2016). *Porta dos Fundos* created a video in 2014 (“*Pobre*”) in response to Jeep Tour’s operation, which has gained more than 13 million views (<http://bit.ly/2ePxSNy>). The video satirizes simplistic stereotypes of *favela* residents and how these tours depend upon and exploit these residents’ poverty.

Mónica Cejas (2006) argues that Jeep Tour often caters to international tourists, whose main concern while visiting the *favelas* is their own safety. Tourists, preexisting safety concerns, combined with information provided by guides who do not engage with or live in these communities, results in the reinforcement of negative stereotypes perpetuated by media outlets about the dangerousness of *favelas*. Anecdotally, the argument about “untrained” guides is also supported by many negative reviews on Trip Advisor, made by tourists who have taken a *favela* Jeep Tour. These complaints alleged that guides seemed uninterested, offered no information at all, or were rude towards the tourists or the community and locals (<http://glo.bo/2dzpv9m>).

In contrast to tours conducted by Jeep, walking tours provide opportunities for unexpected moments to unfold. Such genuine interactions between group members, tour guides, local residents, and the city’s fabric itself (Wynn 2005) can help in re-shaping outsiders’ cultural perceptions of the *favela*. By walking through the *favela*, if only for a few short hours, tourists can become acquainted with the community’s daily routines and the challenges of navigating⁸ through the maze-like, zigzagging alleys and the thousands of steep staircases (which become slippery in the rain) that ascend up the mountains of the South Zone *favelas*. When accompanying tourist groups on foot, local guides can offer up-close explanations of the *favela* landscape they are passing by, such as public infrastructure, shopping areas, and cultural amenities. Walking tours also provide tourists with more time to absorb the ambience, and pose questions about things they notice along the route, or aspects that the guide failed to address; in contrast, the driving tours that pass along main roads can only offer superficial exposure to these communities. Finally, walking tours represent a more horizontal form of tourism than Jeep tours, as they lessen the symbolic and physical dominance of tourists riding in Jeeps (sitting 1.5 meters higher than the locals at ground-level), especially given the already considerable visible contrasts

8 The online geographical visual representation of *favelas* is also manipulated: the municipal government asked Google Maps to change the maps, as “the *favelas* were too visibly prominent which might be damaging to Rio’s image.” In 2013 Google gave in to the demands, excluding the term *favela* and marking the *favelas* as green or brown (nature) areas (Steinbrink 2014).

(clothing, origin, gaze) between tourists and locals. What is more, when tourists demonstrate willingness to take walking tours, it serves as a gesture that is appreciated by *favela* residents, which is discussed later in this article.

2.3 Feature 3: benefits for the community

The third condition that a *favela* tour must meet to be considered a *community-based tour* is to provide direct benefits to the community (Mateus, local guide, *Rocinha*; Sofia, local guide, *Santa Marta*). Due to a lack of government responses to the demands and needs of the *favela* population, many projects are run by NGOs or *favela* residents themselves (Sofia, local guide, *Santa Marta*), and the tours that are perceived as the most sustainable are those that make efforts to invest a portion of their profits in projects intended to benefit the community.⁹

For example, tour operator 1 in *favela Rocinha* invests in several projects in the community. A portion of the 85R\$ that each tourist pays helps fund a local community project: a school for music DJs located in the tour owner's house on *Rocinha's* main road, where every semester twelve *favela* teenagers learn how to DJ. What is more, the school has yielded positive results, as some former pupils have acquired jobs working as DJs both locally or nationally, earning money through DJ gigs; one former student has even acquired DJ work internationally.¹⁰ Tours bring visitors to see the part of the tour that covers the DJ school, where the owner expresses his thoughts on *community-based tourism*, and later asks the tourists about their views before and after the tour. In addition to this social project, these tour operators encourage tourists to make donations for varying initiatives via packforapurpose.com.

In *favela Cantagalo*, tour operator 2 invests five percent of the 65R\$ tour fee in a museum, which the tourists visit on the tour, and which also functions as a community center. The investment contributes to the purchase of books and toys for children, supports a local graffiti artist called Acne for his projects with the poorest children in *Pavão-Pavãozinho*, and goes toward the upkeep of the community garden, *Jardim do Céu*, which is made out of recycled materials and serves as a viewpoint on this tour. In addition to the investment in her community, tour operator 2 takes tourists to the museum souvenir shop and to Mary's Restaurant for lunch, and

9 All the social projects or re-investments of the tours owners have been verified (either by talking to these individuals; calling the social projects; reviewing websites that illustrate the partnership; or visiting the social project that they support).

10 While walking around in *Rocinha* with the tour operator at night time, we encountered this person and he told me about his DJ career.

during the tour visitors have the opportunity to buy beverages or snacks from local shops; she tells tourists that “If anyone wants to buy something, just shout out and we will stop there!” (Tour 2). She explained her motives behind the investment:

“That’s the thing about the *favela* community, you need each other... This is how we grow up and are taught and I wanted to keep this idea in my business. It’s too easy to earn money and not share it, but I’m always going to depend on someone in the *favela* [...] For me it’s impossible to behave like that, I can’t ignore the fact that I have to return the favor. What goes around comes around.”

Although tour operator 3 does not take tourists to any sponsored places or projects, the company does invest in two social projects: *Fusão Social* (Football School), which operates in Western Rio and provides a place for low-income children to partake in sports and other recreational activities, and *Acorda Capoeira*, a *capoeira* social project in *Rocinha*. Tour operator 4 invests in various local initiatives, leads tours operated by the souvenir shop at the top of *Santa Marta*, and provides food for stray dogs and cats. Additionally, while I was on the tour, we encountered several residents that inquired about the second-hand clothing fair for locals that she had arranged, for the next day.

Based on the three features outlined above, these local tour operators and guides, who provide walking tours that provide contextualized information about *favela* life and who make investments in community social projects, are the most sustainable type of tourism for the communities involved.

3. De-stigmatization: tourism as a tool

There are scholars who view *favela* tourism negatively, claiming that it brings little to no benefit to the community as a whole (Carter 2005), while others argue that even if local residents benefit financially (e.g., by selling inexpensive food or souvenirs), the tours ultimately reinforce the underlying social and financial structures that enable poverty – as it encourages residents to sell food to tourists, which may ultimately disincentivize their pursuit of further educational attainment (Williams, 2008). These arguments ignore the fact that the educational system remains a tool of domination for Brazil’s elite, despite ongoing efforts to change it (Batista, sociologist; Luca, *favela* resident and student of pedagogy) and that given the high prices outside the *favelas*, irrespective of tourists visits, the local economy still flourishes due the neighborhoods’ dense population (Carla, local guide, *Rocinha*; Eduardo, local guide, *Rocinha*).

Although this article is in favor of *favela* tourism, I acknowledge that many non-*favela* tour agencies lack (re)investment of their capital in the communities despite the need for such investments. These direct benefits are welcome due to the absence of structural investments as a result of arbitrary *favela* policies (Sánchez & Broudehoux, 2013; Steinbrink, 2014; Talbot & Carter, 2018)). As Jonathan Wynn (2005) has noted, such over-generalization ignores the way in which walking tour guides serve as creative improvisational thinkers and passionate storytellers of the urban landscape. More specifically, attacking all *favela* tours based on such arguments overlooks the various ways in which *favelas* can benefit, so long as tours are carried out according to the criteria outlined above.

On the one hand, neighborhoods experience direct, small-scale financial advantages from the stimulation that the local economy receives from visiting tourists. Tourists frequently purchase beverages, food, and souvenirs at local shops, guides often bring groups to eat lunch at local restaurants,¹¹ and tourists often return to *favelas* for lunch, dinner, or shopping after their tours (especially in the large *favela Rocinha*). According to some tour guides, the international attention brought by tourists has led to greater involvement by foreign NGOs.¹² However, further research is required to measure community involvement by NGOs or the effects of tourism on local businesses as a result of *community-based tourism*.

On the other hand, the *favela* community becomes de-stigmatized in the eyes of tourists as a result of these local initiatives. These tours create unique spaces which help to deconstruct the sensationalized, crime-ridden image of *favelas* through dynamic micro interactions between the guides, visitors, and local residents. Edward Shils (1972) has stated that rejecting “an inherited set of values” (the familiar decontextualized images) helps to de-mythologize beliefs and serves to reshape “alternative tendencies.” By providing contextualized information, these local tour guides contribute to the deconstruction of existing stereotypes that pervade the global community, and therefore contribute to meaningful cultural exchanges between tourists and locals. As a result of the relative immobility of many *favela* residents, locals experience visits by foreigners as intriguing, whereby the *reverse gaze* plays an important role. The tourist gaze, especially objectified through the camera lens, is often said to have great power in commodifying local

11 Of course by including one restaurant, others are excluded. Most likely the restaurants are chosen based on friendship or family ties.

12 The latter is not always appreciated as the “West barges in and decides what kind projects will be done without negotiating or talking with us” (Local guide, operator 4).

culture (Philp & Mercer, 1999). However, the relationship between tourist and local is more complex with at least two sides of agency (Cohen et al., 1992). The reverse gaze touches upon the other side of the relationship, since locals have influence over the tourist-local interaction, and thus over the foreigners' perceptions of individual residents and of the *favela* as a whole.

3.1 Everyday resistance in a global community

All of the tour guides interviewed for this research project strived to show the *favelas* as they are, rather than exploit the images presented in films or media. While previous research on walking tours argues that guides use the public space to reenchant the urban realm (Wynn, 2005; Katz, 2009), I encountered guides who attempted to leverage their positions to create a meaningful career, empower themselves, and simultaneously shape perceptions of outsiders by offering positive alternatives to the dominant stigmatizing narrative.

When asking tour owners and guides about the motivations driving their work, some described their motivations as financial, while others cited ideological concerns or motivations that grew more ideological over time. Bauman (2000) highlights the importance of mobility within the era of "liquid modernity": only those who overcome time and space can benefit from globalization. However, I take issue with Bauman's assertion that globalization harms all of those who are not part of dominant society. Despite the fact that *favelas* cope with real social issues and exclusion which should be addressed on an international scale, tour agencies run by locals and primarily employing local guides have worked to empower themselves by doing what their government, the international media, and popular culture have failed to do: present a counter-hegemonic image of Rio's *favelas*.

Within dominant Brazilian society, these *community-based tours* can be seen as a form of empowerment to overcome specific global images about *favelas*. The guides interviewed here placed great importance on breaking down stereotypes by showing another side of their communities, which serve as counter-ideologies that challenge dominant ideology, and can be seen as everyday, non-dramatic resistance that is integrated into their social lives (such as jobs) and thus is part of their normal lives (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). At the same time, *favela* residents are included in global capitalist society by playing to the demands of global tourism, which has positive benefits, as demonstrated by *community-based tours*.

3.2 Motivations for local guides

Local tour operators and guides born and raised in *favelas* shared several motivations for their work: a desire to preserve the historical and social

history of *favelas*; their own personal financial empowerment;¹³ on a community level, a concern to improve collective identity (Gotham 2007); and more generally, to deconstruct negative stereotypes.

Tour operator 1 started in 2007, when other community members approached him about conducting tours because his body, which is completely covered with tattoos relating to *Rocinha*, would serve as great promotion. Initially he refused, but two factors ultimately changed his mind. He described how when outsiders learned he was from the *Rocinha favela*, people would “look at me with this dirty face. ‘Ugh, really? Eeew.’” Also, according to him, at the time the seven major tour companies that operated in *Rocinha* were owned by outsiders, who took their profits out of the community and provided false or inaccurate information about the *favela*:

“I wanted to do something that was more sustainable. I overheard this guy saying once: ‘look! Bullet holes!’¹⁴ like okay, maybe they are, maybe they aren’t, but why point it out like that? It makes the tour more exciting and live up to the stereotypes” (Mateus, local guide, *Rocinha*).

For him it is not about earning money, he said:

“I’m 53 years old, I have a rented apartment, no Nikes, car, or gold chains. It’s about providing jobs, increasing self-esteem and showing outsiders what life is about here from a local perspective” (Mateus, local guide, *Rocinha*).

The tour owner makes¹⁵ small gestures, such as giving out “I ♥ ROCINHA” bracelets to residents of the *favela*, that state as a means of increasing their self-esteem and pride about where they come from.

Most of the tour guides were fairly conscious that their efforts could be perceived as a form of counter-hegemonic, non-confrontational resistance, although Luiz was the only one who verbalized how tours conducted by locals in a sustainable way should be seen as resistance, as they help confront the inferiorization of *favela* residents:

“It’s resistance because we’re talking about identity, empowerment; we were always survivors and we will always survive. But it’s important to keep our identity and it’s important to focus on

13 Two of the tour guides explained that they chose to start guiding to gain economic resources, but while doing so they realized the importance of changing the image of the *favelas*.

14 Tour operator 3 pointed out a bullet hole amid some graffiti. This was the only “sensationalizing” aspect in evidence from all the tours conducted.

15 I witnessed this while accompanying him on his tour and walking around with him several times, without being a paying customer of a tour.

the positive things. We need to increase our self-esteem, which is very low, by being proud of where we come from, which can be done through tourism!" (Luiz, local guide *Rocinha*)

The above quote is illustrative of what Urry (1994) has explained about identity – as something that is produced in part from the images constructed or reproduced for tourists, which includes its recognition on global tourist maps. This is especially important in a country where the national identity excludes *favelas*, which is largely due to the educational system negating these populations.

For Luiz, this is an issue of “breaking down stereotypes, fighting prejudices, and empowering the community, making people aware of the (community) reality without romanticizing it.” He emphasized how the company’s underlying ideology seeks to break down stereotypes by offering free (donation only) tours, the proceeds of which are used for small-scale community projects. Luiz described how he always wanted to work in the tourism industry, but had not realized that because of the stigmatization of the *favela* as a dangerous, bad place, that his own backyard would turn out to be a zone of action. In addition to the focus on community identity, improving self-esteem, and breaking down stereotypes, he believes that tours provide a platform for sharing cultures, explaining “you guys are interested in us, but we are also interested in you guys!” which directly alludes to the power of the reverse gaze (Luiz, local guide *Rocinha*; Freire-Medeiros, 2010).

Some scholars of *favela* tourism find it inherently unethical when highly mobile, global tourists visit places where the majority of the population is comparatively immobile and travel-restricted; this follows Bauman’s (2000) argument that globalization renders increasingly complex the search for identity of residents who face travel restrictions (Selinger & Outtersson 2010). Although I agree with Bauman that globalization increases the complexity of global identities, the search for identity would not be made any easier for *favela* residents if tourism did not exist in their communities. Given the pervasive role of television in Brazil, especially since the cost of television sets was subsidized during the military regime to help disseminate pro-military propaganda, more than 100 million people tune into prime-time television programming on a nightly basis (Codoner 2010). Brazilian *telenovelas* reflect the influence of globalization through their inclusion of issues such as homosexuality and abortion, and these *telenovelas* usually feature characters who travel abroad. This results in *telenovelas* depicting the cultural exchanges portrayed on *telenovelas* have a broad reach within Brazil, and this helps generate curiosity among *favela* residents about foreign cultures.

By offering a locally generated narrative to the outside world, through spontaneous encounters with *favela* residents (in which the reverse gaze plays a role) and the dissemination of contextualized information to tourists, the *favela* community has agency in reversing and recreating their stigmatized identity. This process represents opposition to the dominant narrative about *favelas* – through leveraging the power of global capitalism. Additionally, by playing on the global curiosity in *favelas*, local tour agencies have found a way to become more economically empowered and to insert themselves into global capitalist society. Similarly, Tour operator 2 explained the organic evolution of her private tour company that she started 10 years ago in *Cantagalo*:

“During a university strike I worked in bars, and those clients, rich locals from my university and foreigners, were curious about *favelas*; they were afraid. So I said, ‘You can come, visit my house and family, nothing will happen to you, nobody will bother you.’ So it started like this. I didn’t charge, some gave me some money, others paid for lunch or *caipirinhas* [...] When I started doing it formally, I started charging a little.”

For her, motivation comes from showing the humanized side of the *favela*

“I do it to show my life, I’m glad to show that my people here are good, even if they don’t have much contact with other cultures, they take in what they see on TV. I want to show we are not violent because we are poor, we are normal families, normal people trying to survive, to breakdown prejudices. I know it’s not your [foreigners’] fault you hear this and think about us like that, but I want to show how it is. So once the people are here, I can show them it’s different, you go somewhere for food and you will tell others how relaxed it is, so it’s good for everyone. [...] It’s not about the money, it’s mostly about family, we take care of each other and it’s about living life and making the best of it. If life gives you limes, you make *caipirinhas*! We are not that desperate, especially the poor, we can live with what we have. We have our problems and desires but everyone in the world has that!”

Indeed, her comments on gender roles, presented in this article's introduction, attest to this. At the same time, she tries to “educate” her own community indirectly through these tours:

“The boys don’t expect the responses of foreign women, because they are used to girls being more reserved or subordinate. But when these “new” girls arrive and behave differently, they

come to me and ask “How can I impress them?” I start by telling them “Well, that *oi gostosa* bullshit doesn’t work,” and I tell them to be interested, ask them out, and I tell them that foreign women expect men to help in the household, and I tell them to not to discuss their moms. ‘No, your mom doesn’t exist to foreign girls.’ And this is good! Once they get to know it’s different with foreign girls, they become aware and perhaps some change their behavior towards women.”

However, some scholars claim that *favela* tours, apart from serving as a commodity for tourist consumption, are mainly a phenomenon of production. They argue that without images produced by the news media, films, documentaries, and other sources, these tours would not exist. The messages used to promote the “tourist product” help to construct it as it is presented to and bought by the consumer (MacCannel, 1992; Freire-Medeiros, 2009). Unfortunately, this assertion diverts attention from the fact that these tours should be perceived as (*re*)actions to the negative *favela* stereotypes that have been created from without. And interestingly, capitalistic tourism, which has been a main contributor to the global spread of these stigmas, now provides an avenue through which to counter these stigmas. Following Mona Lilja’s (2008) arguments on everyday resistance – the actors involved in these tours are both the subject and the object of power; they are exposed to stereotypes and simultaneously promote “repressive truths.”

4. The impact of narratives: before and after perceptions

The portrayal in *favela* films of social, economic, and political issues surrounding *favelas* have shaped the way many people think about them. As with prison films, the entertainment value and popularity of films dealing with the *favelas* can be found in their claims of authenticity (van Rompu, 2017a). Because of these claims, the movies constitute an influential source of information (and misinformation) about what goes on inside *favelas* (Rafter 2010). This has served to create an “approachable” entertainment portal for foreigners to glimpse the inner workings of *favelas*.

When asked what *favelas* are known for, without hesitation, all tourist interviewees offered similar replies: “poor, uneducated criminals, drug dealers.” (John, North-American tourist); “*Favelas* are just the epitome of poor and completely outside of society.” (Jeff, English tourist); “obviously really dangerous, gangs, very poor people, and the living conditions are unfortunate” (Laura, English tourist); “a lot of crime is going on there” (Anja, German tourist). Stefan, an architecture student, confirmed that the only news coverage in Germany is: “about the violence coming in and out

of the *favela*, drug dealers being the bosses of the *favelas*, the wars between gangs and the police,” and Mark, a military pilot from the UK, realized that “the only references in the UK about *favelas* have to do with anti-drug operations; always violent coverage.”

However, when asked to give a more thorough description of a *favela* – before ever visiting one – I noticed the perceptions were based on media representations, which were given context and feeling through visual representations of films. One of the tourists, Jeff, explained that for him the stereotypes are:

“Drug trafficking and poor people, especially from watching movies like *City of God*; often, Afro-Brazilians involved in the drugs business with guns. It influenced me massively! After watching *City of God*, you would never wanna go there. It seems to be the most dangerous place on earth, perhaps the film exaggerated but it definitely contributed to how I think about the *favela* after already getting negative media coverage.”

In all of the descriptions given, crime and gangs were featured most prominently, which suggests a strong connection between preexisting knowledge based on media coverage and the reinforcement of negative stereotypes in films. During interviews and informal talks, the decontextualized crime narrative on *favelas* dominated the tourists’ perceptions prior to their entering a *favela*.

These same tourists were then asked about their perceptions after partaking in one of the *community-based tours* that are the central focus of this study. The tourists were first asked to describe in general terms their changing perceptions, and were then asked to provide another description of a *favela* or description of the *favela*, now that they had completed a tour. These post-tour questions yielded significantly different replies compared to those offered before going on the tour. Tourists’ descriptions shifted from a focus on criminality and danger towards accounts that emphasized and centered around a sense of community:

“I think I’m surprised because I always thought they were lawless places; left behind. But it’s almost like a mini version of normal society where everything actually runs quite smoothly. I expected a tight-knit community but the community sense was stronger than I thought. While walking around, our guide knew pretty much everyone, also scolding a kid of on the street because he did something [...] It’s more sophisticated than I imagined it to be. When you hear about *favelas* and see them on TV, they look like completely dilapidated, just like hous-

es and people scraping by on whatever they can get. I didn't imagine they'd have like a proper system in place" (Jeff, English tourist).

In addition to observations of *favelas* as tight-knit communities, the level of public infrastructure provision in these communities was noted by tourists and formed a large part of their re-oriented perceptions:

"They have pretty developed services, most have water and electricity, cable, internet, and all the associated facilities [...] it really debunks the idea of *favelas* being slums. There are parts or other *favelas* that are more slum-like but these are just functioning neighborhoods, self-regulated functioning communities" (Emma, North-American tourist).

In addition to tourists reaching new, more nuanced definitions of *favelas*, my questions about whether their perceptions had changed yielded commentary such as the following:

"It has changed my perception of the *favela* and people living in these communities. I underestimated how many people work [...] my earlier perception was poor, no jobs, no chances, no food at all, my idea was that it wasn't even a working class, just like, the poorer class" (Laura, English tourist).

A notable exception was a North American Assistant Professor of Urban Planning, who voiced disappointment with certain aspects of the tour. He felt that it was somewhat superficial, and instead hoped for opportunities for more in-depth conversations with locals. His idea about *favelas* had not changed significantly after taking part in a tour, but he acknowledged that this was because he had made prior visits to *favela* communities. This suggests that these tours are most effective as educational interventions for those who do not have personal experience with *favelas*.

Tourists have acknowledged that there are issues and problems that need to be addressed and that each *favela* is unique in certain ways. These remarks indicate that tours do not glamorize or romanticize the *favelas*, but instead provide information about multiple sides of the *favela* reality:

"I wouldn't say they are better off than I thought at first. Obviously, they experience more difficult conditions, but there are a lot of positives that I didn't imagine before. Although you do know crime occurs at times, I get an overall positive feeling from the people living there" (Jeff, English tourist).

The perceptions of Brazilian tourists from São Paulo proved to have changed the most due to *favela* tours. One tourist characterized sentiments expressed by others from São Paulo, saying:

“For sure the tour changed the way we see the *favelas* and Brazil. One of the things that impressed us the most was hearing from our guide that many people actually stay in the *favela* and never leave because they have everything there. All those demonstrations and discussions over politics we are facing today do not properly include them, despite being such a big part of our population. It seems they are an invisible part of the town and country and none of the proposals we have in our politics today include a long-term plan for them. More than that, we could see that despite the problems and issues they have there, we could find great people, willing to help one another. Facing the harsh inequality in Rio, where you can go to a *favela* and then take a 15 minute drive in a van to Copacabana Palace, where you can find 1.3 million *reais* jewelry, it makes you wonder how long it will take until this falls apart” (Flávio, Brazilian tourist).

Based on the data collected, these tours have helped tourists become better-informed about *favelas* as well as reshaping their overall perceptions of *favelas*:

“Now I feel I can have an opinion, I’m more knowledgeable now. When my landlord said ‘Oh don’t go there,’ I said ‘Don’t worry because I used to live in the ghetto.’ But now I can have a more concrete defense and that’s really important to me [...] my opinion wasn’t really informed, so my perception was very negative – they’re not different, they’re just *doing* it different” (Laura, English tourist, interviewee’s emphasis).

As part of this research, tourists were also asked to characterize the *favela* using just 3 to 5 words *before* going on their tour (see figure 3). The same tourists were then asked the same question *after* having visiting a *favela* (see figure 4), which yielded a significant contrast.¹⁶ Interestingly, their descriptions of how their perceptions had changed included both negative and positive aspects of the *favelas*. Although the main descriptive words used, such as “poverty,” “survival,” and “primitive” were still used, words including “criminality” and “danger” were replaced with words that highlight the more positive aspects of the *favelas*.

¹⁶ The size of the words in figures 3 and 4 are not related to the amount of times they were used by the interviewees.

the concept of consent is invalid since economic inequality renders tourism a “necessary evil,” that brings much-needed tourist money into the community, which is welcomed despite the disruptions that it may also bring to the *favela* (Selinger & Outterson, 2010; Freire-Medeiros, 2010). In short, whether *favela* tourism is unethical or not should depend on the opinion of the locals themselves.

Few scholars have actually taken into account local voices while researching *favela* tourism (Dwek, 2004; Freire-Medeiros, 2010). Those who have largely confirm Urry’s (2002) arguments about tourists also becoming objects of voyeurism, as local people systematically view tourists, whose clothes, customs, and cameras serve as considerable entertainment and amusement to them (Williams, 2008). As one *Rocinha* local confirmed to me “It’s funny, I always recognize outsiders by the way they dress and how they look around.”

Half of the locals who were interviewed for this article were business owners (in *Chapéu Mangueira, Cantagalo & Rocinha*) and others were residents who did not own businesses (in *Chapéu Mangueira, Rocinha, Cantagalo, Santa Marta*). The majority viewed the tours as beneficial, either because they create jobs and generate profits for businesses, or because they help project a different, more positive image of their neighborhoods.

Although locals voiced concerns related to large tourist groups and the content of specific tours conducted by outsiders without local knowledge, these same locals also emphasized the positive, beneficial aspects derived from these tours. Most of the locals find the tours positive because they contribute to the development of counter-stigmas (Freire-Medeiros, 2010). On one occasion, a local business owner in *Rocinha* grabbed a chair and joined me at a table outside his restaurant and expressed his views on *favela* tours:

“They’re valuable for the community, as they create awareness, visibility for the community, and people spend money here which is also good for business. They show the reality of the community, here it’s different, lot of wealth difference even within, some people live very good, others don’t [...] It’s bad you know, that they put the police at the entrances of the *favela* just to make it seem as if they’re creating a safe environment, while it’s all camouflage, made up, you know? [...] The tours show other things than the movies, like culture, schools, hospitals, projects, health center, and how it’s organized. And because people here are receptive, they show people’s daily life and the majority don’t mind that” (Luciano, local business owner *Rocinha*).

According to Deborah Dwek (2004), residents feel valued by tourists: "They shake our hands, talk to us, dance with us – unlike Brazilians." Indeed many of the residents I spoke to find it comforting that people in the world actually care about them, rather than ignore them as their own society does: "It's comforting that some people in the world actually care, even if it's just by going on a tour" (Samila, local resident *Rocinha*).

Conclusion

Following the 1992 Earth Summit and in response to the rising global popularity of films portraying *favela* life, a thriving market for tourism has taken root in the South Zone *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, which has resulted in a growing number of tour agencies operating in these communities. Although they are not the principal type of tours operating in these neighborhoods, this research focuses on local tour companies and provides an ideal conceptual framework for sustainable *community-based tours* based on their organizational structure, the content of their tours, and their financial investments in the *favela*.

Drawing on local voices, this article brings new arguments into discussion with past critiques of *favela* tours. The narrative describing how asymmetric relationships reinforce social stratification, should be seen from an emic perspective, in contrast to those substantive claims of inequality made from an etic viewpoint. Despite the imperfection of *community-based favela* tours, the opinion of local community members regarding these tours should be the dominant voice in these debates. Providing etic arguments that make broad critiques of these tours detracts attention from the underlying social issues which these tours are intended to respond to in the first place. Rather than arguing that these tours are a phenomenon of production, which again diverts scholarly attention, these local tour initiatives should be seen as responses to longstanding stereotypes perpetuated by the international community.

This research supports a nuanced and pragmatic argument regarding *favela* tours, which stands in stark contrast to critics that categorically condemn *favela* tours for being inherently unethical. The freedom and mutability of the walking tours means they create the potential for unexpected tourist encounters and interactions with urban dwellers, which makes for dynamic experiences that more closely represent the fluidity of daily life in the *favelas*. From a Foucauldian perspective, walking tours helps eliminate the artificial fence between tourist and resident. This allows residents, who may feel observed by tourists, to put the power of their reverse gaze into action by directly influencing the experience of visitors – either by participating in or withdrawing from interactions with the *favela* tour groups.

The article has argued that the informational content provided by local tour guides on walking tours is the most important element in helping destigmatize tourist perceptions of the *favelas*.

Based on findings from interviews with tourists before and after their first visit to a *favela*, I argue that through the tours' discussions of contemporary social issues related to governmental policies and law-enforcement, which have their roots in colonial ideologies of racial inferiority, (van Rompu, 2017b), local guides are able to contextualize local crime and downplay the media-fueled perceptions of panic, violence, and criminality in the *favelas*. As a result, the tours have helped to rehumanize the *favelas* by constructing a collective reality through the narratives of local tour guides.

Leveraging the globalized negative images of *favelas* to their benefit, these *local* tour operators and guides have attained a degree of financial and social empowerment. This article has illustrated how these local guides have gained a new sense of self-determination by providing more realistic images of the *favela*, which challenge the hegemonic narratives disseminated by the government, (inter)national media, and popular culture. The tours' open-ended presentation of *favela* life offers a less biased understanding of local and national processes that affect *favelas*. The local guides and operators interviewed for this project described how their involvement in these tours is motivated by the opportunities they provide for financial empowerment of themselves and their family/community members, and also by ideological commitments to break down existing stereotypes of *favelas*.

By inserting themselves into capitalist society, tour operators and guides hope to gain the necessary degree of empowerment to overcome negative images of *favelas*. The mechanisms of global capitalism have provided tools to counter stigmatized images of *favelas* by taking control of locally-generated narratives and presenting them to the outside world. As a result of these counter-hegemonic, ideological messages integrated into the daily lives of *favela* residents, these tours can be seen as a form of non-confrontational, everyday resistance, which create international tourism-based market opportunities and ultimately, further integration into global capitalism.

Although these community-based initiatives might not be representative of all *favela* tours, they should be perceived as important actors helping to deconstruct negative stereotypes about *favelas*, raising global awareness, increasing the self-esteem of locals, and recasting their stigmatized identities in a more positive form. Although some scholars find *favela* tourism problematic precisely because many tour agencies morally justify their business operations as opportunities to deconstruct the stereotype of the *favela* (Freire-Medeiros 2012; Rolfes 2010), the findings of this research

demonstrate that *community-based tours* have, in practice, deconstructed these negative images, evidenced by the changed perceptions of tourists. Most notably, these changes were most significant for those who had never entered a *favela* before.

And while deconstructing the stigmatized label attached to *favelas* may not have a direct effect on improving the most pressing social issues facing these communities, *favela* residents have shown a deep appreciation for the opportunity to play a role in creating this local narrative through their reverse gaze. After all, it is individuals who collectively make up the fabric of a community through their myriad interactions. And if we truly believe that it takes only one person to change the world, why not a single-street-level narrative?

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