

COMMERCIAL GENRE IN EVIDENCE: DOES THE FILM, *CITY OF GOD*, MANIPULATE REALITY?

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Abstract || This article aims to share with your readers an insight based study of a film based on the reality of the slum in a west of Rio de Janeiro that serves as a pretext for the director and writers of *City of God* (2002), we pose a central plot through this approach and adaptation alleged gangster genre, from a caricato format, creating a new discursive cliché. This approach emphasizes the film a “fabricated story” supported in an alleged real context, located in the world of the slum, exotic scenery to capture the attention of the international box office through extreme violence and lives that were spent in marginality and crime, perhaps unintentionally is building a biased stereotype?

Key-words || *City of God* | Cinema | Gangster | Handling | Reality | Fiction | Gender | Stereotype.

0. Introduction

In 2002 the film *City of God* opened in Brazil. Its director, Fernando Meirelles, was inspired by Paulo Lins' 1997 romance of the same name. It was box office success with 3.2 million people flocking to watch the feature film which soon achieved international acclaim. And as if to prove it, it received an Oscar nomination in 2004. The film tells the stories of children and young people who become involved in criminal activities and drug dealing in the City of God favela, located in Rio de Janeiro and inaugurated in 1960.

The film, in its narrative and image sequence, conveys an apparent reality that shocks, that makes your eyes sting, and which causes us to reflect upon it. The scenes, constructed by means of brutal aesthetics, tell us of a «subhuman life style»; it permeates us and fastens itself on our consciousness. However, is this real or fictional? After the opening, the director, Fernando Meirelles, was asked how he thought people would view *City of God*: «[...] we didn't invent this story. It is like a mirror: it is not the reflection's fault, it is the fault of the reflected reality» (Paulo Lins *apud* MoretzSohn, 2002: 3). His defence contrasts with Núñez's point of view: «El cine no puede entenderse como un mero soporte técnico-material para la vehiculización de una representación, en tanto que discurso, aparato ideológico, no es un espejo, un reflejo de la realidad, un instrumento pasivo o neutral de reproducción» (2005:24), we end up with a specific interest in analysing whether the film's proposed discourse represents a manipulation of reality by means of a format that is commercial, clichéd and a caricature.

1. Favela: discourses and stereotypes

It is well known that slums are not exclusive to Brazil as Mike Davis' book, *Planet of Slums*¹, demonstrates. No more does it belong only to the community that makes it up seeing that the difference between asphalt (a word used to denote any other neighbourhoods that aren't favelas) and favela is promoted daily. Through the news, newspapers, magazines, and cultural products, mostly cinema and literature, a large part of the planet gains access to this reality, with each of these media bringing a distinct bias to their depiction of the favela world. However, all are in agreement when it comes to conveying the idea of a people who are excluded, marginalized, aggressive, drug dealers, idle, black and dangerous. These stereotypes contribute to the image of Brazilian identity, especially that of the favelas. Thus it contributes to form the collective imagination and transform it into a commonly held belief.

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1 | According to Davis, «there are probably more than 200 thousand slums whose populations vary from a few hundred to more than a million people. The 5 great metropolitan areas of Southern Asia (Karachi, Mumbai, Déhli, Calcutá and Dacca) alone contain about 15 thousand different slum communities whose total population exceeds 20 million inhabitants» (2006: 37).

Thinking that cinema can be a means to generate discourses which, in their turn, induce changes in society, is extremely important and carries tremendous responsibility since believing that films can shape the collective imagination can (re)affirm or deny a preconception or even reinforce a «colonialism» which may still be latent in Brazilian social conduct.

From the sixties onwards, with the «cinema novo», the poverty scenario was used as a form of social criticism. Leading this trend was the prestigious director Glauber Rocha protesting against what was not said, not shown, not known. In view of the fact that this was an era of censorship, cinema was experienced as the social denouncer of the existing chaos, particularly during the dreadful time of the dictatorship.

During the following years, the nation's production of films suffered an abrupt drop, going through periods of almost total lack of production due the scarcity of laws promoting cultural initiatives. The year 2000 was marked by a revival phase in the Brazilian film industry when new life was breathed into it by, as Oricchio (2003) remarks, the fiscal incentives law, and the support of Ancine – a new agency regulating the film industry.

The revival cinema generates polemic when making the same, previously known, social criticism as before, however, nowadays, it devotes greater attention to its aesthetical effects, something previously unheard of, as is the case of the film that is the subject of this study, the immensely influential *City of God*.

The technical quality of Meirelles' work is unquestionable as the film is a harmonious piece of work from the images to the soundtrack. Everything flows well; it offers adrenaline. And goodbye to inertia. The cast is perfect including as it does favela inhabitants, i.e., unknown actors. This represented an interesting innovation for the work as a whole since it revealed high-level acting ability and produced great authenticity when «incarnating» the characters in a hard and cruel environment. The characters' lines/speeches were all adapted to the local language; dialogues full of slang and malice; a veracity with impact. The film covers three decades, starting in the sixties and ending in the early eighties, and every scene shows accomplished scenic work which glitters in a grotesque physical space, in the characters' depiction, in the video clip scenes, in the countless flashbacks, in the camera's odd angles and in the ideology defended in each decade. We become witnesses to human destruction in aid of hunger for power, for vengeance, and, sometimes, for no reason at all.

The lifestyle portrayed in the *City of God*, abovementioned as «subhuman», is explained by the fragility of the physical space, by the way that, with each new scene, nature gives way to broken bricks, cracked windows, blood stains, in the narrow alleys that connect the favela's financial market. These are the *bocas de fumo*, points of sale where the traffic of drugs is conducted. Furthermore, a view of life which worsens as time goes by, shortens and crumbles between the one who orders and the one who obeys; between power and meagre denial, between individualism and lack of community spirit, between fear and next-to-no optimism, between a lightless dead-end and a no-hoper's life, between drug dealers and the police, between taking bribes and complicity; that is to say, between War and War.

The aesthetics, centred on making violence a show, has a role as a mere accuser, devoid of any mediation, contextualization and critical position. This being the case, the following questions arise: which section of the public was the film aimed at? The excess of violence that intends to assail the spectator, the idealization of a ghetto – a black ghetto moreover, alluding to marginalised individuals and recalling the Afro-American ghettos – the protagonist's personality, a gangster as seen in gangster films, his rise and fall, the mafia saga, the famous love triangle that separates inseparable friends, and the sole survivor – he who can tell us the story; all these ingredients may, no doubt, make up a more attractive profile for the story as it is very similar to North American films and more likely to succeed internationally. Meanwhile, isn't this becoming yet another «fabricated story»?

In 2008, with the collaboration of the inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro favelas, the Brazilian Institute for Social Research² carried out a survey that yielded the following statistics: those interviewed expressed the opinion that the social image of the favelas portrayed in the film is «completely distorted». To 85.1% of those interviewed, the favela is not the «haunt of criminals», and to 93.1%, it is not the place of the «poor and black». To 65.4% of those interviewed, press coverage of favela events is sensationalistic because it distorts facts and relies on prejudices. These results force us to give further weight to the possibility that reality is being manipulated in the film *City of God*. In cutting out a section of reality in order to delineate the film's discourse, the person constructing it is pre-positioning him/herself so as to fulfil their own criteria and objectives.

The effort to achieve verisimilitude with so many validations and impressions of reality, may create in the spectator's mind a distorted image of a something that is supposed to be the source and haunt of a violence that daily assails the city. The sociologist Octavio Ianni remarks that such de-contextualization produces enduring and nefarious attitudes to the way in which social problems are perceived

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2 | The research referenced encompasses several questions. It tackles infrastructure, drug dealing, and the standard of living of favela inhabitants. Available here: <http://www.cufa.org.br/in.php?id=materias/mat315>

in Brazil:

Long after, virtually a century after, the abolition of Slavery, the suspicion that the victim is the culprit still lurks in the social consciousness of the Brazilian people. There are studies finding that «hardship», «poverty» and «ignorance» are states of nature, or else the responsibility of those suffering hardship, poverty, illiteracy. There is no visible attempt to reveal the mesh of relationships which produce social inequalities (1997:97).

2. Commercial genre in evidence – gangster –

The film's adherence to the gangster genre amplifies its discursive reading, and offers us a chance to unravel the verisimilitude proposition attributed to it, and it brings us closer to its manipulative character through a 'fabricated story' within recognized structures.

La representación de la violencia tampoco puede manifestarse de manera realista. La contundencia sonora de las metralletas, la sequedad de los cortes en un montaje ajeno a la retórica discursiva, la carencia completa de emociones en la ejecución de esa violencia, la ausencia de todo rasgo de espectacularidad... provocan una sacudida que no deja espacio para la reflexión y que persigue antes el escalofrío (*thrill*) que la caracterización (Heredero, 1996:189).

Gangster films deal with a discourse about the clash between the new capitalist social order and the criminal opposition put up by those marginalized by the system. Historically speaking, the gangster precedes the Wall Street crash and is patronized by the economic prosperity and the development of capitalism that took place in the twenties; in the films the gangster comes out of the stock market crash and is a child of the depression later redeemed by the thirties' *New Deal* regeneration. «El gangster de la ficción hunde sus raíces en esta dicotomía y expresa, por ello, una contradicción mucho más profunda todavía, que afecta de lleno a una corriente importante, casi medular, del pensamiento americano» (Shadoian *apud* Heredero, 1996:145).

The driving force of the notion that American is a fertile land of opportunities, and at the same time an egalitarian and democratic society is submerged by an ideological contradiction: «la bondad de la lucha por el triunfo y la maldad implícita en el hecho de sobresalir sobre el resto de los ciudadanos, el elogio del individualismo y el reproche al deseo de distinción sobre los demás» (Heredero, 1996: 145). So, cinema gangsters perform this metaphor which expresses the central problem of the American mythology, i.e., «el conflicto entre la ley y el libre albedrío, entre la inocencia y la corrupción, entre las reglas de la conveniencia civil y el universo de los sin ley» (Divisa,

2007:233).

Películas como *Hampa dorada* (1931), *El enemigo público* (1931) o *Scarface* (1932) – a las tomaremos aquí como los títulos más representativos del modelo – no sólo describen de manera análoga y, sobre todo, muy estilizada el ascenso y caída social de sus protagonistas, sino que los elementos narrativos y moldes argumentales que sostienen dicha trayectoria (cuya conexión con la realidad no puede ser, a pesar de todo, más que efímera y episódica) guardan una gran similitud entre ellos hasta el punto de parecer casi siempre los mismos, como si la realidad fuese unívoca y los hampones de la calle tan esquemáticos como los que presentan estas ficciones (Herederó, 1996:157).

According to Herederó, from the Thirties onwards, it is possible to observe how the construction and reproduction of gangster traits produce easily identifiable archetypes and narratives. In the *City of God*, the first point under consideration – the rise and fall of the gangster – is easy to see. This is very obvious in Zé Pequeno's trajectory. He reaches the zenith of his wealth and power, built up throughout the film, and then, at the end of the film, quickly falls when the authorities confiscate his wealth and he becomes poor. Given this view of the temporal narratives in *City of God*, one can see another proof of the film's adaptation to the genre: «The ascension is slow and difficult (although it is told with a dynamic rhythm), and makes much work for the subject, occupying the majority of the narrative space. The fall is rapid, almost precipitate; one doesn't need many frames to represent it» (Herederó, 1996:175).

According to Herederó, the gangster's path is almost exclusively within the criminal world; i.e., conflicts between rival groups come about due to the settling of accounts and hardly reflect the environment in which that criminal counter-society proliferates. Characteristics also present in the film which shows predominantly, almost exclusively, the conflicts and the absence of any thoughtful consideration of the origins of the chaos depicted.

According to Shadoian, whom Herederó cites, the gangster's nature, «doesn't suffer guilt or have second thoughts because there is no dissociation between what it pretends to be and what it really is» (1996: 6). Zé Pequeno's psychological profile has no place for guilt for the atrocities he commits; he is totally devoid of moral, social, and political convictions; his ambition to become the favela's leader is uncompromisingly there to the very end. «Los trazos de crueldad, infantilismo, coquetería o patología patológica se refuerzan desde la mímica de los rostros y destacan en relieve sobre un fondo grisáceo, compuesto por figuras secundarias que siempre se muestran mucho más comedidas que los protagonistas en su expresividad facial» (1996: 186). Apparent in both *Dadinho* and *Zé Pequeno* is what we

might call an exaggeratedly aggressive and cruel tone which makes them stand out from the rest. On an emotional level, the characters frequently suffer from affective deprivation. This is evident in Pequeno's profile when he is rejected by Galinha's girlfriend, and also when he witnesses Bené giving Buscapé a camera as a present. Another mainstay of the narrative outline of gangster movies, and endorsed by the *City of God*, is a rapid and concise connection between different scenes; the speed and condensing capabilities of a cut and closed sequential structure where one shot encompasses the previous one, creates a dry, rasping, and bumpy quality. The off-screen narrative is also a very popular technique of the dark genre of gangster movies. For example: in *Perdición* (1944) and *Detour* (1945), because, «en las películas, sirve a varios propósitos... sitúa al espectador en la mente del protagonista, para que pueda experimentar de forma más íntima la angustia del personaje» (Silver; Ursini: 2004:20). This technique is used as a means of achieving, through Buscapé's off-screen narrative, a closeness and a link with the viewer.

The recourse to flashbacks and the points of view identified by the camera, are a throwback to the genre and are repeated on several occasions in *City of God*. The film opens with knives being sharpened to the sound of a beat. In a corner some chickens are being held and one by one they are killed and plucked. However, one is able to untie itself and escapes. The chicken makes a quick escape from having its neck wrung and in following its trajectory we are plunged into the next scene which anticipates the flashback end of the film and which is the starting point for the whole story: by means of rotating the camera this way and that from the standpoint of Buscapé, the viewer sees a gang of children and young people holding weapons and facing a group of policemen. This image is similar to a classic duel scene and it contains a clear metaphor since we have the «two sides of the coin»: the criminals versus the police.

As Heredero states, in the genre's composition there is always room for redemption due to the influence that the woman he loves has over the gangster. This can be seen in the paths of Bené and Cabelereira, who reject the lives of criminals in favour of the love of, respectively, Angélica and Berenice, and the significant presence of the friend character, inseparable companion of the gangster, whose death or break with the gang as for example *Hampa Dorada*, anticipates the boss' in our context, a role fulfilled by Bené. Almost always, the gangster's death obeys a particular finale: «la muerte, bien a manos de la policía o acribillado por alguna banda rival» (Divisa, 2007:279). This is the way Zé Pequeno meets his end, i.e., he is killed by the rival gang: the kids of the Caixa Baixa.

On the other hand, the use of newspapers, a factual means of communication, has its role in this film format since «it is an element used to build up the narrative progression (with the added value of conciseness) and to reinforce, from the outside, the effect of verisimilitude which is sought from inside the story» (Heredero, 1996:179). This is a recurring element in the film and marked by the link existing between Buscapé's profession (he starts off by photographing crime) and the entity that employs him: the newspaper.

The dualistic feeling between the countryside and the city also has a well-established place in the genre as Heredero remarks; as, for example, in *El Último Refugio* (1941). The countryside is portrayed in a romantic way with uncontaminated values, and the city as corrupting these values. In the *City of God* the same duality can be observed; this time in the form of asphalt versus favela. Here corruption is linked to the favela, whereas the asphalt has a romanticised role of purity and social order.

The North American mythology of success and personal triumph, the myth of the self-made-man, the fight for personal affirmation, all these portray the archetypal American dream. This mythology experienced in the prosperity phase of the Twenties, will disappear as a consequence of the depression. The struggle to achieve success and the consequences of failure to achieve it are the lines along which many of these fictions are organised. In the words of Heredero:

las tensiones extremas generadas por ambos procesos, las heridas sociales y personales, económicas o morales, que llevan consigo se revelan, entonces, como la contrapartida de la confianza ilusoria en la posibilidad ilimitada de ascenso social y de los estímulos culturales que aquella sociedad prodiga en torno al combate por el éxito individual (1996: 159).

In the face of this, it becomes impossible not to see the capitalist mythology in the gangster's rise, i.e., the banal practices such as boundless competition, the elimination of the weak, ostentation and luxury as symbols of power, the cult of money, etc. Bridging the gap with the film under study, the gangster figure is strongly identified with the self-made-man myth and also with the Buscapé character, subtly worked, who metamorphoses into a photographer, a career liable to lead to «artistic fame».

2.1. *City of god* and *slumdog millionaire* – caricature

The 2008 film, *Slumdog Millionaire*, by the British director Danny Boyle and based on the 2005 book Q&A by Vikas Swarup is another contemporary example of a production adapted to the commercial

genre. We will take it as a basis to demonstrate that, while this film doesn't make use of the Gangster genre exclusively, it has parallels with *City of God* in the slums theme and slums discourse. The film is set in Mumbai, India, and it shines light on the reality of the slums. The story revolves around two brothers, Jamal and Salim, the competition «Who Wants to be a Millionaire?» and urban criminals. The focus is on the boundless poverty of the slums, evident in the appalling condition of the infra-structure and the total lack of money – graphically demonstrated in the scene where Jamal uses an improvised toilet and ends up covered in his own excrement – as well as in the scenes that follow where Jamal, Salim and Latika sleep together in a rickety shack, on a pile of rubbish and search for food in the surrounding, abundant, rubbish. Through all this, it is possible to see a difference in tone between Meirelles' direction in the *City of God* and Boyle's in *Slumdog Millionaire*. Whereas in the Meirelles film the deprivations are omitted in favour of the «spectacle» of violence, in *Slumdog* the violence comes from the deprivation shown. However, independently of the approach to the context, both contain the gangster element. I shall begin by drawing the parallels between the Jamal-Salim duo and the Bené-Zé Pequeno duo. Salim's characterization is like that of Zé Pequeno: they are both gangsters. He takes the wrong path, he is ambitious and power hungry, he wants money at any cost. The gangster caricature comes from the street boys who try to overcome the mediocrity and poverty that surround them and who, through ambition, vanity and strife for power, slide into the dark paths of criminality, as shown by Heredero.

Meanwhile, Jamal takes the right path and opposes evil doing and violence, just like Bené who, in spite of being Zé Pequeno's accomplice, doesn't commit murder, and who was one of the lads and moderated the bad deeds of his companion. Until the final phase of the film, Jamal remains fast friends with his brother. They are always together even when planning childish forays to obtain food. On the other hand, Latika, beautiful and attractive, serves as the motive for the brothers falling out. It is a clichéd discourse also characteristic of the genre. And at the end of the film, Salim has a moment of regret, of redemption, and releases Latika so that she can go to his brother. Both protagonists end up living the North American dream of success. One along an evil path but avid for personal triumph, the other along a good path as a result of becoming a game show millionaire in a fairytale win, yet also achieving his goal and reinforcing the myth of the American self-made man and showing, like Buscapé, that he has rejected the option of an easy life of crime, and living the myth of a happy ending in both films. Spatial dualism is also recurrent; on one side the favela, poverty, on the other, urban reality, wealth – in this case shown by the opulence of the house of the gangster Salim works for. This frames the origin of the corruption of urban society which creates distortions in the social system, results

in unbalance and produces criminals. The gangster's rise and fall is easily recognizable and the narrative time to construct his trajectory is very similar to that in the *City of God*; slow rise, fast fall followed by death.

3. The manipulated: an upside-down context

The least convincing thing going on, and which I believe to be the most indicative of the fact that facts are being distorted, is the strengthening of the image that the favela simply boils down to violence, ignorance and drugs. Besides this equivocation, there is another of great importance: the coupling of this image, not with an ideology of a humanist stamp and thoughtful discourse, but with one with a stamp of glamour for the show of weapons, shots, lust for power, shrewdness of the leader, cult of money, boundless individuality, interminable conflicts, and cocaine in plenty. Through a privileged aesthetics it portrays a life choice, and it is a choice, which seduces and crystallises an attractive opportunity to obtain power, respect, fame, disinterest in work and the complete acceptance that life is discardable thus diminishing the viewer's emotional sensitivity in favour of desperate adrenaline. The life of a gangster becomes a prestigious social career. In making poverty and criminality a spectacle, the film lost impact as a means of social criticism although it is useful as a cathartic element for a middleclass who prefers to go to the cinema to watch «the true Brazil» on the big screen while leaving the images of a «false Brazil» to the lower classes. A discursive cliché, empty of historical meaning³ and committed to reinforcing the border that distances and protects «us on the asphalt» from «you in the favela» and which may as a consequence create a climate favourable to gain new followers given the fragility of the social fabric. What could have been an opportunity for thoughtful evaluation of social problems became an aesthetic exuberance of commercial interest on an international level⁴.

Since the things that are lacking (housing, education, food, a national health service) are not made evident in the film, the incentives to become a drug dealer, a criminal – something that includes children and adults – aren't made explicit, and neither does the film provide a compelling reason for why things should be as they are. The lifestyle delineated in the film becomes aggressive and inhuman when it comes into contact with reality. Even in the *City of God* the community has 80 organizations dedicated to activities such as: dance, theatre, music, literature, and crafts amongst others. This suggests it is an urban centre like any other, containing shopping centres, schools, leisure centres, banks, supermarkets; perhaps more precarious than in other places, yet there. Their daily life is similar to that of other Brazilians; they work, they study, they have fun; they do this each

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3 | I am referring to the way in which the favela theme was approached, i.e., devoid of historical context. It was presented as an orphan which may lead us to arrive a mistaken and distorted simplification of reality.

4 | I emphasise the international interest seeing that «the biggest advance of *City of God* is in the international partnerships in co-production [...] In 2001, while still shooting *City of God*, co-production with Miramax in the United States, and with Studio Canal in France was agreed [...] These partnerships, made for the first time with companies that have great international prominence, opened important doors to Brazilian cinema, and guaranteed in advance that the film would be screened in foreign countries and facilitated the circulation of films in festivals and markets. In the same way, this advance backing represents significant confidence in the quality of the final product. Up until then, the films of the revival period were only negotiated after they were finished [...]». http://www.centrocultural.sp.gov.br/revista_dart/pdfs/revista%20dart%2012.pdf.

according to his or her ability. A study that questioned 42% of the favela inhabitants showed that 50% believe that they live as well as anybody on the asphalt. In the film, none of these gets a mention and it would appear that practically everyone in the favela is a drug dealer, has low academic achievement, no expectations from life or dreams to achieve. In contrast with statistical data, the great majority of children have access to education (83.4%) which, although of low quality, still teaches them enough to guarantee them progression in their work (this was the case for 54,8% of those interviewed). In the film, the majority of children devote their lives to drug dealing and they use weapons. However, it is not made explicit that they do this as the only means of survival, and instead make it seem that it is a very natural thing and the professional career to obtain power and success inherent to their environment

The presence of families is completely left out of the film making it seem like the majority materialised out of thin air. There is no questioning of the need for, or the absence of, parents and other relatives. They demonstrate that they are people incapable of carrying out a healthy dialogue; there is no other subject except the world of crime. The characters are devoid of moral, intellectual, spiritual and social content. Are they human? They have affixed a label to this community for which we lack appropriate nomenclature to define.

In what regards drug dealing⁵, which, generally speaking, is the origin of the violence, the destabilizing element that brings it into being, it has no place in the film. In the way it is presented, it seems to suggest that the drugs are a product made in that environment, i.e., that the drugs are planted and gathered there as well as all types of violence. The outside, i.e., society is excluded from any responsibility or role in the theme, because its «social purity» was defended through its beautiful beaches, its beautiful white people, its beautiful sunsets. Another issue that generates strong dissent relates to the dissemination of the idea of «a world apart» with its «separate beings». According to research, it is clear that almost 70% of favela inhabitants consider themselves integrated in society, whereas in the film the story takes place almost exclusively within the walls of the favela, which makes it look like an exotic world to those looking in from the outside. The research has not found this lack of connection with the outside world, there is no wall between the favela and the asphalt; this obstruction is created from the outside, mainly by those who do not possess the ability to demystify it. I refer to the media who «stereotypes» and «conditions» thought and conviction processes, or even ideologies, through news broadcasts or cultural products, which may in this way reinforce the peripheral imagery and commit an act of violence against these people who are already morally battered.

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5 | Drug dealing was identified as an internal favela product, not taking into consideration the powerful and influential protagonists that act in that environment, i.e., the «asphalt». According to Zaluar's book, *A Hundred Years of Favela*: «The advent of Colombian cartels and other mafias linked to drug trafficking, cocaine in particular, brought to the country very powerful fire arms which were distributed amongst the young drug dealers and runners, involving an network of intermediaries which including police officers and mules who bring the drugs from other states or countries and who sell them in large quantities (i.e., by weight and not in individual wrappers)» (UNDCP *apud* Zaluar, 1999: 210).

The film's narrative doesn't, in the slightest degree, take into consideration the past of the Brazilian nation which was the victim of a colonization process which was intense and devastating particularly in its social aspects. In this I pay special attention to all that refers to black people⁶. An identity that was shackled to maladies of all kinds of prejudices and types of bitterness, and which nowadays is perpetuated in the form of a ghetto.

It is possible to see by the coincidences observed (in the adaptation to the gangster genre), that the film is not based on a naïve story format, that is to say, it tries to appeal to the viewers in specific ways. Commercial interests are clearly visible; in the background an industry avid to achieve international success. I am not criticising this approach because you can't make apologies for philanthropy since costs need to be met and before us is a marketable product. I only make it evident as the foundation that influences the manipulation issue under discussion. This being the case, would dealing with the favelas theme in a less aesthetic, more thoughtful way interest the international public?

The correspondences between the adaptation and the commercial gangster genre make the film much closer to fiction than to reality. In visualising the caricatures of the genre's archetypes present in *City of God* and which have been in use since the Thirties, the sense that this is reality (as the film defends) is lost, and we get the sense that we are watching a «fabricated story». What is claimed as reality, and that *cannot be omitted*, are the topics of violence and drugs associated with the favelas. That is the reality in the world, not only in the City of God. In view of this, the theme of a notorious and important reality, I suggest that a real discourse was used to «dilute», «disguise» and «incorporate» the commercial genre in the production of this film. When watching the path of the film's narrative, through its shocking and chilling images, the supposed reality is portrayed by means of violence and more violence; it paralyses the spectator and this causes him/her to believe in the authenticity of the story since their reference points come from the contents of the press which daily assails their readers with the same headlines: favela, the haunt of criminals and drug dealers. Meanwhile, taking into consideration the fact that that «authentic» reference is not exempt from sensationalism and media speculation either, this is the place to reflect and consider the possibility that the theme under discussion has been manipulated.

The idea of developing the story closed within the walls of the favela seeks to appeal internationally, since the daily life of the favelas appears exotic to international audiences enticed by curiosity and ignorance, and thus could provide substantial interest to make people go and watch the film.

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6 | Finally, 1850 sees an end to the traffic of slaves and 1888 sees the end of slavery with the passing of the Áurea law. Black people survived the end of slavery only to see themselves nowadays enclosed and «bestialised» in discursive formats that are similar to ghettos and bear the codename, favela.

After this analysis, it is imperative to add that, in my opinion, the delicacy of the theme requires a different type of approach due to the facility with which fiction mixes with reality: *City of God* (a real community) is, above all, represented by the favela inhabitants themselves exploring the language constructed in that community. The name chosen for the film, *City of God*, is a direct allusion to the community in question, but it is also a reference to all the other Rio de Janeiro favelas, which, once again, become the guilty parties instead of the victims through the «distorted» stereotypes used to represent them. The claim that a film is *based on real events* immediately suggests to the viewer that what he/she is about to watch approaches reality. However, in this case, the claim alludes to the book of Paulo Lins, which was written in an imaginative way⁷, and where, although some of the characters bear the name of real people, is basically a work of fiction as the author himself has said. With regard to the how naturally the cast acted, there is a verisimilitude that intimidates when the time comes to question it. However, the manipulation exercise is revealed when behaviours, attitudes, thoughts, are *generalised* in a single perspective, the perspective of criminality and tarring a whole community. The only exception being the sole survivor, the one with a good heart and morals values: Buscapé. You cannot render the whole with an exception; however, through the whole you render and defend an ideology – a discourse.

From what has been said, I think the film's fictional stamp is clearly contrasts with the way its director tried to justify the film: «[...] we didn't invent this story».

Thus, it can be concluded that cinema is a show and has always been; it was developed to that end. So the representation of complex problems, such as the issue of favelas versus asphalt, has to be analysed in carefully because discourses pertaining to identity, reaffirmed by film discourses, become facts in the collective imagery. Therefore, it is important that they be questioned and destabilized in the search for new meanings.

4. A final word

I could not conclude this investigative study without a final word. The intention of this piece was neither to criticise nor to denigrate the work of Fernando Meirelles. For the record, I admire the film as a work of art. It is undeniable that the film gave Brazilian cinema a tremendous boost. It served to put Brazil in focus not only at a national level but also, and above all, at an international level. It shifted paradigms and demonstrated the quality of Brazilian filmmaking.

NOTES

7 | Interview with the writer Paula Lins, who talks about the process of writing the book *City of God*. Published in the magazine: Caros Amigos (Edition 74), May 2003.

In what pertains to the format of the film's contents, I would also say, for the record, that for many other people the film may have served as a form of thoughtful discourse within some specific point of view and it may, by means of one argumentation bias or another, have «de-structured» the viewer in search of thoughtful consideration of social issues.

I was particularly interested in (re)interpreting the work by deconstructing the stereotypes reiterated in order to refer to reality since, many times, I found myself endorsing the «depicted verisimilitude» and, in those moments, I found myself plunged in this «collective make-believe» structured in the same stereotype film format. It was then that I realised that it was necessary to carry out this study mainly to refresh my mind on the issues of the favela community.

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