

SOCIAL SCIENCE REPRESENTATIONS OF FAVELAS IN RIO DE JANEIRO: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE*

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The word favela in the main dictionaries in English and French is translated as *slum* or *bidonville*.¹ Some social scientists also use these words to refer to favelas (Davis, 2006, is one of the best examples).² But “words need to be employed carefully” says Gilbert (2007) referring to the word slum and to the use it is given by the United Nations “who has employed the word in order to publicize the seriousness of the urban problem and to improve its ability to attract funding”. In France, Depaule (2006) and Depaule and Topalov (1996) have also been arguing that *banlieue*, *bidonville*, *ghetto*, *slum*, *taudis* do not have the same meaning everywhere and that one should beware of semantic conversions and generalizations.³ In fact it seems that the systematic use of such words ends up stigmatizing neighborhoods situated at the bottom of the hierarchical system of places that compose the metropolis and it also ends up endorsing the idea of a positive link between territory, identity and commitment.⁴ Does this

* I would like to thank Peter Ward for his remarks which helped to improve this text.

¹ In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2000) : « In Brazil, a shack, shanty ; a slum : usu in pl. favelas, a collection of improvised huts, a shanty town. Hence favelado, a person dwelling in a favela. In the *Nouveau Petit Robert* (2000) : « Au Brésil, ensemble d’habitations populaires de construction sommaire et dépourvues de confort. Les favelas de Rio (voir aussi bidonville) ». See also www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Squatter-camp

² The title of the translation of “The Planet of Slums” in Portuguese is “O Planeta Favela”. In French the book is called “La Planète bidonville”. See also Kramer (2006).

³ These two authors direct a project named “Les mots de la ville”. The results of the work of that international network of scholars will soon be published under the name “Trésor des mots de la ville”.

⁴ It is worth mentioning Loic Wacquant’s article – « Pour en finir avec le mythe des ‘cités-ghettos’ ; les différences entre la France et les Etats Unis ». that stresses why one should not compare the *cités* in France with the ghettos in the United States.

hold for Brazil, and in particular for Rio de Janeiro, where the favela is assumed to be *the* place of poverty in the city?

I will argue here that one should not use the term slum while referring to a favela. This paper will discuss the question based on images and ideas used by the social sciences in Brazil to build their representations of such areas.

The term was initially used in dictionaries as a botanical denomination in XIXth century rural Brazil. Favela was the name of a plant, with a medicinal and a practical function: its leaves were used for a herb tea and its light wood served as building material. It was also a plant that provoked itches and had thus a symbolic meaning. It gained a geographical sense (Morro da Favella, in Bahia, then in Rio de Janeiro) during a rural civil war named “*Guerra de Canudos*” (1895-1896) where soldiers after having fought in the war in Bahia eventually settled on a hill in Rio de Janeiro called Morro da Providência, as they awaited their pay. They named their new settlement Morro da Favella, after the plant which had thrived at the site of their famous victory against the rebels and also as a symbolic gesture, as they were now in an inferior position. There from designating a specific place, favela became eventually the general denomination of an urban phenomenon typical of Rio’s development from the 1920s on, whereby settlers built precarious homes in land they did not own.⁵ By the 1950s it was extended to a national category used by the Brazilian census, and from the 1960s on it entered the terminology of the social sciences.⁶ Nowadays it stands in Brazil for a poor segregated area in the city and it is often seen contradictorily as an area of solidarity and sociability, but where violence, associated to drug dealing, is present in everyday life.

To start with, I will distinguish the historical phases in the production of academic discourses. Next, I will look at the history of research on favelas and describe the characteristics of the corpus of academic productions: who studies the favelas of Rio? Which disciplines are involved? What have been the methods used? What have been the main findings? Which favelas are covered by most case

⁵ The word lost an l in ????

⁶ For a more detailed analysis of the word favela see Valladares (2006) where I discuss the origin of the myth and its multiple uses in the first half of the XX century.

studies? Lastly, I will characterize the predominant views structuring these representations and I shall argue that a set of dogmas has become the conventional wisdom maintaining a homogenous and stable view of favelas, whereas their reality has moved in many different directions.

1. Development of academic discourses on the favelas of Rio de Janeiro

In current discourse, the word “favela” is associated with “social problems”, “segregation” and “urban violence”. A historical approach shows nonetheless that the favela has been an issue of debate for at least a century, linked to a succession of images and other representations that stem from the social constructions that engineers, doctors, administrators, politicians, writers and social scientists have built up over the years in dealing with this particular social and urban phenomenon (Valladares, 2006).

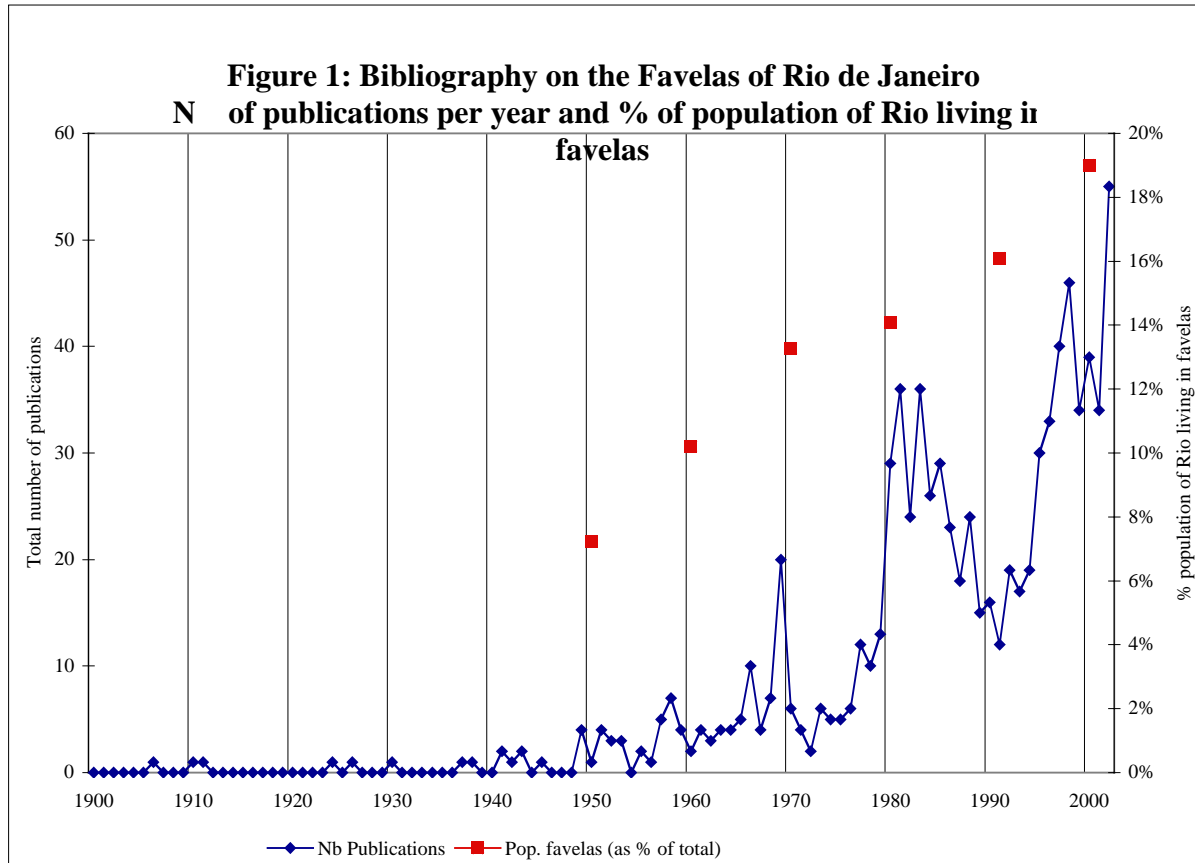
My analysis of the scientific literature is based on a corpus of 838 texts (produced between 1906 and 2002) identified by the URBANDATA-Brasil database.⁷ Bibliographical research was carried out in 46 libraries in Rio de Janeiro and on the Internet. The corpus comprises articles published in periodicals (37%), university theses and dissertations (20.4%), research reports (11.9%), books (13.7%), unpublished communications to conferences (9.6%), proceedings of colloquia (4.2%) and other documents (2.1%).⁸ Publications considered were mainly in Portuguese but also in English, French and Spanish.

Figure 1 shows on the one hand distribution of publications on favelas by year and on the other (since 1950) the proportion of the

⁷ URBANDATA-Brasil (<http://urbandata.iuperj.br/>) records for each publication, in addition to the usual bibliographical details, information on the research method used (case study, survey based on sampling, secondary analysis, diagnosis or assessment, comparative study, historical study), the discipline within which the author or authors are working, the place or places investigated, the themes dealt with (26 categories). A summary is made of each publication. I would like to thank Lidia Medeiros, who co-ordinated the work of a team of trainees on the favelas. The resultant analytical bibliography of 668 texts covering the 1906-2000 period is the most complete to date on the subject (Valladares and Medeiros, 2003).

⁸ URBANDATA-Brasil covers neither articles published in the daily and weekly press (with the exception of special supplements) nor institutions’ internal reports not communicated to the public. In the category “other documents” we have nonetheless included a number of documents of this sort because of their political or historical significance.

population of Rio recorded as living in the favelas. The publications curve brings out overall developments, showing the growing weight of the literature.



Source: URBANDATA-Brasil 2004. Data cover years to end of 2002

In the figure three periods can be distinguished. The first (ending in the 1940s) corresponds to the emergence of academic thinking on the favela: the limited number of publications involved shows that few authors were mobilized. This production dates from before the take-off of the social sciences in Brazil. It is highly significant, since from these beginnings date the representations of the favela that will predominate during the later 20th century: the opposition between the favela and the city. Writing is usually journalistic, in the form of essays which, often relying on moral judgement, call for improvements in hygiene, education and welfare. These calls are supported during the early years of the century by the reforming discourse of engineers, medical practitioners, journalists and writers showing concern for the future of Rio, *Cidade Maravilhosa* (marvelous city). This literature focuses on the “first” favela of the city, the Morro de Favella which since its “creation” had become an

archetype; it replays the myth of the origin of the favela (Valladares, 2006).

The second period runs from the end of the 1940s to the mid-1960s: the favela, now seen as a social problem and an issue in urban planning, becomes a *fait accompli*. This phase is also that of the transition to social sciences. The censuses of 1948 (carried out by the authorities of the Federal District) and 1950 (the National Census carried out by IBGE, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) brought forth the first significant crop of scientific studies. As the first official data on the favelas and their inhabitants became available, the traditional vision of the favelas and *favelados* (estimates would go up to 200,000, they were believed to live in shacks, were considered all black and lazy, a “bunch” of unqualified workers) was questioned; demographic weight, activities, origins and skin colour were now taken into account scientifically. The 1950 national census produced the first statistical definition of the favela, by introducing the official category of *aglomerado sub-normal*, applying five criteria: an agglomeration of at least 50 housing units could be considered a favela, provided that shacks of crude appearance were predominant, that no permits had been issued for the construction, that there was no inspection, that it had been put up on property that did not belong to the occupants, that servicing (drainage, electricity and water supply, telephone lines) was absent or inadequate, and that the zone had not been properly urbanized and that streets had not been laid out. For the first time, the phenomenon could be measured: there were 58 favelas in Rio; they had 169,305 inhabitants, 7% of the total population of the city in 1950.⁹

The third period begins in the mid-1960s; it is marked by a sharp increase in the number of publications, and corresponds to the “favela of the social sciences”. This period accounts for more than 90% of all the literature on the subject. As of the 1970s, the number of studies

⁹ An important methodological issue has to do with the difference between favelas and *loteamentos irregulares*. At first sight many of those *loteamentos* just look like favelas. But there is a significant difference related to tenure. In the case of favelas the occupation is (mostly) on invaded land. In the case of the *loteamentos irregulares* the occupant originally bought the piece of land but the developer of the *loteamento* did not fulfill his obligations (water and sewage system). It is the history of the area that will tell if an area remains a *loteamento* or transforms into a favela, if subsequent land use becomes more and more irregular, adding invasion to the original regular lots. I do not know whether the 1950 census took into account this difference. But it has clearly been taken into consideration in subsequent censuses as well as in the work of IPLAN-Rio, which is now developing a register of *loteamentos* in parallel to that of favelas.

taking place in the *favela carioca* grew immensely as a result of the development of doctoral studies in Brazilian universities. Publications often used the favelas in order to deal with broader issues such as urban poverty, or the everyday life and customs of the common people. This brought about a change in quality - authors and types of work became more varied – and also in quantity: the number of academic theses, articles, reports and books increased markedly. The favela became a fashionable subject; NGOs became increasingly involved. This vast corpus includes surveys and reports which respond to social, technical and political demands.

This same period, however, shows noteworthy fluctuations. In Figure 1 we can distinguish three sub-periods of brisk growth in the number of publications - the late 1960s, the earlier 1980s, and the later 1990s – the first and second of these followed by a perceptible falloff.

It was during the 1960s that studies first became more methodical. The first field-work studies were carried out by French,¹⁰ Brazilian and American researchers.¹¹ That period culminated in the 1969 issue of the scientific journal, *América Latina*, symbolizing acceptance of the theme by the social sciences.

Why were there subsequent fluctuations? It is often suggested that there is a link between on the one hand intensification of research and rates of publication and on the other the process of “favelisation” itself.

Seen in the long run, the increase of scientific work on favelas and that of “favelisation” would indeed seem to be linked. In Figure 1 the two curves follow the same trend. Between 1950 and 2000, there is vigorous growth in the number of publications and in the population of the favelas of Rio (which increases from 7% of the population of the municipal area to 18.7%).¹² Yet whereas the number of publications per year fluctuated considerably, the population of the favelas did not. As Figure 2 shows, growth in the population of the favelas was fairly steady over the entire 1950-2000 period; growth in the number of publications was by no means as spectacular. It should

¹⁰ See my article on Louis-Joseph Lebret and the favelas of Rio de Janeiro (Valladares, 2005)

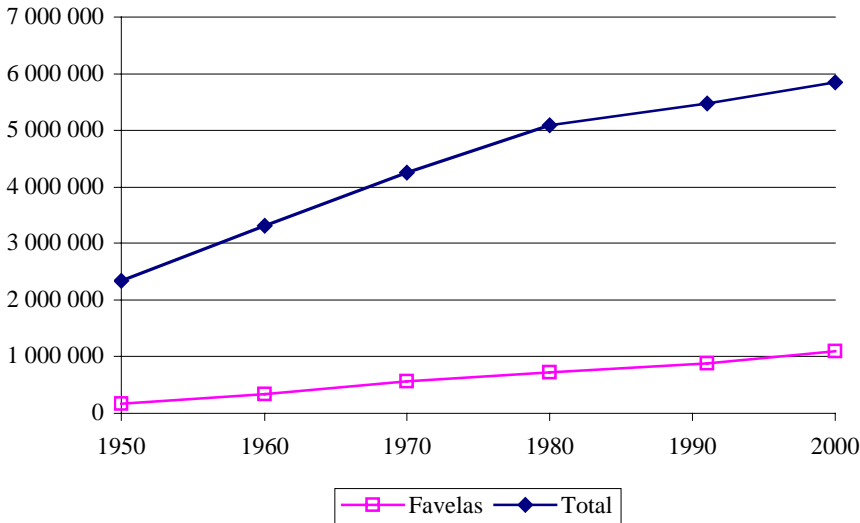
¹¹ Anthony Leeds was doing research in Rio in those days. See the account of Anthony Leeds and the Peace-Corps in Valladares (2006).

¹² According to the conclusions of Cezar (2002), analysing the latest IBGE data.

nonetheless be noted that during the last sub-period the rate of growth in the population of the favelas is higher than that of the overall population of the municipal area. But this can be observed as of the early 1980s; it does not tally with the argument often put forward that it was in the 1990s that “favelisation” gathered speed.

Admittedly, some fluctuation may have occurred between the census years. The population count made in 1996 (analyzed by Cezar, 2002: 11, Quadro 2) does indeed show a slowdown in the growth of the favelas during the first half of the 1990s, with an annual growth rate down to about 1.5%, picking up during the second half of the decade, to 3.5%. These fluctuations in the growth of the favelas, though far from negligible, are by no means proportional to variation in the number of publications.

**Figure 2: Population growth in Rio de Janeiro
Municipal area and favelas**



Source: IGBE census data

A possible factor stimulating interest on the part of social scientists are the new favelas that were identified in the western part of the Municipality of Rio. Between 1980 and 1991, the Instituto Pereira Passos identified 85 new favelas there; it had previously been thought that new favelas sprang up mostly in the remoter peri-urban

areas, outside the Municipality.¹³ During the 1990s still more favelas appeared, for the most part in expanding zones of the city. In 2000 the IGBE identified 681 favelas, against 545 in 1991, an increase of 136.¹⁴ Though the growth in the population of the favelas was partly due to the increasing density of those in the Southern Zone, it was due above all to strong growth of existing favelas in the Western Zone and in the Jacarépaguá-Barra da Tijuca sector, which expanded at the same time as the *condomínios fechados*, the new upper middle class gated communities.

A final argument in favour of “objective” factors stimulating interest in the favela was the increase in poverty. According to Rocha (1994: 126),¹⁵ the proportion of the poor in the population of the Rio metropolitan area increased markedly between 1981 and 1990, from 27 to 32%, against a slight drop from 29.1 to 28.9% on average for all Brazilian metropolitan regions. This increase in poverty, measured at the beginning of the 1990s, together with its higher visibility, may thus have contributed to the intensification of research.

For social developments to find their way into research agendas, they have to be recognized by the academic milieu and they must equally be debated as issues by the public and the media. It is to this milieu that I will now turn my attention, distinguishing processes internal and external to the University.

The political stakes and conjuncture can give insight into the variations already mentioned. The hypothesis here would be that interest in the study of the favela is linked to public policy and to urban planning issues, the intensity and orientation of which varies from one period to another. This would explain the growth in the number of publications during the 1970s, when the much publicized anti-favela policy of Governors Carlos Lacerda, Negrão de Lima and Chagas Freitas gave rise to debate, provoking criticism and opposition (Valladares, 1978). The distinct falloff in academic production

¹³ Santos (1977) was the first to point out that new favelas were developing towards the metropolitan periphery. Cardoso (1997) calls attention to the fact that official statistics underestimate the phenomenon as there is no equivalent to Instituto Pereira Passos outside the Municipality. According to him, the number of favelas has probably increased throughout the metropolitan region.

¹⁴ The count has given rise to differences between the IGBE and the Instituto Pereira Passos, whose definitions and methods differ. The growth in number, however, is far greater than the difference between the two counts.

¹⁵ Rocha’s calculations were based on a definition of poverty worked out as a function of the price of a basket of basic consumer goods, *la cesta básica* – a method widely used in Latin America.

recorded during the 1980s corresponds to a period during which clearance and re-housing programs came to an end, and public policy was no longer an issue. The brisk revival of academic production in the 1990s corresponds to the ambitious new policy, the Favela-Bairro program, which extended considerably the pioneer CODESCO experiment in urbanizing favelas.¹⁶ The Favela-Bairro was launched in 1993 with broad coverage in the media and international funds from the BID (Inter American Development Bank-IADB).

The return of the favela to the foreground in the late 1990s can therefore in the first place be explained as an effect of a policy of encouragement driven by Government agencies.¹⁷ In 1994 several social surveys were undertaken by a number of research centers and post-graduate institutes in order to select projects to be applied to the first 19 favelas concerned by the Favela-Bairro scheme. About a hundred professionals, university teachers and research workers were granted financial aid. Their research teams used different social science techniques: case-studies, with semi-directive interviewing; participant observation and focus-groups; and sample-surveys together with interviews of various social agents. Much of this work was subsequently referenced in academic dissertations and scientific articles. It can therefore be said that the output of publications on the favelas has returned to the foreground because a new urban policy has had a boosting effect on research and survey initiatives.

A second component had a similar effect. A number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) combined their action with research. As of the 1980s, several of these organizations were active in Rio,¹⁸ rapidly obtaining the support of multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and the Ford Foundation. NGOs were closely linked to the academic world (Landim, 1998). Many of their activists and even more of their research workers were either academics or students on training courses. Some of these NGOs were also active in

¹⁶ On CODESCO see Santos (1981).

¹⁷ Such as FINEP and Caixa Economica, which took over the activities of the BNH (National Housing Bank) set up in 1964.

¹⁸ Among the more important of these were IBASE (the Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Analysis), set up in 1980, which launched the "Campaign against hunger and poverty and in favour of life", which mobilized throughout Brazil during the 1990s; ISER (the Institute for the Study of Religion), from which originated the NGO *Viva Rio*, set up in 1993, and which today has some 900 activists, many of them coming from favelas; it runs projects in areas such as financial credit, education, vocational training, computerisation, human rights, to mention only some (Sorj, 2003).

publishing, putting out books, reviews, handbooks, documentation and other quasi-academic material. As NGOs also made the favelas one of their priorities, this led to a substantial production of research closely linked to action.

This mobilization of academics in programs linked to public policy and to NGO activities, however, cannot be explained uniquely by their need to finance their research activities. In Brazil intellectual activity and politics have always been closely intertwined. Brazilian intellectuals “have for a long time now devoted themselves collectively to exploring ‘national reality’ and to giving form to Brazilian society” (Pecaut, 1989: V). Over the past twenty years - since the restoration of democracy - social scientists have played their part in thinking out the transformation of Brazilian society and working through its difficulties, acting both as researchers and as citizens. Combining these different activities has been widely accepted. Social scientists helped to reform society by working through political parties, trade unions and NGOs, adopting hybrid positions, “commuting” or cumulating between academia and positions as experts in local, regional and national government, and in governmental agencies.

Two major themes, violence and social exclusion, were put on the social science agenda. They also help to understand the revival of interest in the favelas within the universities in the 1990s.

Over the past twenty years, a sense of insecurity has gradually taken over the major Brazilian cities. By 1984 a television channel, Rede Globo, in partnership with IBOPE (Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion) was already distributing questionnaires throughout the Rio metropolitan area as part of a campaign “*O Rio contra o crime*”.¹⁹ Press and media harped on this insistently, with pictures of individual and collective violence (crimes, kidnappings, massacres, gang violence, including the notorious *arrastões* – organised gangs that “cleaned out” the fashionable beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema on several occasions). This gave the impression that the public authorities were powerless, no longer in control. At the same time, national NGOs and international human rights organizations denounced the

¹⁹ The campaign was analysed by Zaluar (1988) and subsequently by Soares and Carneiro (1996).

corruption of the police. Accusations e.g. on the subject of massacres of street children in which the police were implicated, were taken up in the press and the media, which launched out investigations of police involvement in racketeering, kidnappings, the drug trade, etc.²⁰

The Brazilian university, traditionally sensitive to the political situation, became heavily involved, seeking new ways of explaining the evolution of crime and violence in Brazilian cities. The urban poor who were considered as the main protagonist of violence were also seen as its most frequent victim (Zaluar, 1999). A number of collective publications (Soares, ed., 1996; Velho and Alvito, eds., 1996) analyzed the role of poverty and social inequality in explaining the rise of violence and its various forms. Machado da Silva (1994) even argued that spreading violence had been accepted by a substantial segment of the deprived youth. The favelas, venue of the *bailes funk* – the great funk parties, very popular with young people, including those from prosperous neighborhoods (Vianna, ed., 1997) – were identified as the home of the drug trade. They were also held to be the home of the *galeras cariocas*, the working-class youth gangs that forged group identities in the course of collective confrontation. *Cidade Partida*, written by a journalist who had spent ten months in the Vigário Geral favela following the massacre of twenty-one of its inhabitants by the police in 1993, stresses that the favela represents a world which “the republic has not reached” (Ventura, 1994: 12). The book describes as a fully-fledged socio-spatial apartheid the separation between the world of the favelas and that of the rest of Rio.

Corroborated by several arguments, the idea of social apartheid (Buarque, 1993) spread rapidly throughout Brazilian sociological thinking. The return of political democracy had not stopped the income gap between the richest and the poorest from widening (Peralva, 2001). The various elites were doing everything they could to maintain their privileged position; the State seemed to have given up all social concern. The poorest of the poor, abandoned to their fate and left out of projects for social transformation, saw urban space being privatized and segregation intensifying at a rate hitherto unknown. In scientific analyses, a new key concept – social exclusion – adopted in most studies of poverty, was put to use in studies of the

²⁰ Candelaria and Vigario Geral.

favelas and their inhabitants. A new social dynamic captured researchers' attention: the increasing importance of the drug trade, now a factor even in the financing of local services. The favelas came to be seen as the locus *par excellence* of contemporary social exclusion. A further negative perception, linked to the social and political consequences of globalization (Fausto Neto, 1995), was now added to the traditional imagery developed during the heyday of the theory of marginality. "Social fragmentation" and "social fracture" dominated the new intellectual dynamic; NGO research linked the idea of social exclusion to that of incomplete or partial citizenship.

In sum, the new foregrounding of the favela studies can be explained by a combination of several types of involvement, academic, political and ideological, all linked to a political situation characterized by strong social demand responding to violence and to social inequalities. The Brazilian university followed its tradition of involvement in and sensitivity to the political and social conjuncture.

2. Disciplines, type of research and favelas most studied

If one is to grasp in finer detail the variations in scientific output, the share of each academic discipline in the overall production should be examined.

In the course of the study of the literature on favelas, twenty-nine different academic disciplines were identified.²¹ Urban sociology (19% of the literature), urban design and architecture (18%), and urban anthropology (14%) account for 51% of the corpus as a whole. Next come social work (7%) and urban geography (6%). "Institutional production" is well represented (9%): this category covers anonymous official publications produced or commissioned by survey and planning organizations, including NGOs.

In addition to the above disciplines, there are also political science (5%), social medicine (4%), education science (2%), and urban law (2%). Personal accounts by residents in favelas constitute 2% of overall production.

²¹ Certain publications, with authors belonging to different disciplines, have been classified accordingly.

Lastly, under the heading “other disciplines” I have grouped psychology and psychiatry, engineering, public administration, journalism, population study, economics, philosophy, social communication, cinema, public security, social development, nursing, statistics, art history, theology and geology.

The sheer length of this list indicates the extent to which the favela has attracted attention and interest and has been legitimized as *the* territory of poverty. At the same time, however, the broadening of academic interest in the favela and its inhabitants possibly corresponds to a dilution of this very interest. Increasingly the favela comes to be studied not so much for its own sake as for that of certain themes for which it serves as a research field. Highly diverse, these themes deprive the favela itself of its centrality. The thematic index that we have published elsewhere (Valladares and Medeiros, 2003) brings out the increasing attractiveness of such themes such as the outbreaks of violence in the favelas, public health, youth, and grass-roots participation, etc.. On the other hand themes linked to urban policy, transformations in the real estate market, the demographic and social characteristics of residents, have attracted less and less attention.

An examination of the different approaches used will enable to describe this trend more precisely. Considering all the texts of which the academic origin could be determined (excluding personal accounts and institutional publications), the distribution by type of research was calculated.

Case studies account for almost half of the total output (44%). This type of approach is congruent with the preponderance of contributions by anthropologists (14% in the breakdown by discipline) and sociologists (19%). However, all sociological studies of favelas do not use this method, which is sometimes also used in other disciplines. The fact that 20.4% of publications in the corpus correspond to academic dissertations, and that most studies are monographs, irrespective of discipline, probably contributes to the high proportion of case studies.

Next in importance comes the evaluation type of social survey (16%). The high proportion of diagnostic studies can be explained by

the importance of institutional output by government agencies and NGOs, anxious to learn about local characteristics before taking action or, after taking action, to gauge its effects on the space and the population.

A third type, surveys based on questionnaires, presents the same proportion (16%). This high percentage shows that despite the difficulty of constructing surveys of this sort in the favelas, a noteworthy effort has been made in this direction.

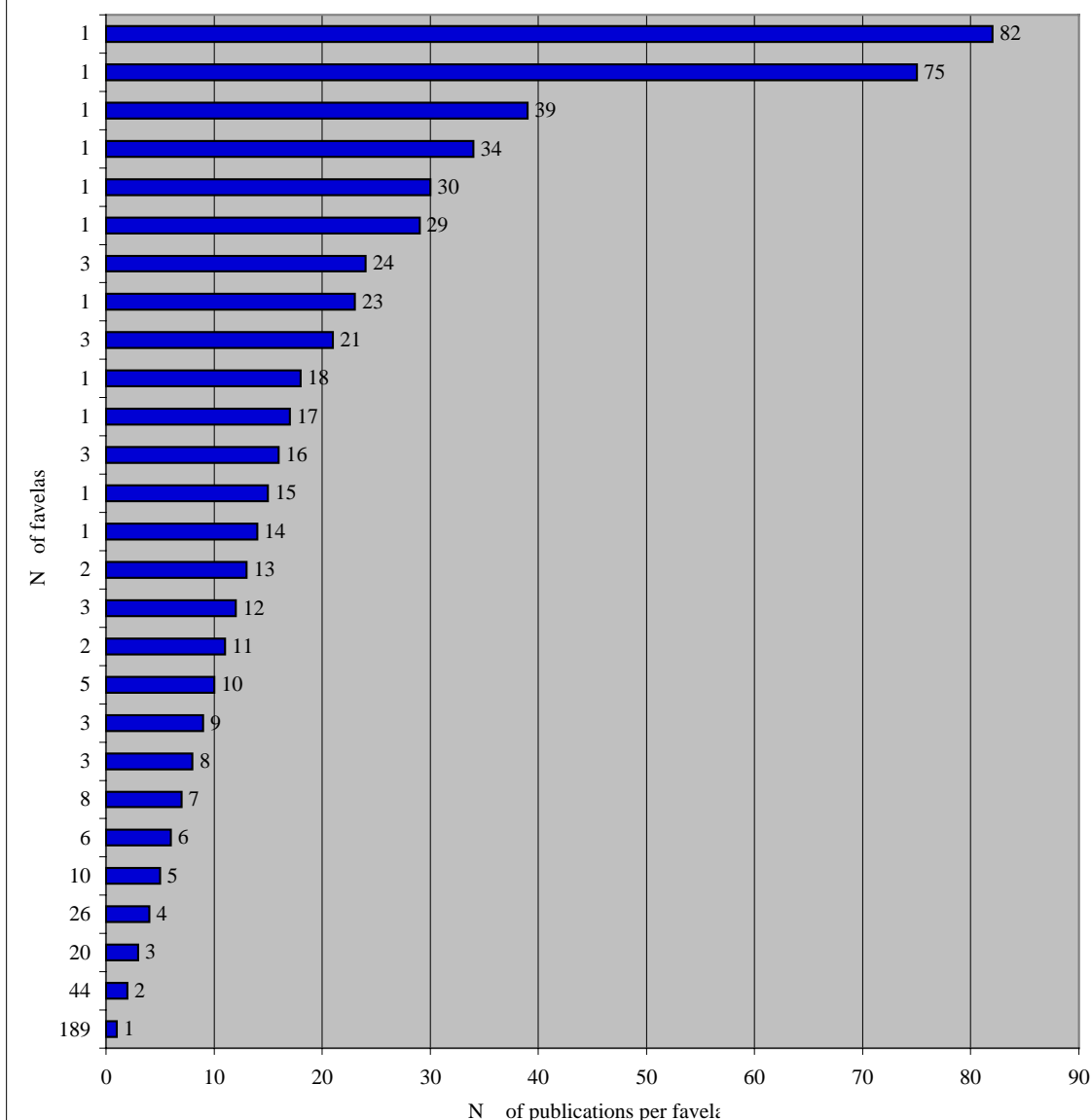
Studies based on secondary analysis of data (9%) and comparative studies (8%) have a low proportion. The latter usually take the form of comparisons between two favelas, between a favela and another type of poverty-stricken neighborhood, or between a Rio favela and a favela in another city. There is not a strong tradition of comparative research in Brazil. On the other hand training in statistics is underdeveloped within the social sciences, and most researchers have difficulty in gaining access to statistical data. Despite the Register of Favelas set up in 1981 by the Instituto Pereira Passos²² and the work undertaken by IBGE since the 1950 census, these sources have still not been adequately exploited.

Analysis of the literature on favelas also entails identification of the favelas studied. Are there “preferences” in this respect? On which favelas have researchers been focusing?

Figure 3 shows which favelas have gained most attention.

²² The Instituto Pereira Passos was formerly known as IPLAN-Rio. The Register of Favelas uses aerial photography to identify new agglomerations. Reference to the data produced by Instituto Pereira Passos has been already mentioned in this paper.

Figure 3: Bibliography of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro



Source: URBANDATA-Brasil 2004. Data cover years up to and including 2002. Of a total of 838 publications, only those dealing identified favelas of Rio de Janeiro have been taken into account. Some publications deal with several cases, which explains the total of 1,327.

The Figure shows that only a relatively small number of favelas, out of the total of 752 identified by the Instituto Pereira Passos, has attracted researchers' attention. Only 19 favelas have given rise to 15 publications or more. These 19 favelas have totaled 545 publications, 41% of the overall output.

This concentration is particularly significant in the case of those favelas that have received most attention. Rocinha, for example, has been dealt with in 82 publications, Complexo da Maré in 75, Jacarezinho in 39, Morro de Santa Marta in 34 and Mangueira in 30. Next comes Conjunto Habitacional Cidade de Deus (a re-housing project considered by many authors to be a favela now), dealt with in 24 publications, and Praia do Pinto (destroyed following a re-housing program) in 18. At the other end of the spectrum we find 189 favelas that have given rise to one publication only, 44 that have been dealt with in two, and 20 in three.

The list of the favelas most often studied raises several hypotheses as to their “attractiveness”, none being exclusive of the others.

The first is proximity to a university. Rocinha is close to the Catholic University (PUC), Complexo da Maré to the campus of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and the School of Public Health of the Fundação Oswaldo Cruz. When a favela is near a university, it constitutes an ideal laboratory for post-graduate and research students. Universities encourage voluntary social work; this gives their students privileged access to the favelas.

A second hypothesis is that the favoured favelas have been targeted by public policies: Praia do Pinto, Catacumba (both cleared), Conjunto Habitacional Cidade de Deus (re-housing), Bras de Pina and Mata Machado (targeted by CODESCO), Pavão-Pavãozinho and Cantagalo (targeted by the Brizola government’s policies), Serrinha and Mangueira (targeted by the Favela-Bairro scheme) and Complexo da Maré (targeted by Projeto Rio).

A third hypothesis is that attractiveness is linked to visibility because of violence. This could apply to Conjunto Habitacional Cidade de Deus,²³ Santa Marta, Jacarezinho, Vigário Geral, Parque Acari, Complexo da Maré and Morro do Borel. In these notorious favelas, delinquency, crime, drug trafficking, gang warfare and brutal police raids are everyday occurrences.

²³ *Cidade de Deus* is the site of Fernando Meirelles’ eponymous film (2002).

Political notoriety linked to conflict or to the mobilization of associations forms a fourth possible factor. This is the case with Jacarezinho and Morro do Borel, both homes of intense activity by *favelado* activists, which are symbols of resistance and struggle. This is also the case with Vidigal, where the Catholic Church's Favela Pastoral program has been particularly active.

A fifth hypothesis is more cultural, involving the traditional imagery of the favela as the home of samba. This is the case in Mangueira and Morro do Salgueiro, which have samba schools of repute. Morro da Babilônia, famous for the same reasons, featured in Marcel Camus' film *Orfeu Negro*, which won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1959. Santa Marta also symbolizes the emblematic aesthetics of the favela; it was there that Carlos Diegues filmed *Orfeu*, his 1999 remake of *Orfeu Negro*.

Curiously enough, one of the oldest favelas – the Morro da Favella, first of the name – also known as Morro da Providência, is the subject of only 16 publications.

Lastly, “snowball-effect” forms yet another hypothesis; this effect may result from involvement of a large number of NGOs in local action. This could apply in particular to Rocinha, where the NGO Viva-Rio has encouraged many initiatives (Sorj: 2003) and where a large number of foreign NGOs are operating. It could also apply to Complexo da Maré, where the CEASM was set up by a group of residents, and led to the creation of the Observatory of Favelas, a network which now extends to numerous other favelas.

3. Dogmas

Detailed examination of the literature on the favela produced over the past thirty years is, as suggested above, profuse in its themes, in the disciplines involved, in approaches, most of the research being concentrated on a limited number of favelas.

Reading through this material I found however that images and representations seem to converge on a certain number of basic characteristics attributed to the favela. They form a body of dogma

tacitly shared by most researchers²⁴ and never really questioned. They are simply taken for granted and form the implicit foundation of the research perspective. It is on this limited number of assumptions, rather than the abundance of themes, that I would now like to focus attention.

The first dogma is that the favela is something specific. For a long time now it has been considered that its particular history and its mode of growth, so different from that of other neighborhoods, have made the favela a space that is unique. Urban geographers stress the special way in which the favela occupies space, its total disregard for regularity and for urban layout and standards, i.e. proper streets and proper servicing (Lopes, 1955; Parisse, 1970; Cavallieri, 1986). It is first and foremost this difference in the mode of occupation of space that enables researchers to identify the favela. Architects point to differences engendered by the fact that habitat, urban arrangements and aesthetics are at variance with all accepted models of architectural rationality (Drummond, 1981; Guimarães and Cavalcanti, 1984; Berenstein-Jacques, 2001a, 2001b). Official bodies justify their specific approach to favelas by recalling, decade after decade, that this particular type of land use does not meet accepted standards, that it is illegal, and that a special approach is needed to normalize it (Bronstein, 1982; Poggiese, 1985; Fernandes, 2001). Legal scholars point out the “legal pluralism” of these neighborhoods, in which a degree of relative autonomy resulting from the collective illegality of occupation (B. Santos, 1977) affords the *favelados* some rights (Conn, 1968). The Catholic pastoral has even tried to solve property conflicts between *favelados* and legal owners (E. Carvalho, 1991) stressing their exceptionalism. New procedures have been set up with the *Estatuto da Cidade* and the *Usucapião especial urbano* to regularize illegal occupancy (Fernandez, 2001). Demographic indicators go in the same direction: they show that in these spaces the population is younger, that the proportion of migrants is higher, that density per housing unit is higher and growth rates stronger than in the city as a whole (Goulart, 1957; Parisse, 1969a). Quality of urban life in the favelas is also below average (IPLAN-RIO, 1997). Lastly, as we

²⁴ Recent research (Alvito, 2001; Peralva, 2001; Burgos, ed., 2003; Pandolfi and Grynzpan, 2003) has admittedly challenged traditional views, but without destabilizing the dogmatic structures determining representations of the favelas.

already mentioned, the census category defined by IBGE crystallizes this difference; the favela is considered officially a “substandard agglomeration” (*aglomerado subnormal*) of at least fifty housing units.

Sociologists and anthropologists have also come to the conclusion that there is a specificity and that it can be attributed to “favela culture”. A collection of articles published to mark the centenary of the favela (Zaluar and Alvito, eds., 1998) contains twelve contributions; four are devoted to folk culture (samba, carnival, *capoeira*, balls, funk groups) and five to crime, fear, drugs, and delinquency; only three deal with changes in policy and social structure. Numerous studies repeat with insistence that the favela, which saw the birth of the samba (Oliveira and Marcier, 1998), is today the home of funk and rap (O.Cunha, 1996; H.Vianna, 1997; Oliveira, 1997; Cecchetto, 1997). Formerly the empire of *jogo do bicho*,²⁵ the favela is now identified as the city’s drug market (Ventura, 1994; E. Guimarães, 1998; Barbosa, 1998; Deccache-Maia, 1999). The specific space of the favela promoted the development for *umbanda* ceremonies (Birman, 1980) and today furthers the spread of Pentecostal sects (Bombart, 1969; Ventura, 1994; O. Cunha, 1996; Alvito, 2001). In the favela, politics take on a different style, with grass-roots neighborhood associations (Machado da Silva, 1967) currently vying with traditional mechanisms based on political client-relationships and now controlled by the drug-traffickers who replace the absent State (Centro de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos Bento Rubião, 1994).

To sum up, all of these studies assert a marked identity of the favela, with its specific geographical features, its illegal status and land use, its obstinacy in “remaining a favela”, and in keeping up its distinctive lifestyle. The typical young *favelado* drops out of school, and takes up a career in drug trafficking (Zaluar, 1985; Barbosa, 1998; E. Guimarães, 1998), attracted by money and power. The favela conditions the behaviour of its inhabitants. These views reactivate the traditional hygienist and ecological postulate of determination by milieu.

²⁵ Clandestine lotteries.

The second dogma characterizes inhabitants and territory socially: the favela is seen as the locus of poverty, the urban territory of the poor. Particularly tenacious, this dogma has been inherited by social science from earlier representations. The idea is an old one: the poor have a space that is proper to them. This dates back to the early 1900', when the then mayor of Rio, Pereira Passos, cleared the slums (*cortiços*) in the centre of the city (Benchimol, 1990) forcing the poor population to relocate in the suburbs. As we mentioned, the Morro da Favella, the “first” favela to be established in Rio, was occupied by impoverished soldiers who had fought in the war of Canudos. The story of the favelas is thus one of land invasion by poverty-stricken migrants, impoverished soldiers - the poor. Fifty years later the theory of social marginality will also see the favela as the habitat of the poor regardless of its critique (Perlman, 1977).

Subsequently discussion in the social sciences was to turn this vision the other way round, transforming the favela from a problem into a solution. The favela offered free housing to people with no regular income or no income at all, by means of self-help, and involving the participation of the local residents (Santos, 1981; Brasileiro *et al.*, 1982). The basic assumption, however, remains unchanged: the favela is a space proper to the urban poor, where the poor feel at home, where they *are* at home, which *is* their home. Forming a city within the city, an illegal city within the legal one, *favelados* stake out a territory of their own, its clearly marked identity omnipresent. In this space, abandoned by the public authorities, a specific economy develops, with its own laws and codes. The favela is thus the very symbol of a specific type of segregation. In his book *Cidade Partida*, Ventura (1994, cited above) provides a satisfactory synthesis of this representation of the putative “territory” of poverty, an urban translation of social exclusion.

In selecting the favela as *the* field *par excellence* for the study of poverty and social inequality - so that whenever any study is to be made of the poor, researchers automatically turn to it - social science has shown firm belief in this dogma and played a part in constantly renewing it. It was to the favela that students and research assistants were sent, and towards it that theses were oriented, on the assumption that all the features associated with poverty and the culture of the

lower classes were to be found there: their religion, health, education, politics, associations, informal sector, music, women, children, youth, school dropouts, violence, etc..

It should be pointed out that the term *favelado*, which initially meant inhabitant of a favela, linking a person to a *place*, thus ended up designating - pejoratively - anyone occupying a social *position* marked by poverty and illegality. The *favelado* now belongs not only to the world of the people, but also to that of social problems. The spread of the image of the favela as a problematic enclave, spreads the feeling, apparently, that poverty engenders poverty and therefore problems - the usual vicious circle of denunciation.

The third dogma asserts the unity of the favela, both in scientific theory and in political practice. Favelas are spoken of and written about in the singular - the favela. It is generally recognized that in reality the favelas differ from one another; but habit leads people to reduce this variety to a commodious uniformity. Official data and social science research do distinguish between older and recent favelas, between those that are small, medium-sized and large, between the consolidated and the precarious, between those in the plains land and those on hillsides, those in the city centre, those in the northern, southern, eastern and western zones, and those on the periphery (IPLAN-RIO, 1983). But though it is not denied that the universe of the favelas varies geographically and demographically, it is nonetheless invariably assumed that sociologically the favela is a single category. This implies a lack of interest in diversity. Differences internal to the world of the favelas are simply assumed to be merely of secondary importance. The diversity and plurality of social relationships and situations are occulted. It is always to the ideal-type, the archetype, that goes the discourse on the Rio's favelas. A favela is seen as being necessarily a hillside settlement (*morro*), illegally occupied, outside the law, under-serviced, a concentration of urban poor. The single generic denomination unifies situations that often vary in terms of geography, population, social composition and urban form.²⁶

²⁶ Leeds (1969) had already called attention to the variety within the favela universe of such situations. He insisted that favelas were not communities but localities. His contribution has been « forgotten ».

This particular dogma has important methodological consequences, e. g. in frequent recourse to statistical comparisons between on the one hand all favelas taken together, and on the other the rest of the city. The SAGMACS study (1960) inaugurated this practice, though it added case studies that did bring out differences between favelas. Many other researches that followed this pattern, however, failed to take the same precautions. By summarily comparing favelas as an ensemble to the rest of the city, differences between one favela and another are implicitly considered negligible; and the same can be said of internal differences within each favela. A more finely tuned analysis shows that these differences are far from negligible (Preteceille and Valladares, 1999; 2000). Internal differences within the “rest of the city” are also implied to be negligible, despite glaring differences between the wealthier neighborhoods of the Southern Zone (Copacabana, Ipanema, Leblon, Barra da Tijuca) and the lower-class peripheral neighborhoods (Preteceille and Ribeiro, 1999; Ribeiro; 2000). This methodological option leads e.g. Ribeiro and Lago (2001) to conclude that as the gap widens between the favelas and the rest, Rio is being transformed into a dual city, the widening gap being imputed to an accentuation of the social exclusion concentrated in the favelas. Detailed study of transformations in social segregation, however, shows that in fact it is not the favelas but the wealthy neighbourhoods that have moved away from the common average, the favelas recording variation comparable to that in other lower-class areas and in “middling” neighborhoods – variation which is not homogeneous either (Preteceille and Ribeiro, 1999; Ribeiro, 2000).

One puzzling consequence of these dogmas has been that once areas have been classified as favelas, they remain favelas – except in the few cases of total eviction. There are favela areas which have been subject to significant urban improvements in terms of infrastructure bringing them up to the standard of average urban areas; there are favela areas where the original shacks have been replaced for long by houses made of concrete, with all the qualities and facilities one would find in other areas of the “normal” city; there are favela areas where most building are several storey ones; and there are even a few favelas where land and home ownership have been regularized (that has

proved the most tricky thing up to now). Nevertheless, these areas continue to be classified as favelas, although IBGE experts recognize that the official definition no longer applies to them. What was initially defined as a type of urban structure remains a favela because of its supposed permanent social identity as a favela...

4. Preliminary conclusions

Can this exposure of the dogmas structuring academic literature on the favela be transposed to other types of neighborhoods and other contexts in social science? A moot point: does research on relatively poor neighborhoods in the United States, France and Latin America (Fassin, 1996) not also adhere to certain implicit and unchallenged principles on which this field of research is grounded?

The stakes and the agents involved obviously vary from one country to another. But I will confine my analysis to the Brazilian case.

Analysis of implicit dogma shows that in Brazil studies tend to focus on the supposedly specific nature of favelas, these neighborhoods being perceived as “communities”, places of a culture that is different and has its own resources. Such “politically correct” approach comes into play on two levels, one of them intellectual (the study of that which is different reveals its value) and the other practical (helping the underprivileged and the discredited).

There are two possible ways of understanding the permanence of this approach. Firstly, a double reference legitimates the activity of many researchers: not only the university, but also activism, political or social. This should not be forgotten. Most academic works cannot be understood unless due consideration is given to the role of militant ideology. The tradition of committed sociology is still very much alive everywhere, entailing valorization of research focused on the lower ranks of society, on the poor, on the workings of communities. Often this work is mingled with activist attitudes, normative and prescriptive.

In France, for example, despite insistence on neutrality – the influence of Durkheim, prolonged by Bourdieu, Chamboredon and

Passeron in their work *Le Métier de sociologue* – the situation is probably not very different. Grignon and Passeron (1989) stress the attraction of populism, the ethic of neutrality tending to merge with the defense of the wronged and the humbled. As in Brazil, it is difficult to challenge analyses that apparently benefit the individuals being studied. From this stems a tendency to valorize the “people”, to stress the participatory abilities of inhabitants, to perceive lower-class neighborhoods as areas of solidarity, and to point up the link between territorial identity and commitment. Whence the frequently dramatic denunciation of social, urban and cultural conditions in underprivileged neighborhoods overemphasizing and generalizing negative aspects in defense of their inhabitants.

A second way of gaining insight is to take into account the more pragmatic components of research activities. Research agendas are constructed by means of public policies and in response to demand (together with financial offers) addressed to social science. I have shown that there is a link between variation in the number of publications and variation in public policy targeting the favelas. Aren't there similar links in other countries? In the public authorities' calls for tenders, in official urban policy, in local authorities' demand for surveys? Many studies of slums or squatter settlements in Third World countries, funded by the World Bank, show similarly limited perceptions and methods...

Over and above the question of themes for which finance is available, there is the question of the way in which social objects are represented. For a Brazilian researcher, it is easier to obtain finance for a research project if the categories (of perception and analysis) it embodies correspond to those of the sponsor. Recent reports of European calls for tender give the impression that at present much the same could possibly be said in European countries.

Last but not least, we should not overlook the essentially comforting nature of dogma. Sailing well-charted waters, one runs little risk of coming to grief. Working with established categories makes it possible to repeat and accumulate data. Furthermore we should remember that researchers are often also university teachers: the favela provides the teacher with an excellent field for training the students, especially if they are working on monographs. Favelas also

have the effect of “estranging” doctoral candidates, changing their surroundings and enabling them to learn to deal with differences and to make their first forays into fieldwork, in many cases without having to go far from the university campus. Neighborhood monographs are one of the best ways of gathering large amounts of data without first having to acquire expertise in difficult, time consuming (and sometimes destabilizing) methodological comparisons. Similar factors could no doubt be found in other countries. In France, for example, such interpretations are now linked to the idealized past of working-class neighborhoods or to the quest for an exotic “otherness” in some other part of the world... This is the impression the author of this article has gained as a Brazilian researcher who is often asked for advice - and is constantly surprised by French, English and US students’ passionate desire to work on Brazilian favelas.

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