

# REINVENTING RIO DE JANEIRO'S OLD PORT:

TERRITORIAL STIGMATIZATION, SYMBOLIC RE-SIGNIFICATION, AND PLANNED  
REPOPULATION IN PORTO MARAVILHA

## A REINVENÇÃO DA ZONA PORTUÁRIA DO RIO DE JANEIRO:

ESTIGMATIZAÇÃO TERRITORIAL, RESSIGNIFICAÇÃO SIMBÓLICA E REPOVOAMENTO PLANEJADO NO PROJETO  
PORTO MARAVILHA

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**ABSTRACT:** Rio de Janeiro's former port has undergone an intense process of transformation driven by investor expectations and real estate profitability objectives. However, in this depressed area, long marked by various territorial stigmas, the rise in land value largely depends upon symbolic revaluation. One of the main objectives of the large-scale urban redevelopment project known as Porto Maravilha is to reverse existing perceptions of the port area, moving away from representations as an abandoned, decadent, dangerous space, towards a more positive image as a showcase for Rio de Janeiro and a new gateway to the city. This article describes the triple process through which this reversal is achieved: territorial stigmatization, symbolic re-signification and planned repopulation. It documents various strategies used by project proponents to radically transform the symbolic, material and social make-up of the area in order to promote its revaluation. It also aims to document diverse modes of resistance developed by local population groups to denounce the invisibility, silencing and symbolic erasure they have suffered, showing, in the process, that in Porto Maravilha, culture serves both as an instrument of gentrification and as a tool of resistance.

**KEY WORDS:** Porto Maravilha; Rio de Janeiro; territorial stigmatization; symbolic re-signification; planned repopulation.

**RESUMO:** A antiga zona portuária do Rio de Janeiro vem passando por transformações que atendem às expectativas de lucratividade de investidores do setor imobiliário. No entanto, a efetivação dessa revalorização fundiária passa por uma revalorização simbólica da área. Um dos objetivos do projeto Porto Maravilha é inverter as percepções existentes sobre a zona portuária, afastando as representações existentes – um espaço abandonado, decadente, perigoso – para transformá-la em uma vitrine e porta de entrada da cidade. A partir da mobilização de três conceitos – estigmatização territorial, ressignificação simbólica e repovoamento planejado –, busca-se compreender a ação dos promotores do projeto e discutir as maneiras pelas quais a população local constrói suas resistências frente à invisibilização, ao silenciamento e ao apagamento simbólico dos quais são vítimas. Demonstramos que, no âmbito do projeto Porto Maravilha, a cultura é operacionalizada para a especulação imobiliária e para a transformação do perfil social da área, mas também funciona como uma ferramenta de resistência.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Porto Maravilha; Rio de Janeiro; estigmatização territorial; ressignificação simbólica; repovoamento planejado.

**Contribution of each author:** **A.** theoretical and conceptual basis and problematization; **B.** research data and statistical analysis; **C.** producing figures and tables; **D.** photographs; **E.** preparation and drafting of manuscript; **F.** selection of references.

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper takes a critical look at Porto Maravilha, Rio de Janeiro's port revitalization project launched in 2009 as part of the city's Olympic mega-projects. As the largest public-private-partnership in Brazilian history, this project seeks to turn a vast, devalued post-industrial sector into a world-class, mixed-use entertainment district, through the construction of cultural facilities, the development of tourist attractions and the stimulation of real estate activity (MONTEIRO; ANDRADE, 2012; SÁNCHEZ; BROUDEHOUX, 2013). Once a dynamic commercial and industrial neighborhood, economic activity declined during the second half of 20th century and the conversion of properties and vacant lots into tenements and informal housing settlements accentuated its low-income residential character (ABREU, 2006). The largely Afro-Brazilian, working class communities who have long inhabited the port are now threatened by revitalization efforts that seek to exploit the area's close proximity to downtown and to draw upon the valuation potential of the local built environment to attract high paying investors and residents.

From our point of view, Porto Maravilha is first and foremost a real estate project whose success is dependent upon the symbolic re-signification of the territory. Important public investments have been undertaken to radically transform the old port's image in order to lure private investors, who are in turn expected to actualize the project's vision through redevelopment. We sustain that the main goal of Porto Maravilha is to invert perceptions of the port from a backstage, space of relegation and shame, to a front stage showcase for the city. This is being done by replacing the area's historically black, poor, working class population, known for its strong activism and rich cultural practices, by a white, cosmopolitan, elitist population, and its consumerist and individualist vision of culture. Drawing from Wacquant (2007), we posit that this "territorial de-stigmatization", accomplished through a process of radical cultural reconfiguration, is essential to the real estate valuation of the sector and key to the economic success of Porto Maravilha.

This article draws upon research conducted between 2009 and 2016 in Rio de Janeiro's port district. It rests upon a multidisciplinary conceptual approach that integrates the study of social and spatial phenomena by combining ethnography – a traditionally anthropological method – with an analytical framework derived from critical human geography. Its methodology includes repeat, on-site observation, recorded through photographic surveys and spatial annotations, as well as participant observation, carried out during public events such as public consultation meetings and festive gatherings. Dozens of formal and informal interviews were conducted with actors involved in the transformation process, at the city administration level and in private consortiums, as well as with local-residents, activists, workers and business owners, artists and members of diverse groups and associations. This information was supplemented with a wide range of secondary sources, including extensive press reviews in the printed and web media, scholarly publications, planning documents, official websites, activist blogs, and NGO reports.<sup>1</sup>

The paper begins with a discussion of the notion of territorial stigmatization, followed by a historic survey of Rio de Janeiro's port district as an area marked by a deep territorial stigma. The bulk of the article analyses diverse de-stigmatization strategies used by Porto Maravilha promoters in order to facilitate real estate valuation in the

<sup>1</sup> It is part of a wider, long-term research project on the socio-spatial aspect of large urban projects in Rio de Janeiro, funded by the Social Science and Humanities research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

sector. These strategies include various attempts to re-signify the port area's land uses, built environment and social landscape through initiatives that are both exclusionary and highly segregationist. The paper concludes with a discussion of some of the ways in which local populations groups are resisting their symbolic erasure, invisibilization and silencing, thereby demonstrating that in Porto Maravilha, culture will be both an instrument of gentrification and a tool of resistance.

## **TERRITORIAL STIGMATIZATION IN THEORETICAL CONTEXT**

Goffman (1963) defines the social stigma as an attribute, behavior or reputation, which is socially discrediting in a particular way: it causes an individual to be classified as undesirable and to be rejected as abnormal. For him, stigmatized people are individuals who do not have full social acceptance and are constantly striving to adjust their social identities to fit dominant social norms. As part of his research on urban marginality, Loïc Wacquant (2008) would later spatialize the notion of social stigma and transpose it at the territorial level. Borrowing from both Goffman's social stigma and from Bourdieu's notion of "symbolic power" (2001), Wacquant describes territorial stigma as being made of elements of social discredit and injurious forms of actions that are fastened onto place through collective representation. He demonstrates how territorial stigma, which takes the form of spatial taint, territorial blemish, or place defamation, is much more than a simple topography of disrepute, but has come to be equated with social disintegration. In this sense, someone's place of residence could be construed as a "defect" that disqualifies and deprives its inhabitants of full acceptance by others (WACQUANT, 2007). Territorial stigmatization can thus have concrete impacts upon residents of disparaged districts and lead to their relegation, expulsion or symbolic exclusion from society. It can even become racialized to the point of eliciting form of revulsion that can lead to punitive corrective measures (WACQUANT, 2007).

Conceptualizing stigma as a social construct is key to understanding the politics of place image construction and the motives behind initiatives that seek to influence or control such representations. In the production of urban space, different conceptualizations of the city compete and are the object of contention. Symbolic representations of place that attribute certain characteristics to urban sectors often become hegemonic in the collective imagination. In this sense, territorial representations cannot be separated from the power relations that structure and rule this territory. Territorial stigma is one of the resources that can be mobilized by hegemonic actors in their attempt to control the production of space. Place defamation provides powerful groups with the foundations and ideological justifications for imposing their vision of the city. For Wacquant (2007), once a place is labeled as problematic, located outside the norm, this deviant territory becomes intolerable for normative society and fixing it becomes imperative. It thus becomes easy for authorities to justify the implementation of special measures regarding its use, design and regulation.

Interventions in the built environment are privileged mechanisms to achieve the normalization of territories discursively constructed as problematic. The

literature suggests that one of the main remedies used by both public authorities and private developers alike in their efforts to “correct” deviant territories is their incorporation into the real estate market (SWYNGEDOUW; MOULAERT; RODRIGUEZ; 2002; WEBER, 2002). However, just as territorial stigmatization legitimizes urban interventions, it can also act as a barrier against transformative urban projects. Negative territorial representations can repel investors and impede urban development. Yet, these representations are not immutable. They can be transformed through narrative strategies, image construction practices and symbolic revaluation, for example through strategic city marketing campaigns that positively alter perception and facilitate social acceptability (BROUDEHOUX, 2017).

Brazil's downtown districts present a perfect illustration of the importance of symbolic place images in land valuation processes. After decades of state neglect and divestment by private capital, the recent revaluation of city centers has relied upon the diffusion of a discourse that evokes the need to reverse alleged cases of urban “degradation” (MONTEIRO, 2011). The need to overcome a so-called “urban crisis” has become imperative in government programs across the political spectrum, presented as an essential responsibility of public administrations (ARANTES, 2001). In this context, municipal authorities, state administrations and federal committees have drafted multiple plans, programs and projects to reverse this crisis, whose very existence has been questioned by Brazilian critics and denounced as a discursive strategy meant to justify neoliberal urban transformations (ARANTES, 2001).

### **RIO DE JANEIRO'S OLD PORT AREA: THE HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF A TERRITORIAL STIGMA**

Historically, early port activities in Rio de Janeiro took place along the Guanabara Bay near the current city center, with the bulk of activities centering on Praça XV (former Largo do Paço), the symbolic heart of the city. In the 17th century, a mining boom in the Brazilian hinterland required an influx of manual workers, turning Rio into a great slave port. Until the mid-1770s, slaves were docked near Praça XV at the Praia do Peixe (Fish beach), but this unsavory trade was gradually transferred to a less conspicuous locale, with the construction of the Valongo Wharf, further down the bay. The transfer of port activities was accelerated in 1808, with the arrival of the Portuguese royal family, escaping the Napoleonic wars, who settled at Praça XV in what became the Imperial Palace. The same year, Brazil opened its port to England, which prompted an intensification of port activities, as well as commercial trade, especially in coffee. At the time, to avoid offending the imperial court, the slave market located on rua Direita (today's Primeiro de Março Street) near the Palace, was also transferred to the Valongo sector (CARDOSO *et al.*, 1987; SOUTY, 2013; LIMA; SENE; SOUZA, 2016).

While the construction of warehouses and trading counters dynamized the local economy, the transfer of the slave market to the area contributed to the consolidation of its function as a repository of “unclean” activities in the city. It is estimated that between 1770 and 1843, around 900 000 African slaves landed on the wharf, where they were fattened, sold and exchanged in nearby warehouses (LIMA, 2013; LIMA;

SENE; SOUZA, 2016). The port thus became the site of one the busiest slave trades in the world, making Rio the largest black city in the Americas (SOARES, 2011). The port was also the site of the city's main prison, the *Cadeia do Aljube* (located on today's Acre Street), which contributed to the sordid image and dangerous perception of the sector (CHALHOUB, 1996).

During the 19th century, the development of the three neighborhoods of Gamboa, Santo Cristo and Saúde was directly related to the port's economy (CARDOSO *et al.*, 1987; LAMARÃO, 2006). The area came to be densely occupied by commercial ventures, industrial plants, warehouses, shipyards and mills, making the city one of the largest commercial depots of Latin America. After the end of the slave trade in 1888, the area remained the center of port activities and their related businesses such as gambling and prostitution. The port also had an important residential population of mainly poor and black low-wage earners, whose limited mobility required proximity to the city center, where daily work could be found (ABREU, 2006). Throughout its history, the port's average income, education and employment levels were substantially lower than in the rest of the city (CARVALHO, 1995; ROCHA, 1995).

Due to a severe rental housing shortage, the port also served as a proletarian housing repository, where people lived in overcrowded tenements, hostels, and inns. In the first decades of the Republic in the late 1800s, these tenements became the target of a number of municipal ordinances that sought their eradication, legitimated by a discourse that condemned their "unhealthy" appearance and "promiscuous" nature (BENCHIMOL, 1992). In the wake of their brutal eviction, many dwellers fled to the slopes of Morro da Favella, a nearby hill located at the heart of the port district, giving birth to what is now considered Brazil's first *favela* or squatter settlement (known as Providência) (VALLADARES, 2000). Within the wider port sector, Providência would itself come to be ostracized as a space of alterity, perceived as the embodiment of marginality and social deviance, and was stigmatized for its failure to integrate into dominant society. Local elites saw the favela as a public nuisance, a visual blight and a materialization of moral degeneration (CARDOSO *et al.*, 1987; VALLADARES, 2000).

At the turn of the 20th century, a series of Haussmann-inspired hygienist reforms and sanitizing campaign carried out by prefect Pereira Passos further transformed the city center and the port. Narrow streets were replaced by wide avenues for motor vehicles (BENCHIMOL, 1992; ABREU, 2006). Most tenements were destroyed, and their poor, black population expelled, justified by the need to protect more deserving central city residents against the propagation of disease and epidemics, the risk of violence and crime, and the threat of racial contamination (CHALHOUB, 1996). Ironically, the destruction of tenements, coupled with an influx of migrant labor working on the vast public works, contributed to Providência's expansion (VALLADARES, 2000).

In the second half of the twentieth century, a host of factors contributed to the decline of the port area. The loss, in 1960, of Rio de Janeiro's status as Brazil's national capital and the transfer of government functions to Brasília deeply affected local economic activity, leaving vacant a number of federal buildings near the port. The ascent of São Paulo as Brazil's economic and financial center, a trend that started in the 1930s and gradually gained momentum, also negatively impacted Rio's

downtown (ABREU, 2006). In the 1970s, de-industrialization curtailed economic activity in the port, while containerization required the transfer of industrial port functions to modern facilities, further downstream on the Guanabara Bay. In the 1980s, the development of Miami-style car suburbs in Rio de Janeiro's west zone accelerated the exodus of the middle class and the depopulation of the port district, opening the door to the illegal occupation of many abandoned buildings. Over the years, lack of public investment and municipal abandonment further exacerbated economic decline, urban degradation and the rise of marginality and violence. When Porto Maravilha was launched in 2009, the port area boasted one of the highest concentrations of squatting and homelessness in Rio de Janeiro (FAULHABER, 2013).

For much of its long history, Rio de Janeiro's old port held a particular status in the urban landscape, as a territory on the margin, which was never fully part of the formal city. It always served as a utilitarian space, a backstage service area attending to the needs of the city center while conveniently keeping activities of a potentially offensive nature out of sight. Its strategic location, "at once near and far from downtown" (PINHEIRO; RABHA, 2004) meant that banned or disreputable economic activities, which were nonetheless necessary to the full reproduction of capital, could be carried out at a safe distance from elite neighborhoods.

Rio's port encompassed an area long known as *Pequena África* (Little Africa), where urban life was dominated by free and enslaved Africans, who occupied the city streets and public squares working as free laborers, vending, running errands and socializing (GUIMARÃES, 2014). Local elites and authorities were weary of these dangerous classes, which they both feared and depended upon for the development of the slave-based capitalist economy as well as for their daily comfort (ARANTES, 2005). Ironically, some of the richest contributions to Brazilian culture came from the port's black population. Many of the symbols of Brazilianness that now form part of the Brazilian imaginary around the world were born in the port and are products of its Afro-Brazilian heritage. Rio de Janeiro's port is known as the birthplace of both samba and capoeira. It is also the cradle of the first *ranchos*, which would later give birth to the city's famous carnival. And it was in Providência that Rio's first samba school was created, and would revolutionize the carnival parade (MOURA, 1995).

Yet, for much of its history, Rio de Janeiro's port district was described as a dreadful, unsanitary, and prohibited place, tolerated as a necessary evil (PINHEIRO; RABHA, 2004). In his typology of urban spaces, Wright (1997) distinguishes between *pleasure spaces* — spaces of entertainment and relaxation, associated with middle class uses — and *refuse spaces*, spaces of neglect, violence, and abandonment, often taken over by marginal population groups. Rio's port area could therefore be characterized as a *refuse space*, a space of otherness, alterity, and marginality, where the city's excluded could be readily exploited while being kept invisible.

Rio's Port can also be seen as symptomatic of the city's schizophrenic split personality, marked by the co-existence of two conflicting urban identities: the utopian White City idealized by the ruling European elite, and the heterotopian Black City, consistently repressed as shameful, illegitimate and provisional (SOUTY, 2014). Throughout the history of Rio de Janeiro, intense moments of image construction have striven to realize the utopian image of this advanced, White City, by erasing its poor, Black, uncivilized and primitive component (ARANTES, 2005). From the hygienist

campaigns of the early 20th century, to the modernization programs of the 1940s, to the post-modern suburbanization of the 1970s, authorities sought to repress the city's African identity and to impose imported and mainly European urban models and values (GUIMARÃES, 2014). Today, this Black City continues to be perceived as rebellious, marginal, and antithetical to the official formal, civilized, legal, White City, with its individualist and capitalist culture (SOUTY, 2014). Until the eve of the city's mega-events, the carioca elite and middle classes persisted in avoiding the sector. Centuries of dominant discourse, political actions, negative media narratives and neglect resulted in the enduring stigmatization of the port and its inhabitant, as a place of violence, insecurity, precarity and environmental degradation.

## **PORTO MARAVILHA: DE-STIGMATIZATION THROUGH SEMANTIC RE-SIGNIFICATION AND SYMBOLIC ERASURE**

As Rio de Janeiro was selected to host the world's top sporting mega-events, namely the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, the launching of Porto Maravilha was seized as an opportunity to transform the port from a refuse space into a pleasure space for the entertainment of a globalized elite (FERREIRA, 2010; FAULHABER, 2013). The project can thus be construed as yet another attempt, in a long list of historical initiatives, to shake off what remains of Little Africa and to realize the dream of the exclusive White City. But since the economic success of the project relies upon real estate valuation and capturing the potential capital gain or ground rent that could result from the existing rent gap (SMITH, 1987) it was essential for project proponents to defuse negative representations of the port. The success of this vast redevelopment project became highly contingent upon the reversal of the stigma that had long afflicted this area. In order to convert this neglected space into a desirable asset for capital accumulation and to attract middle class residents and other target users, deeply ingrained, negative representations first had to be neutralized.

Although territorial de-stigmatization is first and foremost a symbolic process, it relies upon very concrete alterations and transformations of the local social and material landscapes. De-stigmatization strategies generally consist in cleansing the land of traces of previous sources of territorial stigma, a process of physical erasure and semantic re-signification that functions at three distinct levels. It first affects existing land uses, with the expulsion of old, obsolete or undesirable functions and their replacement by new, more attractive ones, based on contemporary standard and expectations. It also alters the man-made environment through the destruction, renovation or adaptive reuse of derelict structures associated with previous functions, and the construction of a new, more up to date material landscape. De-stigmatization strategies finally act upon the human environment, through the expulsion of stigmatized population groups and their replacement by what Harvey euphemistically calls "people of the right sort" (HARVEY, 1990, p. 92). In all cases, this re-signification process is accomplished through the joined actions of rhetorical strategies, especially in terms of city marketing, public policy and direct actions (BROUDEHOUX, 2017). The particular mechanisms of this urban cleansing

process are discussed in more details in what follows, organized on the basis of these three levels of intervention and illustrated by the example of Porto Maravilha.

### **DE-STIGMATIZATION OF USES**

To guarantee a capital return for investors through the production of space, new land uses must follow a revalorization logic. In order to boost real estate activity and to unlock land values, Rio de Janeiro's civic authorities have implemented a series of policies and practices that favor what Brazilians call "noble uses", which include upscale housing for middle and higher classes, luxury office space, cultural institutions and high-end shopping and dining facilities. Proposed measures and incentives include the relaxation of zoning regulations, the implementation of infrastructure, tax breaks for investors, and city marketing strategies (MONTEIRO; ANDRADE, 2012; SÁNCHEZ; BROUDEHOUX, 2013).

Existing popular uses of public spaces such as informal commerce, which are not compatible with this revalorization logic, and are discouraged by the project, have thus been the object of a criminalization process that bans such practices from newly renovated squares and sidewalks, even if they represent an important source of revenue for many low-income families. Porto Maravilha values new, more upscale and formalized vending practices, such as the gourmet food-trucks, which have recently appeared at Mauá Square. Local residents who also want to partake in tourism development and to profit from the ongoing tourism boom face lengthy bureaucratic procedures and costly permits in order to obtain the right to sell their own local gastronomy on the streets of the old port. The new public spaces that have been created as part of Porto Maravilha, including the brand new Olympic Boulevard, have failed to accommodate the needs of long-term residents in terms of economic activities. Informal vending is prohibited, and recently upgraded open spaces are actively guarded against violators.

Traditional industries that have thrived in the port area for years are also feeling the pressure to vacate the area. This is the case of many small-scale recycling centers located in the port for over five decades but whose "dirty" activities are now found to be incompatible with the port's new function. Over the last few years, many other traditional businesses, including small restaurants, independent stores and artisan shops have also left the area. However, some traditional places of commerce and local enterprises have been selected by Porto Maravilha promoters to showcase the area's rich cultural vitality. These include restaurants featured in a gastronomical culinary circuit, which is supported by the consortium and widely featured in their promotional material and tourism brochures as part of the area's official attractions.

Culture is also vastly used as a positive re-signification strategy, with policies favoring non-stop cultural programming on Mauá Square and the construction of several spectacular venues that specialize in "culturtainment". Porto Maravilha's cultural strategy reveals the project's deep bias for a vision of culture that exudes contemporary dynamism, creativity and avant-garde and is oriented towards an idealized, marketable future rather than a polemical past. It conforms to a carefully crafted scenario that seeks to attract young creative professionals, nightlife consumers, wealthy cruise ship tourists, select investors and upscale residents. This scenario includes three main components: the promotion of cultural activities, investment

in large cultural anchors, and incentives for Young Urban Creatives (known as “yuccies”).

Porto Maravilha’s cultural strategy attempts to stimulate the area’s cultural buoyancy by organizing various shows, festivals, cultural activities and other forms of entertainment. Many of such events call upon local cultural producers, who are consensually co-opted to increase the port’s tourism appeal. They also involve various exclusive events, such as Fashion Rio, which are geared the leisure class and seek to give the area a cosmopolitan flair. Many of these activities take place at Mauá Square, on the Olympic Boulevard or in the many warehouses located along the bayfront. Porto Maravilha’s cultural strategy also relies upon the widening of the area’s cultural offering, with what is clearly an elitist vision of formal, high culture with a global outlook. Apart from Rio’s Art Museum (MAR), and AquaRio, Latin America’s largest urban aquarium, these projects also include the brand-new Museum of Tomorrow (*Museu do Amanhã*). As its name indicates, this project is more concerned with the global future, with a consensual environmentalist focus, than with the port’s more sensitive and contested past.

A third aspect of Porto Maravilha’s cultural strategy involves diverse form of incentives to encourage young urban creative (yuccies) and other members of the “creative class” to set up their business in the port district, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of the sector by boosting its bohemian index, economic dynamism and gregarious character (FLORIDA, 2003). Since its inception, Porto Maravilha has shown a strong, favorable prejudice for digital and creative industries over more traditional cultural practices. For example, Porto Maravilha created the *Distrito Criativo do Porto*, an economic pole meant to attract new creative industries to the port and to valorize its infrastructure investments. Porto Maravilha has also given generous subsidies to help finance the renovation of buildings for industries like GOMA (a co-working “fablab” that includes 30 creative economy enterprises), in the hope of bringing more young professionals to the sector (PORTO MARAVILHA, 2015; GOMA, 2017).

Critics denounce Porto Maravilha’s instrumentalization of culture and the concomitant exploitation of the consensual power of cultural production as a strategy used to give a benevolent face to a speculative and exclusionist project (SÁNCHEZ; BROUDEHOUX, 2013; SOUTY, 2013). However, in its quest to turn the area into an attractive, risk-free investment, Porto Maravilha is promoting a vision of culture that has little to do with local reality and history. While making passing references to the area’s status as the cradle of samba music, other chapters of local history, which could bring attention to uncomfortable issues like slavery, exploitation and social inequality, are downplayed. Porto Maravilha’s cultural promotion relies on diverse forms of cultural recuperation, where local living culture is selectively presented in a consensual, “quaintified” and folkloric form, so as to give a unique flavor to the Port while deflecting controversial political issues. Examples include initial plans to transform Morro da Providência, a hill where disgruntled unpaid soldiers, escaped slaves and evicted tenement dwellers settled more than 100 years ago and survived various waves of evictions, into a picturesque, sanitized, make-believe colonial village (PREFEITURA DA CIDADE DO RIO DE JANEIRO, 2015a).

Furthermore, it was only after the discovery of several artifacts dating back to the slave trade during excavation work at the site of the Valongo Wharf that

Porto Maravilha reluctantly agreed to make part of the ruins visible. Project leaders summarily evacuated the polemical issue of the area's slave past by creating an African heritage walk, which identifies, with a few interpretation panels, a number of sites linked to the port's black history (SOUTY, 2013; 2014). Porto Maravilha's historical simplifications, cultural folklorization and dismissal of Afro-Brazilian heritage have been denounced as attempts to disqualify the struggles of the area's contemporary black and poor population against gentrification, so as to facilitate their expulsion while erasing all historical traces of their existence (SÁNCHEZ; BROUDEHOUX, 2013). They can also be seen as a mechanism of symbolic erasure and historical amnesia that seeks to neutralize the area's contentious past.

### DE-STIGMATIZATION OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Territorial de-stigmatization also involves a radical transformation of the port's physical landscape, with major infrastructure projects aiming to make the area safer and more attractive. In Porto Maravilha, multiple interventions ranged from investments in architecture, historical preservation, urban design, road resurfacing, street lighting and mobility systems. In the process, many of the port's derelict, abandoned industrial and office buildings, often occupied by squatters, artists and informal economy workers, were demolished to make way for the construction of glittering office towers. These modern, glass and steel structures are erecting a new, modern façade for the city along the waterfront, thereby concealing views of the port from the bay, and sparing cruise ships passengers the sight of nearby Providência. A key objective of Porto Maravilha is to boost seafaring tourism with the costly expansion of docking facilities (PORTO MARAVILHA, 2012).

The re-signification of the port's physical landscape also includes the construction of spectacular architectural landmarks. Among the project's key visual icons is the spectacular Museum of Tomorrow, a stunning white skeletal structure advancing on the Guanabara Bay, designed by world-famous architect Santiago Calatrava. Mauá Square was also entirely remade with sleek urban design and turned into a gigantic urban square, bordered by the bay, the Museum of Tomorrow, the MAR museum, and the 1920s *A Noite* art deco tower, soon to be renovated (CANDIDA, 2016). The architectural revalorization of the sector also includes the renovation of a number of key historical buildings and sites of cultural significance, including the Church of Nossa Senhora da Prainha, the Suspended Gardens of the Valongo, the José Bonifácio Cultural Center, and the Cais da Imperatriz Square, with the recently excavated ruins of the Valongo Wharf. Many recent historic preservation efforts, which primarily highlight elements of the landscape closely associated with European roots and Catholicism, and present people of Portuguese and Spanish descent as the area's legitimate residents, have been denounced as promoting the whitening of Rio's Port area (SOUTY, 2013). Under such Eurocentric interpretation, the African past is minimized and its Afro-Brazilian legacies depoliticized, sanitized and easily repackaged for touristic consumption.

The demolition of the Perimetral elevated highway in 2014 allowed the opening of a new waterfront promenade, the *Orla Conde*, carefully designed with upscale material, glorified views of the bay and newly restored façades of historical buildings long hidden by the structure. The Perimetral's dismantling also facilitated the construction of the Olympic Boulevard, west of Mauá Square,

lined with renovated warehouses used for hosting shows, events and a theater company. The boulevard features the world's largest mural, called *Ethnicities*, painted in 2016 for the Rio de Janeiro Olympics by renowned Brazilian street artist Eduardo Kobra. Olympic Boulevard connects with the recently renovated Imperatriz Square and Valongo Wharf. Further in Gamboa, Harmonia Square is also undergoing a facelift, and the grand 19th century casern on its western side is slated to be converted into a shopping mall, as part of the transformation of the *Moinho Fluminense* grain mill into a mega commercial complex. This 1 billion R\$ project will include the construction of a corporate tower, with offices, a hotel, a medical center, residential apartments and a one thousand-spaces parking garage. The shopping mall alone will spread over 15 thousand square meters, with over 120 shops and a multiplex cinema (MOINHO, 2017).

The renovation of the port district further includes the implementation of new modes of transportation that seek to improve mobility within the sector, especially the construction of a light rail line looping around the district to link the urban airport to the regional bus terminal. A cable car connecting the *Cidade do Samba*, where carnival costumes and floats are made, and *Central do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro main train station, with a stopover at Providência favela, was also built before the 2016 Olympics but stopped its operations shortly thereafter. If for tourists and visitors, moving around the port has been made much easier, local residents, especially those who do not own a car, complain that public transportation connecting the area to the city center and the elite South Zone has actually diminished, with the rerouting of several bus routes away from the sector (SÁNCHEZ; BROUDEHOUX, 2013). They also find the price of using the brand-new light rail prohibitive, while its layout does not serve their transportation needs. As a result, the use of this infrastructure is limited to business people and tourists.

In spite of the project sponsors' numerous efforts to change public perception of the port, the return of middle class residents to the district has yet to materialize. Porto Maravilha's de-stigmatization policies are gradually bringing people back to the district on weekends, but it has not been enough to convince them to settle in the area on a permanent basis. At the time of writing in November 2016, not a single residential project had been executed. Furthermore, the rare few residential projects that had been announced by real estate developers were canceled or put on hold. For the time being, the port area redevelopment appears to be no more than a mere extension of the city's central business district with a vast tourism and entertainment appeal, a far cry from the new mixed use district that had been announced.<sup>2</sup>

The dearth of investments in residential projects can be explained by a series of factors. The current economic crises certainly played a part in limiting what still appears as a risky venture. In moments of crises such as the one Brazil has been experiencing since 2015, entrepreneurs are more cautious and less inclined to take risks, and would rather direct their investment towards safer projects. Rio de Janeiro's West Zone, especially around Barra da Tijuca where the majority of Olympic investments were made, remains favored by real estate investors. A developer we interviewed notes that:

The real estate market is not interested in residential developments in the port. Middle-class families don't want to go live there, they don't want to invest in an area associated

<sup>2</sup> One sole large-scale residential project, the Porto Vida condominium, was initiated in the perimeter of the project. The 1,333 apartments building was meant to house referees, journalists and employees of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, which would be sold privately after the event. In 2014, construction work on Porto Vida was stopped after the City decided that Olympic workers should be housed closer to the Olympic park, in the city's West Zone. Construction work on the project was still paralyzed at the time of writing, and there are speculations that part of Porto Vida will be converted for commercial use.

with poverty, full of squatters and vacant buildings. There is plenty of good business to be made by investing in other parts of the city, where there is still a lot of land to build upon. Maybe one day, when the area's image improves and there are no more vacant lots to develop elsewhere, it may become interesting to invest in residential projects in Porto Maravilha.<sup>3</sup>

3 Interview made in March 2014.

Lingering territorial stigmatization thus appears to be an important factor explaining the dearth of housing investment in Rio's port district. Porto Maravilha sponsors are confronted with a last, great challenge, namely the social de-stigmatization of the sector. They must find creative ways to convince the middle classes to take up residence in the area. This may be a lengthy process, which clearly depends upon the continued displacement of whatever few lower income residents may be left in the port.

### **SOCIAL DE-STIGMATIZATION**

The re-signification of Rio de Janeiro's port district thus relies upon a radical transformation of the socio-economic makeup of its population. Porto Maravilha talks of raising the current population of 30 000 to 100 000, using tax breaks and the construction of new, upscale residential units to attract upper middle class and elite residents (MONTEIRO; ANDRADE, 2012). This social de-stigmatization strategy also relies upon a series of discourses that attempt to reframe the planned gentrification of the area and the replacement of its working class social fabric by a middle class-oriented consumer culture as a desirable, positive and necessary endeavor. Project officials talk of re-vitalization, re-habilitation, and re-development, thereby depicting the area as lacking vitality and needing to be brought back to life. This revitalization discourse disqualifies the current socio-spatial landscape and denies the existence of its current resident population. By claiming that the port must be "rescued" and "reclaimed", official rhetoric similarly suggests that the area had been unrightfully invaded, and now must be re-conquered by more deserving users and given a more respectable function (MONTEIRO; ANDRADE, 2012).

Official discourse is further compounded by talks of social integration as one of the promises of the project, with multiple calls to "social mixing", a policy strategy widely used in the context of urban regeneration. Social mixing has been defined as a deliberate attempt to increase the socio-economic or ethnic diversity of an urban area, especially in the European and North American contexts (VAN EIJK, 2013). Social integration policies aim to help low-income populations break from the cycle of poverty through the cohabitation of different social classes in a particular urban area. While social mixing is usually presented as an efficient tool to fight social exclusion, in Porto Maravilha, appeals to social mixing appear to be purely rhetorical, and call upon a perverted vision of the notion to legitimate the radical transformation of the port's socio-economic makeup and to warrant the area's valuation. Since incentives to attract middle class residents to the port have not included any form of action to prevent the eviction of current, low-income families, gentrification can be assumed to be both planned and deliberate, as a central part of Porto Maravilha's development strategies.<sup>4</sup>

4 This is not an exclusive expression of Rio's port revitalization project as being demonstrated by an extensive literature in urban studies (LEES, 2008; BACQUÉ *et al.*, 2011; BRIDGE; BUTLER; LESS, 2012; ROSE *et al.*, 2013).

#### THE REPOPULATION DISCOURSE

Another rhetorical tool vastly used in the implementation of Porto Maravilha confirms such interpretation. A key instrument in the professed revitalization of Rio de Janeiro's port rests upon the mobilization of so-called "repopulation" policies. In official Porto Maravilha documents as well as in public propaganda, project sponsors have made repetitive calls for the need to repopulate the port, following city leaders, whom, since the 1990s, have emphasized the need to bring residents back to Rio's downtown (MONTEIRO, 2015). Underlying this discourse is the debatable notion that the degradation, decline and loss of vitality in central city districts is the direct result of middle class flight during the second half of the twentieth century. In spite of a clear lack of interest for downtown living among Brazilian elites and young professionals, revitalization efforts initiated since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have aimed to stimulate a back to the city movement, hoping that the arrival of higher income population groups would help establish a new dynamic and facilitate real estate valuation (ABREU, 2006; BENTES *et al.*, 2011; MONTEIRO, 2015). Undoubtedly, the intent was not to attract just any kind of new residents but specifically focused on members of the middle class and upper middle class.

The notion of repopulation is highly contestable and appears to be driven by a desire to expel and displace existing population groups, or at least to dilute the current socio-economic makeup of the port area in order to attract new residents and to promote land valuation (MONTEIRO, 2011; 2015). Calls for re-population suggest that once inhabited, the port district is now devoid of residents. Such blatant dismissal of the area's current inhabitants can be construed as an admission, on the part of Porto Maravilha proponents, that the port's long-established population represents an impediment to the de-stigmatization of the district. It can also be perceived as a thin veiled attack on the Afro-Brazilian community, which has historically lived in the area.

For over two decades, policy makers have brandished social mixing and repopulation as solutions for the revitalization of the port. More than simple rhetoric, these two notions are now inscribed in official policy, and have been incorporated in various plans, legislations and programs (MONTEIRO, 2011; 2015). For example, the repopulation imperative has justified the creation, in the late 1990s, of a housing program specifically designed to encourage new residents to settle in the city center. Called *Novas Alternativas* (New Alternatives), the municipal program aimed to convince real estate investors that the rehabilitation of old buildings in the city center could attract middle-class residents and thus be profitable. However, the program was never successful, with the construction of only a few residential units. Other manifestations of the state's desire to repopulate the port with middle and high-income classes are found in a set of municipal policies, including two laws adopted in 2014, which grant a series of municipal tax breaks to new residents settling in the area.

One could claim that the strategic transformation of the port's socio-economic makeup will be achieved through two simultaneous processes of depopulation and repopulation. In other terms, the effective repopulation of the port area first requires its depopulation, with the departure of a great proportion of its original residents. Recent state investment, with the upgrading of infrastructure, major urban design

improvements and the provision of new cultural amenities, has already begun to affect the socio-economic profile of the area. Over the last decade, sectors like Morro da Conceição have been undergoing a classic form of gentrification (GLASS, 1964) with the gradual arrival of artists, intellectuals, foreign nationals and wealthier cariocas buying up property on this picturesque hill adjoining the city center. Many of its 19th and early 20th century houses have been renovated and turned into commercial ventures like tourist residences, art studios or restaurants. Down in Gamboa district, Porto Maravilha investments have prompted a more rapid and “strategic” form of gentrification (ARANTES, 2001), often called *expulsão branca*, where local population groups are expelled under the pressure of the real estate market.

While official numbers are approximate at best, we can estimate that a little less than half of the port area's 30 000 residents are homeowners, the remaining being tenants. Since rents have already begun to rise, it is clear that without a radical state intervention like rent control or rent allocation (very unlikely in the current Brazilian political climate), one can predict that a great proportion of tenants will be forced to leave in the coming years, expelled by rising rents. Most of the squatter communities who occupied vacant buildings were evicted in the early years of Porto Maravilha, their structures demolished to free up the land for real estate projects. A proportion of homeowners may also want to partake in the Porto Maravilha bonanza and to cash in on the increased value of their property, thus willfully leaving the area to go live elsewhere. Some, especially small business owners, are expected to stay in order to benefit from the economic development of the area. However, rising land values, the replacement of traditional commerce by upscale shops and restaurants and the disappearance of small industries will make it difficult for most low-income residents to remain. Even with conservative estimates, more than half of the port's current population could have left the port once the project is well underway.

#### **SOCIAL DE-STIGMATIZATION THROUGH DILUTION**

The strategic social de-stigmatization of the port does not only include efforts to displace its current poor, black, working class population, but it also aims to reduce the concentration of low-income residents which prevails in the sector, by stimulating an influx of wealthier residents. This repopulation strategy thus implies a process of *dilution*, where those who cannot be removed by the combined action of direct expulsion or gentrification (*expulsão branca*) will become a minority, drowned into a sea of wealthy new comers. In spite of Mayor Eduardo Paes's emphatic declaration that the new port district would not be a “rich people ghetto” (PREFEITURA DA CIDADE DO RIO DE JANEIRO, 2015b), current policies, which make no provision for social housing that could retain local residents or attract new working class families, are promoting such an exclusive vision. How else could one interpret the city's repeated calls to social mixing when actual municipal policies support the radical replacement of a population groups by another?

Porto Maravilha's absence of low-income housing provision appears to be part of a strategic plan designed to discourage current inhabitants to remain and to limit the influx of working class families. In 2015, as a response to mounting criticism about the project's disregard for social housing needs, CDURP, the consortium

responsible for the management of the project, went through the motion of hosting a series of three “public consultation” audiences for the development of a housing plan.<sup>5</sup> However, the process was denounced as little more than political theatre, derided as a charade of consultation and a travesty of a debate. Many port residents who attended the meetings claimed to have been (falsely) promised free housing in return for their participation. People also felt intimidated to speak their own minds by heavy-built dockers wearing t-shirts with the slogan “I support CDURP” who caused disturbances whenever audience members asked critical questions.

At the time of writing in November 2016, nothing had come out of these consultations, in spite of the promise made by Mayor Eduardo Paes to build 10 000 social housing units in the port (CAVALCANTI; SCHMIDT, 2016). The most pessimistic experts claim that there is not enough public land left in the sector to build such a quantity of affordable housing units.<sup>6</sup> Given the “Olympic state of calamity” declared a month before the hosting of the 2016 Olympics, and which still prevailed at the time of writing, neither the state nor the City have the available funds for this kind of investment in social housing.

## **RESISTANCE STRATEGIES AND THE SYMBOLIC WAR FOR RE-SIGNIFICATION**

Previous sections have discussed the way Porto Maravilha proponents have attempted to transform external perceptions of Rio de Janeiro’s port, and to remove, or at least soften, the stigma that had long afflicted this territory, through various forms of semantic re-signification that affected local land uses, built environment and social makeup. However, the seemingly peaceful and consensual integration of Rio’s port as part of the formal city, transformed from a hidden refuse space into a front stage space of spectacular consumption and brought out of the shadow into the spotlight, does not mean that the process was passively accepted by those excluded from this vision. Different forms of resistance are challenging the symbolic erasure of part of local history and cultural identity, allowing people to reclaim their right to exist, and to be seen and heard as full members of society. For Lefebvre (1968), the right to the city is actualized in the appropriation and occupation of urban spaces. Mitchell (2003) for his part, talks of the right to be seen, the simple right to be present and visible in public space, as a fundamental right that allows the most economically deprived to exist as citizens and to participate in society. In the face of exclusionary and segregationist policies, to be visible in the city’s public spaces becomes a political act of resistance.

In recent years, diverse grassroots cultural groups have devised embodied and territorialized strategies to resist their invisibilization, cultural erasure and silencing. They are reclaiming their right to representation by using the city’s public space for diverse cultural practices that will help keep alive the area’s rich heritage. While culture — or a particular, elitist, world-class vision of culture — was instrumentalized by Porto Maravilha proponents to transform external perceptions of the port, and to remove, or at least soften, the stigma that had long afflicted this territory, culture was also used as a weapon against expulsion by local resistance movements. The port’s Afro-Brazilians were especially creative in using their rich heritage to reclaim

5 The elaboration of the Porto Maravilha Social Housing Plan resulted from a request from the agency financing Porto Maravilha that CDURP presents clear guidelines for the implementation of social housing within the project perimeter (Normative Instruction 33, 12/17/2014).

6 About 75% of Porto Maravilha’s area is made of land previously owned by the public (at the municipal, state and mainly federal levels), which was transferred to a real estate investment fund. Housing advocates argue that if there had been a real intention to build low-income housing, a portion of that land would have been kept in the hands of public authorities.

possession of a territory that their ancestors have not only inhabited for over three centuries, but also built with their unpaid labor. As a result, in the battle for the re-signification of Rio de Janeiro's port, culture serves both as an instrument of gentrification and as a tool of resistance.

Many resistance strategies recently deployed have brought positive attention to the black history of the port through the re-appropriation of highly symbolic spaces associated with Afro-Brazilian identity, and give visibility to their contemporary presence by displaying a variety of Afro-Brazilian cultural manifestations in the port's public spaces. For example, capoeira practitioners have been using the ruins of the Valongo Wharf to promote the practice of this important symbol of slave resistance. Other practices, including *jongo* dancing groups and Carnival "*blocos*" are also using this key historical site to make a political statement. Other embodied practices such as carnival parades, *batuque* sessions, religious rituals, festive gatherings, as well as music, gastronomy, crafts or folklore, have allowed the community to re-enact and actualize a new Afro-Brazilian shared identity, with growing pride and confidence. They have in the process helped reactivate many emblematic sites associated with the slave past, and the symbolic power of these landmarks has in turn enhanced the evocative potential of these performances. Rather than encouraging the museumification of local cultural practices and their transformation into tourist attractions and spectacle, they are encouraging their continuation as culturally relevant embodied practices. These acts of resistance also perpetuate the port's rich tradition of solidarity and activism, inherited from numerous black rebellions and struggles against repetitive urban reforms and hygienist interventions. Not only have they allowed Afro-descendants to positively enhance their presence in the port but they also have facilitated the development of solidarity linkages among diverse communities in the port, united in their fight against gentrification and erasure.

An important grassroots initiative that constitutes a site of resistance against historical amnesia and silencing is the *Instituto dos Pretos Novos* (IPN), known as the "cemetery of the new blacks", site of a shallow African burial ground for slaves who died before they could be sold. Discovered in 1996 by a local homeowner during excavation work, the site was turned into a memorial, a heritage museum, and a research and cultural center, with limited state investment. In a city where so little has been done to promote black history and commemorate the slave past, the IPN stands as an important political site giving a voice to those long forgotten or willfully ignored by official history (PEREIRA, 2014).

Another important marker of Afro-Brazilian identity used as a site of resistance is Pedra do Sal, a large granite rock whose vast symbolic power goes back to the days of the slave trade. It has long been an important node for the manifestation of Afro-Brazilian culture, especially religious practices of *candomblé*, and remains an essential site to celebrate the survival of African traditions (SOUTY, 2014). The site is a central figure in an ongoing demand for recognition as part of World Heritage by UNESCO, which also includes the Valongo Wharf and the *Cemitério dos Pretos Novos*. But this particular site also reveals the fine line that separates the perpetuation of "authentic" cultural practices and their commodification as part of the urban spectacle, as seen in the growing popularization of the *rodas de samba* at Pedra do Sal, which now figure on lists of "must-do" attractions in several international guidebooks and are now attended by growing number of local and foreign tourists.

In recent years, Porto Maravilha promoters have exploited some of these cultural practices as part of the area's growing "memory industry". Ironically, the touristic recuperation of Afro-Brazilian heritage, promoted to add value to their undertakings, has afforded black culture and history an unprecedented visibility and level of attention. While this recuperation pay little heed to the struggle for equality and racial justice, and often presents a sanitized, de-politicized, and de-contextualized version of history, it may ultimately prove to be one of the Afro-Brazilian of port's greatest assets in their quest for legitimation. It will be up to them in the coming years to see how they can benefit from this opportunity to garner global attention, especially among diaspora tourism, without falling into the trappings of folklorization and commodification. The process of recognition by UNESCO could also bring potential symbolic gains for those excluded from the urban vision promoted by Porto Maravilha and eventually be used strategically as an instrument of resistance to exert pressure upon decision makers to limit the project's negative impacts upon local culture.

## CONCLUSION

The symbolic, material and human landscapes of Rio de Janeiro's port are rapidly transforming, in ways that support Porto Maravilha's new globalized and cosmopolitan outlook. The cohabitation of this new reality with the long-established everyday practices of the port's residents has brought about surprising contrasts. Businessmen and tourists rub shoulders at Mauá Square's gourmet food-truck while kids from the favela ride skateboards on the square's shiny new pavement. On Sacadura Cabral Street, many old shop-houses have been converted into bars and nightclubs, attracting a young, white, middle class clientele rarely seen less than a decade ago. The electronic music sounds that escape from these nightclubs mix with the more traditional rhythms of samba circles playing at nearby Prainha Square and Pedra do Sal. Late into the night, Uber cars clog up the streets, dropping off or picking up club goers. They drive pass street vendors selling water and beer, whose presence attests to the port's rising popularity as an entertainment destination. During the day, young black kids improvise a game of football on an empty street. In a nearby alley, residents of a derelict tenement hang clothes to dry at the window, while a woman empties a bag of aluminum cans collected the night before on the floor of a nearby shop-house converted into a recycling center. Around a parked old Chevrolet Opala, a group of men set up an improvised mechanics shop on the sidewalk, while thinly clad German tourists make their way back to their cruise ship.

The coming years will see the unfolding of a symbolic battle over the re-signification of Rio de Janeiro's port area. However, it is clear that the port's landscape has already been transformed to a point of no return and that the territory is now profoundly marked by an Afro-Brazilian identity that will be difficult to negate, as was too often done in the past. Our research will continue to investigate how this battle plays out in the future, to assess whether the city will continue to use a strategic rebranding approach to evacuate an uncomfortable past, and to

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disqualify existing residents, perceived as a public nuisance and a threat to real estate valuation. It will be interesting to see if elements of local history are incorporated in the symbolic construction of the area, in ways that go beyond superficial and ornamental folklorization and that embrace and celebrate both the painful past and living heritage of this key urban area.

Time will tell if, under pressure from social movements, local community members, activists, researchers and UNESCO agents, Porto Maravilha will adopt a more inclusive vision for the port. The recognition, valuation, and preservation of the port's Afro-Brazilian heritage would not only represent an admission of the contribution of people of African descent to the social, cultural and environmental development of Brazil and their undeniable role in shaping the western world but also act as a testimony to the triumph of democracy and hope. It would help turn the port district into a place of tolerance, inclusion and multicultural cohabitation, much closer to the "rainbow nation" image that Brazil has striven to build over the last few decades with campaigns such as "Um país de todos" (2003-2006) or "País rico é país sem pobreza" (2007-2015).

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