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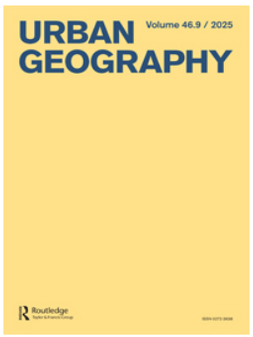

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The spectacle of non-violence: deactivating territorial stigmatization in favela representations in the Rio 2016 Summer Olympic Opening Ceremonies

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ABSTRACT

Sport Mega-Events (SMEs) have been widely used as opportunities to promote and (re)brand host cities to domestic and international audiences. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, marginalized or stigmatized urban places do not feature heavily in urban representations during SME opening ceremonies despite the complex relationship between SMEs, redevelopment and urban marginality. However, the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro marked a departure from this trend. While the Brazilian Olympic Committee (BOC) aimed to present the city as vibrant, colorful and safe, they also incorporated marginalized urban spaces – the city's favelas – into event-related promotions. We introduce the concept of *deactivation* to analyze the representations of favelas during the Rio 2016 Opening Ceremony. We suggest that the complexity of urban marginality and territorial stigmatization is erased through cultural representations that foreground empowerment and challenges to socio-spatial stigmas. In doing so, the favela is (re)imagined as a romanticized spectacle for external consumption that works to make them legible for capital accumulation, pacification, and the displacement of their inhabitants.

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Introduction

Sporting mega-events (SMEs) present unique opportunities to build, project, and promote a host city and nation to domestic and international audiences (Gold & Gold, 2008; Roche, 2002). The Games of the XXXI Olympiad in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 were no exception. Yet, the promotion of the city also had to combat negative reports and depictions of favelas – self-built neighborhoods that are highly stigmatized through associations with urban poverty and criminality. This paper introduces the concept of *deactivation* – efforts that intend to circumvent, as opposed to directly

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challenge, territorial stigma through simplified, spectactularized, or hyper-real symbolic representations at larger, (inter)national scales in order to advance our understanding of territorial stigma by exploring the way the urban margins were incorporated into the Rio 2016 Olympic Opening Ceremony.

Urban margins carry complicated relationships with the cities and nations in which they reside. Favelas in Brazil, since their development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, have a historically complex spatial, legal, environmental, social, cultural, and economic relationship across the country, and indeed in Rio de Janeiro. Typically, and perhaps unsurprisingly, marginal urban spaces are either excluded from official SME promotions or incorporated as sites and people associated with urban renewal and transformation necessary for justifying SMEs. For example, the marginal spaces of Beijing in the lead-up to the 2008 Olympic Games saw 1.5 million people displaced from its *hutong* (alleyway) districts between 2000 and 2008 in the name of urban regeneration and rebranding – a contradiction of China's "Harmonious Society" promotion in the Event (Barker, 2013) – while the rich cultural history of the districts and people were excluded. Similarly, in London for the 2012 Olympics, the boroughs of Hackney, Tower Hamlets, or Newham were not incorporated beyond attempts to cleanse the streets of undesired people – namely sex workers, racialized and criminalized youth – to make way for the seductive facade of urban regeneration (Silk, 2014). Similar trends of excluding aspects of the host nation or city deemed problematic from official narratives associated with mega-events, are commonplace. Other examples include perceptions of crime at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa (Donaldson & Ferreira, 2009), experiences of marginalized urban youth in the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics and London 2012 Olympics (Kennelly & Watt, 2011), whitewashing of the Circassian genocide at the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics (Bhimani, 2016), or the marginalization of concerns related to the nuclear disaster at Fukushima at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics (Ichii, 2019). The narrative associated with SME-related urban regeneration is consistent: spaces and people targeted for the construction or renovation of the urban environment are peripherally, tangentially, or remotely involved only insofar as they legitimate the re-imagination and re-visioning of urban space.

In the case in Rio 2016, however, the marginal spaces of Rio de Janeiro, its favelas, were both, at times, deliberately included and celebrated in Olympic promotions beyond those seen in the common urban regeneration narrative. These efforts to include and celebrate Rio's favelas sit in stark contrast to policies of pacification and removal which worked to simultaneously obscure, minimize, or erase favelas and their symbolic association with urban poverty, crime, and violence. There is, then, a multiplicity to favela representations operating simultaneously among different actors – expressions of authentic, vibrant urban life to be celebrated, and at times commodified and as a site of violence, crime, and poverty that must be reformed, cleansed, or erased (Richmond & Garmany, 2016). One of the more notable, significant, and unique ways in which favela spaces, people, and culture were incorporated into the 2016 Games was through the Opening Ceremonies. The music, color, art, architecture, dance, and other cultural aspects of favelas were crafted into how the city was represented.

This paper examines representations of favelas in the mediated materials of the Brazilian Olympic Committee (BOC) through the opening ceremonies and its accompanying media guide. In doing so, this paper contributes to debates about territorial (de)stigmatization. Previous research charts the political economy of territorial

stigmatization whereby territorial stigma and associated symbolism is "activated" to legitimate urban redevelopment (Kallin, 2017; Kallin & Slater, 2014; Wilson, 2024). More recently, scholars have focused on process(es) of territorial destigmatization, or attempts to mitigate or unmake territorial stigmas (Horgan, 2018; Muller, 2024; Schultz Larsen & Delica, 2021). In doing so, as Larsen and Delica (2019) argue, it is important to avoid over-simplifying the cause, and production, of territorial stigmatization. It is important, then, to avoid presenting stigmatisation/destigmatisation in dichotomous or binary terms. Rather, the policy schizophrenia characteristic of attempts to *de*stigmatize tainted places suggests both stigmatization and destigmatization exist as "two sides of the same coin" which operate at different scales (Schultz Larsen & Delica, 2021, p. 427).

In this paper, we introduce the concept of deactivation, which speaks to a process whereby stigmatized places are represented in over-simplified if not superficial, abstract ways to circumvent their stigmatizing associations with violence, poverty and decay. Where destigmatization works as an intervention to challenge territorial stigma, deactivation refers to a process wherein potentially stigmatization associations with poverty, crime and violence are symbolically erased in spectacularized or hyper-real representations at larger, (inter)national scales. Previous research on favelas has emphasized the process whereby stigmatizing discourses become a "spectacle of violence" through which the favela can be commodified as a site of touristic consumption (see Robb Larkins, 2015). The purpose of this paper is to examine the representation of favelas within the opening ceremonies, which we contend were the opposite – a spectacle of *non-violence* – where the violence, poverty and spatial marginalization of the favela was erased in its reduction to abstract visual and cultural representations, such as color, music, and dance. We argue, therefore, that efforts to include, celebrate, and destigmatize favelas and favela residents, known as *favelados*, within the opening ceremonies were mitigated if not undermined by inconsistencies between favelas within urban regeneration realities and representations (i.e. territorial stigma, pacification, forced displacement, erasure, and removal), reliance upon a highly stylized and compacted visual representation of favelas, communication inadequacies, and the limitations of speaking to a wide-ranging and international audience. We conclude that there is a convergence among the representational opportunities for deactivating stigma afforded by SME opening ceremonies – at the (inter)national scale – and the practices of pacification, removal, and redevelopment at the local scale.

Sport mega-events, urban branding, and territorial (de)stigmatization

SMEs have been at the forefront of the "festivalization" or "eventification" of the contemporary urban experience (see Roche, 2017; Sanchez & Broudehoux, 2013). Beyond associated economic impacts, SMEs are often sold on their perceived ability mitigate territorial stigma by leveraging positive representations of host cities thereby contributing to urban (re)branding (Gold & Gold, 2008). Jones (2015) argues that hosting SMEs – given the escalating costs associated with doing so – is tantamount to "the most expensive branding and repositioning strategies undertaken by cities" (p. 96). Host cities can, therefore, justify the growing costs associated with hosting events by focusing on the notion that SMEs can (re)position the city to a global audience. Similarly, SME opening ceremonies

have garnered increasing academic attention as an opportunity to contribute to urban/nation (re)branding and place promotion (Arning, 2013; Biressi & Nunn, 2013; Chen et al., 2012; Hogan, 2003).

The relationship between SMEs, their opening ceremonies and urban branding reflects the entrepreneurial turn in urban politics. Urban entrepreneurialism focuses on the changing political economy of urban neoliberalism by placing a focus on opening up spaces as sites of capital accumulation (Harvey, 1989). Cities, therefore, must be presented as an "innovative, exciting, creative and safe place to live or visit, to play and consume in" (Harvey, 1989, p. 9). In turn, the urban politics produced is increasingly image conscious and competitive (Miles, 2020). This suggests, therefore, in periods of urban entrepreneurialism, there is a renewed focus on urban branding and the symbolic reimagining of the city itself in which the logics and politics of urban neoliberalism connect with the "branding" opportunities associated with bidding for, and delivering, SMEs (Clift, 2021; Clift & Andrews, 2012; Ichii, 2019; Jones, 2015).

In periods of urban entrepreneurialism, SMEs are increasingly being used in tandem with wider strategies aimed at challenging processes of territorial stigmatization by producing elaborate spectacles which recast stigmatized areas in a more positive light. Territorial stigma, as defined by Wacquant (1993, 2008b), refers to the "blemish of place" which recasts disparaged districts and their inhabitants as "urban outcasts". Territorial stigmatization, therefore, is a useful framework through which to understand the symbolic defamation of marginal places and its political affects (Wilson, 2024). From this perspective, territorial stigma is politically useful insofar as the "blemish of place" provides a rationale for "fixing" stigmatized places through urban redevelopment (Kallin & Slater, 2014; Paton et al., 2017). Kallin (2017), similarly, situates image and reputation in the political economy of territorial stigma. More specifically, Kallin articulates "reputation gaps" that emphasize the "articulation of potential" while situating the local state within the production of territorial stigma whereby stigmatizing discourse are *activated* to legitimate urban redevelopment. SMEs, from this perspective, provide an ideal channel through which spectacularized images of "transformed" urban spaces can be juxtaposed with stigmatizing images of crime, violence and decline.

SMEs can connect with the literature on territorial destigmatization (see Horgan, 2018; Schultz Larsen & Delica, 2021; Muller, 2024). Territorial destigmatization refers to the processes, interventions or strategies orientated towards negotiating or challenging spatial stigma at a variety of scales from local to the international (Schultz Larsen & Delica, 2021), which can be connected to literature on SMEs and urban (re)branding. SMEs provides both means and rationale for integrating marginal urban spaces into the commodified, competitive logics of urban neoliberalism. Paton et al. (2017) argue that, while SMEs are frequently positioned as a response to urban decline and territorial stigma, the politics of SME hosting in "regenerated areas" (re)produces punitive strategies for managing "problem populations" and subsequently reinforcing socio-spatial exclusion(s). Similarly, Gray and Mooney (2011) show, in the context of Glasgow's 2014 Commonwealth Games, that territorial stigma and disinvestment provided the pollical impetus for SME-related regeneration. Stigmatizing representations can, therefore, be repurposed and co-opted into aspirational narratives of "transformation" and "revitalization" that is sustained through SMEs. SMEs then do not simply provide a "branding

opportunity" for host cities to upgrade the image of marginalized places, rather, they provide a space whereby territorial stigma can be "activated" (see Kallin & Slater, 2014) to legitimate urban redevelopment and gentrification.

In Rio de Janeiro, Steinbrink and Gàmez (2019, p. 40) noted that informal settlements in the city were an image problem for event organizers that was addressed simultaneously by incorporating images of the favela into the narrative of the Games and by demolishing them altogether. This sentiment appears to connect with the typical treatment of marginal urban spaces insofar as SMEs provide a rational for their (re)development and reimagining (see Paton et al., 2017; Wilson, 2024). The BOC's decision to incorporate and celebrate city's marginalized and stigmatized urban spaces into the Opening Ceremonies remains relatively uncommon.

To understand this seeming divergence, we suggest that this represents a process of deactivation rather than destigmatisation. Previous research that addresses the political economy of territorial stigma focuses on the process whereby territorial stigmatization is activated to legitimate urban redevelopment (Kallin, 2017; Kallin & Slater, 2014; Wilson, 2024). From this perspective, the state becomes an active node in the (re)production of territorial stigma and the symbolic defamation of "tainted" places. We suggest there also exists an inverse of such a process – what we call "deactivation" – whereby the state, host cities, and event organizers seek to circumvent stigmatizing representations without – it seems – challenging or subverting stigma itself. In our analysis, we suggest that the Rio 2016 Opening Ceremonies are an illustration of deactivation, abstracted representations of favelas disconnected from their lived realities. To achieve this, in the next section and to foreground our analysis, we discuss the history and development of favelas. In doing so, we unpack processes of pacification, commodification, and erasure and their relationship to SMEs including, but not limited to, the 2016 Olympics. In bridging the gap between urban representation and reality, we suggest that abstract representations of the favela act as a process of deactivation, detached from both their lived realities and spectacle of violence (Robb Larkins, 2015). In this sense, abstract representations of favelas as markers of cultural authenticity – thus *de*activating their association with violence and poverty – speaks to a different kind of hyperreal urban representation, what we call the "spectacle of non-violence" which similarly works to make the favela amenable to capital accumulation.

Favelas within Rio de Janeiro: urban rebranding and regeneration

Favelas in Brazil are communities constructed by residents due to lack of available affordable housing that carry a complex relationship within Brazilian society and in relation to the cities in which they exist. Usually, but not exclusively, occupied within the urban, favelas are commonly referenced and recognized as sprawling hillside buildings that ignore variations in different regions and urban/non-urban localization (Lucarelli, 2008). Geographically and ethnically, favela inhabitants are thought of as almost exclusively Black and are frequently linked to criminality as favelas are made synonymous with violence and drug-trafficking. Yet, the term can also connect to residents' positive association with a settlement (Valladares, 2005/2019). Internationally, as Davis (2007) suggested, favelas are also homogenized within the word slum and a relationship to other marginalized spaces in different cities and nations. These homogenizing tendencies

deny the diversity and complexity of favelas, while contributing significantly to their stigmatization (Rial y Costas, 2011). These dynamics contribute to what Perlman (1976) referred to as a myth of marginality. This myth positions the favela as fundamentally different from the *asfalto* (asphalt), as the formal city is known, with the *asfalto* positioned as inherently superior to the stigmatized favela, which Talbot (2024) suggests is key to understanding state action towards favelas in Rio's pre-Olympic period.

In Rio de Janeiro, favelas emerged as an example of territorial stigmatization, symbolically defamed with residents emerging the "face of fear" in city (Fernandes, 2014). Wacquant (2008a) argues that, with the penalization of Brazil's urban margins, favela residents become constructed as *de facto* enemies of the nation. Favelas operate, therefore, as a site of urban relegation whereby the stigmatized and marginalized fractions of Brazil's working class can be subjected to containment, penalty, and police violence. In this context, favelas were seen as a threat to the hosting of SMEs in Rio de Janeiro, with the IOC requiring the successful hosting of the 2007 Panamerican Games to prove the city was capable of hosting. While the Panamerican Games succeeded through the creation of "fortified enclaves" around sporting venues (Curi et al., 2011), the larger-scale events of the 2016 Olympic Games and 2014 FIFA World Cup necessitated a solution to the "problem" of favelas in the city branding itself as a global destination. Spatial stigma, therefore, legitimates urban (re)development that at times seeks to improve favela conditions but also can hide, pacify, or remove them all together.

Indeed, forced eviction, displacement, and pacification programs were the primary processes through which urban redevelopment and reimagination took shape. When Rio won the right to host the Olympics, the municipal government published a list of 19 favelas that would need to be removed to make way for the Games. Various favelas were threatened with removal or redevelopment in SME plans and preparations (see Gaffney, 2016; Magalhães, 2019; Talbot, 2024). Although these evictions were supposedly negotiated, once an area was designated for removal the minor compensation in negotiations was also met with threats and pressure. Data compiled by activists indicates that, between 2009 and 2015, 77,209 people were evicted from favelas across Rio de Janeiro according to (Comitê Popular, 2015). This wave of evictions was justified through positioning favelas as a threat to the city – a source of urban disorder which needed to be excised to stimulate investment and tourism (Magalhães, 2019). As Prouse (2019) identified, mega-event led development sought to formalize the space occupied by favelas in order to open new avenues for investment, which as Cavalcanti (2013) detailed, creates new forms of political and social relations between the State and favelas.

Though initially separate, pacification programs became particularly intertwined with the Olympic Games as a means towards securitizing Rio's favelas. Though short-lived, policing initiatives involved setting up specialized police units known as UPPs (Police Pacification Units) that intended to create a constant presence in favelas to pacify marginalized urban spaces associated with drug trafficking gangs. While violent deaths fell by three-quarters and resident approval was high, by 2019 Pacification programs closed after deaths caused by police began to rise (Barbassa, 2017). There is, then, a tension whereby UPPs were ostensibly about protecting favela residents while, at the same time, intensifying police violence to securitize public spaces for international visitors and eventgoers. As Steinbrink (2013) suggested, pacification was a means to meet

FIFA and IOC requirements for the perception of safety for international visitors. Adept at promoting this *Choque de Paz* (shock of peace) campaign via media outlets, the intended message of these efforts was clear, *Ordem e Progresso* (order and progress), the nation's national motto.

There is, then, a symbiotic relationship between the practices of, evictions, police violence and forced removals and the representational practices through which territorial stigma is activated. In her ethnography of Rocinha, Brazil's largest favela, Robb Larkins (2015) argues that violence in favelas performs the role of a Debordian spectacle. She argues, "spectacles of favela violence naturalize war while occluding the fact that present realities are intertwined with historical, economic and cultural conditions" (p. 13). The spectacle, as Debord (1967/1994) argues, provides an engaging imagery that draws attention and focus, serving to replace lived reality with commodified representations. Baudrillard (1994) argues that such representations take the form of hyperreality in that they lack a relation to reality. Robb Larkins (2015), in drawing together the spectacle and hyperreality, argues that the commodified favela, or "Favela, Inc.," relies on a fetishization of violence that is divorced from the historical, economic and cultural conditions in which favelas exist.

Contributing to the production of the hyperreal favela are films like *Cidade de Deus* (2002) and *Tropa de Elite* (2007) (Rial y Costas, 2011), coverage that represents favelas as problematic marginal spaces whose remedy lies in securitization and order (Lacerda, 2015; Penglase, 2007), and favela tourism wherein tourists dress safari vests and are driven around in jeeps (Rial y Costas, 2021). As Robb Larkins (2015) notes, such tourism creates an ironic self-reinforcing loop, as residents reliant on income from tourism "perform their own authenticity through reference to the markers of the hyper-real" (p. 85). State violence associated with policing, particularly the pacification program, also forms part of the hyper-real spectacle of violence: As Alves (2018) explores, the racialized spectacle of violence in favelas, with young Black men in particular rendered ungovernable and subjected to state terror. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to theorize the relationship between the hyper-reality of favelas and racial capitalism, this lens further reveals the stigmatization of these territories and their inhabitants.

Alongside the fetishization of violence, Favela, Inc. also relies on obscuring lived realities. Steinbrink (2013) detailed how favelas were erased through numerous outputs leading up to the Games, such as the following: absence in urban development plans (e.g. Vila Autodromo); photos that hide or obscure favelas (e.g. the Manguiera favela near Estadio Maracanã); removal of favelas in official Olympic bid documents; omission of the word favela from the BOC's 419-page Olympic bid book; leaving out favelas from official tourist maps; and the controversial request by the City of Rio de Janeiro to Google to remove favelas from Google maps. When they have been spatially visualized in popular culture, the favela has been beautified and simplified into a series of stacked colorful blocks, what Valladares (2005/2019) may consider an internationally established attractive representation of poverty.

However, in the context of the 2016 Olympic Games, favelas were not entirely absent from event-related promotions. Rather, at times, they were symbolically reimagined as the exotic stage of the event itself (Richmond & Garmany, 2016). Through incorporation into the "brand" of the city and at times projected through the games and presented as an "authentic", yet exotic, commodity for external consumption. This suggests, then, there

exists an inverse of Robb Larkins's (2015) "spectacle of favela violence" – what we call the "spectacle of non-violence" – where the favela's stigmatizing association with violence, poverty and criminality is erased. Through what we have called "deactivation", it is therefore important to explore the links between urban branding, territorial stigmatization, and the politics of urban redevelopment that is legitimized through SMEs, which we suggest is illustrated in the 2016 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony.

The 2016 Olympic Opening Ceremony

The 2016 Olympic Games Opening Ceremonies were hosted at the Maracanã Stadium in Rio de Janeiro on the 5th of August 2016. Opened by Interim President Michel Temer, the ceremonies included more than 5,000 dancers and volunteers, more than 12,000 costumes, 11,000-plus athletes. Two portions comprised the two-hour ceremony. The first half was a creative or artistic program dedicated to and for Brazil as the host nation followed by the parade of nations in which athletic participants walk into the stadium. They were broadcast to an IOC-estimated 342 million people around the world. Since then, the Opening Ceremonies have been preserved and made available on YouTube where they have a view count of 7.7 million people as of 25 September 2016 – at which point tracking of views ceased. Although each country that broadcasts the opening ceremonies may (or may not) have had their own narrators, the version on YouTube stands as the official IOC-preserved artefact of the ceremonies that is made widely available internationally. Three narrators delivered commentary (Peter Donegan, Gillian Clark, and Duane Dell'Oca) although the creative program was narrated almost exclusively by Peter Donegan. The narrative purveyed by "The Creators" of the Ceremonies – Fernando Meirelles, Daniela Thomas, and Andrucha Waddington – was described by them in the media guide as follows: "Brazil's ceremony will focus on the future, celebrate togetherness and reach beyond the country's borders, speaking to the planet as a whole" (p. 7). They sought, in their words, to "change some paradigms of Olympic ceremonies" by replacing a high-tech approach with an "analogue inventiveness" developed through "the richness of Brazilian popular culture and the energy and passion of thousands of volunteers."

Analytical approach

We drew on two sources of data, the audio-visual mediation of the Opening Ceremonies and the accompanying media guide. To analyze these, we first watched and rewatched the Opening Ceremonies to gain a general understanding of the contents of the broadcast, and we read the media guide. Second, we transcribed the creative program, including the audio and visual aspects of the Ceremonies. Third, we narrowed our focus to the section of the ceremonies called the "Building of Contemporary Brazil," an urban narrative that emphasized the presence, multi-cultural character, and diversity of the nation and specifically its favelas. Fourth, drawing on a discursive (Fairclough, 2001) and cultural studies (Johnson et al., 2004) approach to reading media texts for meaning and power relations, we critically "read" how favelas were represented within the ceremony, their discursive framing. As we developed our critical reading, we asked several central questions: What is being presented to the audience, and how? How do the different

audio-visual layers represent favelas and favelados? What socio-spatial power dynamics are at play within the representation and in relation to urban life? How do these compare to what was transpiring in Rio and favelas in the build-up to the 2016 Rio Games? From this process, we established two central patterns across the representation that form the basis of the following analysis. The first, *Visual pacification and commodification*, focuses on the visual-spatial depiction of favelas, and the second, *De-politicization, de-activation, and socio-cultural erasure through empowerment*, focuses on their relationship to and meanings of the music and dance.

Deactivating territorial stigma, visual pacification, and the spectacle of non-violence

Of the 20-minute segment on the building of contemporary Brazil, approximately fifteen minutes centers specifically on representing the favelas. The transition to that segment began with Brazilian Übermodel Gisele Bundchen in a shimmering silver dress walking across an expansive darkened stage to the sound of *Garota de Ipanema* (The Girl from Ipanema) by Antonio Carlos Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes. Played at this moment, *Garota de Ipanema* carries a correspondence to Carioca Jobim – whose portrait adorns the light-sprinkled and silvery urban landscape – and to the area of Ipanema, one of the most iconic and wealthy spaces of Rio de Janeiro, and the people that live there. Gisele's sunkissed-white skin, high heels, silver-shimmering dress, and associated flowing lights billowing around her serve as a metonym for the beautiful landscape of Brazil found in Ipanema and Brazilian architecture, notably Oscar Niemeyer. The media guide noted the following:

> Gisele leaves a long trail wherever she goes, her delicate lines become Niemeyer sketches, some of his iconic works are drawn on the stage of the stadium: the little church of Pampulha, Casa das Canoas, Museum MON, and Brasilia Cathedral. (p. 21)

The segment offers a cultural and racial contrast to what is to come as she approaches the favelas.

Following Rial y Costas's (2021) contention that favela representations are situated between their erasure and hypervisualization, the opening ceremonies nearly invoked the criminality and violence commonplace favela representations. The Washington Post (Partlow & Phillips, 2016) reported that Gisele was initially set to be approached by a food vendor for a photograph who would be chased off by security guards but was protected by the model. Media outlets widely misrepresented the scene as one where Gisele would have been robbed or accosted by a young Black boy. At risk of reaffirming racial stereotypes, the scene was cut last minute after rehearsal for the ceremonies and deemed "not funny" by Mierelles – the interntionally known Director of the film *Cidade de deus*. That the scene was planned but cut speaks to the challenges of racial sensitivity and inclusion, ethnic and geographic assumptions, and the inability to include subversive or nuanced representations in Opening Ceremonies, which target an extremely wide audience. That the cut-scene was also widely reported by media outlets also speaks to the ways in which favelas are quickly articulated to the spatialized and racialized stigmas. Even without actually occurring in the ceremonies, the absent and unseen scene reproduced the spatial stigma in relation to racialized images of crime

and violence. In a more literal sense, this speaks to a process of *deactivation*. That is, the decision to cut the segment represents a very deliberate attempt to manage the "optics" of the favela by removing that which could be seen to (re)affirm stigmatizing associations with violence and poverty. Whereas previous research demonstrates the role of the state in producing stigma to legitimate urban redevelopment (see Kallin, 2017; Kallin & Slater, 2014; Wilson, 2024), here we see an inverse attempt to downplay potentially stigmatizing representations.

In the run up to the World Cup and Olympics and Paralympics, Steinbrink (2013) detailed several ways in which the City of Rio de Janeiro worked to erase favelas through physical and mediated forms by analyzing policy, interventions (pacification programs), media documents (e.g. tourist maps), and cultural productions (e.g. paintings). These efforts, erasure and generic mediated spatialization, consolidate the double stereotype of favelas wherein they function as spaces of crime, poverty and violence or as colorful, close-knit, musical, and dancing communities (Kalkman, 2019). Physically, invisbilization occurred in the city via demolition, eviction, pacification, and wall construction. The intended representation of the vibrancy of favelas here thrives on the idea that even in substandard housing or neighborhoods tainted by territorial stigma, that urban life can arise and thrive. A strong point of visibility, cultural recognition, and inclusion in the opening ceremonies connote Frenzel's (2016) narrative of hope and collective agency that have the potential to challenge to territorial stigmas. Still, these sentiments belie the realities on the ground. Forced displacement, fleeting and limited success with pacification programs, minor improvements in some areas, and entire erasure of favelas in areas primed for redevelopment create a stark contrast to the attempted celebration of culture that emanates from Rio's marginalized and stigmatized urban spaces. The treatment of the favelas in, during, and after the Games belies narratives meant to disarm or deactivate territorial stigmas associated with the favela. At the same time the BOC beautified favelas in the opening ceremonies representation, they simultaneously subjected them to physical erasure.

Moreover, the spatial visualization of favelas tended to adopt depictions of these urban spaces by representing an ad-hoc assembled series of colorful buildings stacked on top of, adjacent, and interconnected with one another, which was on full display during the opening ceremonies. Such visual spatial representation is at considerable odds with prior BOC attempts to erase favelas in media products. As Steinbrink (2013) detailed that, as actually-existing physical spaces, favelas were erased or obscured from a number of visual products from the BOC in bidding for and promoting the Olympics (e.g. bid materials). Yet, in the Opening Ceremonies they were actively promoted and celebrated, or at least the idea of them was. Their colorful visualization here aggrandizes and hyperbolizes in another form of hypervisualization that bears no connection to actually existing spaces. Further, within the media guide, reference to the favelas is replaced twice with "cubes," as in, "A boy starts dancing on one of the cubes" and "The cubes light up" (p. 23). For reference, "favela" is used nine times within the document. Color in these renderings intend to beautify the favelas, creating an image of vibrancy, happiness, diversity, or celebration intended to counteract the reality of poverty and territorial stigma underneath. The dominance of this imagery has created a visual stereotype recognizable in multiple media sources and contributes to what Valladares (2005/2019) may consider an internationally established attractive representation of poverty. This singular imagery

encapsulates Baudrillard's (1994) simulacrum, a copy of a copy for which there is no original. Simulacra are expressions of the hyperreal that make locating real places, spaces, or objects difficult to find. Moreover, as Valladares (2005/2019) expounds at length in popular and academic discourse, the singular if not caricatured imagery of a favela – with no real connection to a specific favela or urban space – disregards the heterogeneity of favelas in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil. Doing so, she suggested, confers a generic space of "otherness" in contrast to the real and actually existing communities and neighborhoods.

The media guide noted the building of contemporary Brazil and densely populated mega-cities, urban developments, and the great Brazilian inventor Santos Dumont. The narrator provided less commentary than the media guide. One of the "surprises" to which the media guide refers is the transformation of the cityscape into the colorful building blocks of the favelas. However, no clarity on spatial favela representation is offered in the media guide. One note on the side of the guide indicates that "[t]he pictures of the buildings that make up the set are from the architectural photographer Peter [(Pedro)] Kok" (p. 18). Kok is a photographer and videographer known for his attention to the built environment across the world but primarily in Brazil, although he demonstrates little or no connection to favelas through his work. This note pertains to the metropolis imagery of cities generally in Brazil but does not apply to favela representations, which take on a caricatured form and have little or no relationship to real urban space.

Attempts to deactivate territorial stigma with positive representations highlighting the agency of favelados against discourses of violence or despair can quickly be reincorporated into neoliberal and capitalist fairytales. The visualization of the favelas with vibrancy and celebration creates a heterotopia wherein favelas are commercialized and commodified for symbolic value within a competitive marketplace. The simplified, generic, and beautified favela imagery is intended in part to speak not just to a more empowering rendering but also to a highly commercial and international audience. Since the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the singular favela imagery has become a commercial foundation (Bentes, 2002; Kalkman, 2019; Larkins, 2015). This highly reproducible image can be found across fine art and favela/slum/poverty-chic artefacts (Freire-Medeiros, 2009), tourist materials, blankets for purchase on Rio's beaches, coffee mugs, t-shirts, or local artists in Rio's many tourist-oriented markets.

The commercialization of the idea of a favela in the form depicted within the 2016 Opening Ceremonies reaffirms Bianca Freire-Medeiros's (2009) rebuttal to Marx's (2018) assessment that although capitalism seeks to turn everything into a commodity, poverty is one thing that cannot be because it has no use or exchange value. As she demonstrated in her work on favela tourism, and keeping with Frederic Jameson's (1991) assertion that within the cultural logic of late-capitalism capital seeks to expand into previously uncommodified areas, poverty can be and is being consumed as a commodity. The favela, and its associative racialized poverty, since the 1990s and early twenty-first century, has become a product of various kinds of and for consumption. The danger in challenging territorial stigma within the Opening Ceremonies is that doing so instead reinforces this commodification and pacifies stigmatization. Here, the symbolic value of the generic favela representation binds together with and services the justification of SME-led urban regeneration. This spectaclized representation of stigmatized urban space gives leverage to and for the urban reformation and entrepreneurial

practices that occur through displacement or erasure on the ground. In this way, there is a convergence between activation and deactivation but at different scales. While deactivation occurs at the (inter)national scale where the favela is represented as a homogenous space absent of stigmatizing associations with crime, poverty or violence, territorial stigmatization can be activated at local scales to legitimate pacification, redevelopment and removal. In this way, deactivation is different from territorial de-stigmatization. In the next section, we explore how deactivation occurs at the (inter)national scale through the expropriation of the cultural products of the favela.

De-politicization, deactivation, and socio-cultural erasure through empowerment

Collectively, the music and dance within the Opening Ceremonies supported the effort to develop a culturally and racially diverse, tolerant, and inclusive mega-event. This effort was a marked contrast to the 2014 FIFA World Cup, which relied on a traditional view of Brazilian diversity which presents Brazil as a model of racial harmony, as diverse and joyful (Malanski, 2020). Mitchell (2023) articulated how the 2014 ceremony effectively "repackaged colonial legacies to construct a fantasy of multiculturalism" (p. 1507). In contrast, in the 2016 Ceremonies, "the Rio 2016 Olympic opening ceremonies, choreographed and produced largely by Brazilians, delivered a narrative of racialized historical legacies and social responsibilities that compose the Brazilian past, present, and future" (p. 1507). The sentiment that the 2016 Opening Ceremonies offered more nuanced representation of race, spatial stigma and multiculturalism is well founded. Brazil, after all, is the first nation to host the Olympics that has a majority Black population. However, we suggest that this narrative is complicated, mitigated, and at times undermined by an over-simplification of complex phenomena into the reductive and streamlined narrative required for media aimed towards multiple, widespread, and diverse international audiences. The politics, culture, power, and struggle of Brazilians, favelas, and urban space are repackaged together – their political significance and complex realities deactivated – as markers of vibrancy and authenticity.

In the first instance, the relationships between space, place, and culture are anchored to their commodification via their situatedness within the representation of the favelas as multi-colored blocks. Music and dance are explicitly tied to a spatial relationship with the favelas, or at least the idea of a favela. This provides a spatial complication to the intent of the overall narrative. The media guide noted the following for the commencement of the segment:

> Above Ipanema, a pulsating energy rises. It is the voice of the favelas. It is popular culture. Any history of pop will tell about the same origin: it is from the poorest, the most underprivileged neighbourhoods, that the rhythm, songs and dances moving the planet originate.
>
> It is this power that shakes the stadium. We show the inventiveness and the incredible energy of these anonymous creators.
>
> "Passinho", funk, "Samba" and popular Brazilian music alternate on stage. Idols of the Brazilian pop music scene electrify the street dancers who take turns exhibiting their different styles.

The intention here is to link urban space (favelas) with people (*favelados* and people of color) and their cultural productions (music and dance). In doing so, the media guide draws explicitly on urban marginality and poverty within favelas as a marker of their cultural authenticity. This invokes an interplay between stigma, culture, and commodification at play in which the spatiality of the favela is erased while the stigmas associated with exclusion, poverty and urban marginality are deactivated and (re)constructed as fertile ground for authentic cultural production in line with other romanticized and exoticized notions of the favela (Freire-Medeiros, 2011; McNally, 2017).

In doing so, then, this dynamic in the 2016 Olympic opening ceremonies speaks to the process wherein territorial stigma is symbolically deactivated. This resonates with the broader project of making the favela legible to co-opt them into the networks of global capitalism and touristic consumption as a theater of both poverty and vibrancy (Freire-Medeiros, 2007, 2011). When the relationships amongst (a/the) favela, people, and culture are made during the ceremony, their spatiality remains erased by the reliance upon the representation of the favelas as a series of colorful stacked blocks. This process of abstraction, and commodification, works to simultaneously erase the favela as a physical, stigmatized place while rendering it a spectacle for external cultural consumption. This de-contextualisation and de-historicization of the favela represented here is characteristic of the policy schizophrenia in the urban governance of neglected places (Schultz Larsen & Delica, 2021). The placelessness of the singular image of the *favela* undermines the empowering and inclusive intentions of the ceremonies by erasing the heterogeneous nature of actually existing *favelas* and their representations at other scales. Activation and deactivation here occur simultaneously at different scales. Local or national activations of territorial stigma can legitimate event-related redevelopment or renewal in specific favelas (see Talbot, 2024) at the same time as deactivation occurs at the international scale, and through which the cultural products of the favela are detached from actually existing places and their association to crime, violence and poverty.

Of central importance in the ceremonies is their intent for the artistry, music, and dance within the favela segment to communicate the nation's historical, spatial, social, and cultural struggle. As Pardue (2008) illustrated, hip hop in Brazil has proved an important medium through which artists represent their realities in relation to social, political, economic, and spatial marginality. This enables artists to disarticulate and rearticulate understandings of race, gender, and favelas in Brazil. For example, the final performance of the favela segment is performed by Karol Conka and MC Soffia and is dedicated to Black women and empowerment. The media guide noted the following for this segment:

> A tribute to the contribution of Black people to the Brazilian popular culture. Two rappers sing about the empowerment of Black women while a dancer performs a mix of break dance and "capoeira" at the centre of the stadium. A huge image of this dance is projected and multiplied on the stage.
>
> Look and listen to this Black girl. Focus only on the empowerment, respect our fight and our movement. (p. 24)

Important in their presence in the Ceremonies is the content and focus of their music, which often focuses on Black women, racism and race relations, and legacies of slavery. As women on the stage, they also challenge historical tropes of Black Brazilian

women. Mitchell (2020) articulated how the figure of the *mulata* body has been exoticized, eroticized, and fetishized in popular culture, and the *mulata* figure as a form of Brazilian eroticism and interracial mixing. In another example, there is a song-exchange between Zeca Pagodinho and Marcelo D2 poised within and across the favela blocks on stage. This segment communicated both the diversity of the Carioca pop music and the tension within favelas by expressing a tension of "battles between groups that challenge each other, from one side of the set to the other of the set" (Media Guide, 2016). Marcelo D2 frequently explores the dilemmas, challenges, and anxieties of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Mitchell, 2009).

Yet, despite the intention for the ceremonies to represent such societal struggle, complication, and empowerment, Mitchell (2020) also argued that the ceremonies could also be said to have fallen victim to the spectacular commodification trap that is the Olympics:

> Brazil as joyful, vibrant, and celebratory helped construct tropicalized iconographies that reproduced and aestheticized a racializing logic of Black containment and Black pleasure. The mass spectacle of the Olympic ceremonies demonstrated the continuing management of Blackness and mixing in a neoliberal era. (p. 216)

The ceremonies fell victim to this spectacularization and commodification as the political imperatives of many of the performers, their music, struggles, and their identities are deactivated within the ceremony and broadcast.

In another example, the late Elza Soares who was notable for inclusion because she represents a Black Brazilian woman from the favelas who broke barriers for Black Women in drawing on African roots and jazz to great acclaim. In doing so, she became an advocate for the rights of Black Brazilians, women, and the LGBTQ+ communities. She is noted in the media guide:

> One of Brazil's most renowned singers, she began her career in 1953, having since scored a string of hits in a variety of genres, especially samba. Elected "best singer of the millennium" in 2000 by BBC. (p. 23)

Yet, the political nature of her music and advocacy is absent in this description. Further and more glaringly, the narration of the segment with Soares struggles to convey much about her. All that is offered to the viewer is this: "Elza Soares one of Brazil's most renowned singers beginning her career back in 1953." Her connection to favelas is assumed while remaining vague in the media guide and is unclear, and the narration of her performance lacks any link to the broader social, cultural, or spatial dynamics important for so many of the diversity of Brazilians.

Similarly, the content of the music and dance that was included was repackaged to avoid its more political connotations. The opening song of the favela segment, *Rap de Felicidade* by Cicinho & Doca, is a classic funk song and favela anthem from 1995. It was sung by Ludmilla whilst a young Black male – 13-year-old Cristian do Passinho – dressed in white dances Passinho alone. The media guide noted the dance's emanation from the favelas and mixing of street dance styles that are "a way for young people to express themselves and try to succeed, with creativity and joy, in the battle of life where they are stigmatized for their colour and social class" (p. 22). The style is also notable for its shift in Brazil's cultural identity, from relative obscurity, near obscenity, and stigmatization associated with violence, drugs, sexualization, and criminalization

rooted in favela culture to one of cultural affirmation (Cronin, 2016). From the narrator, there is no mention of the dance style, its connection to people or place, nor the dancer whatsoever; in fact, the narrator is silent throughout this whole passage. *Rap de Felicidade,* too, is not discussed at all despite its importance within Brazilian culture.

Moreover, the more political aspects of the song are excluded. What is played is the refrain, which in English translates to: "I just want to be happy, walking peacefully in the favela where I was born, and be able to be proud, and have the knowledge that the poor have their place." This refrain is repeated several times with different stylistic elements. What is not sung are the lyrics that follow this refrain and contrast this optimistic counter-narrative:

> My dear authority, I no longer know what to do,
> With so much violence I feel afraid to live,
> Because I live in the favela and I am very disrespected,
> Sadness and joy here walk side by side,
> I say a prayer to a protective saint,
> But I am interrupted by machine gun fire,
> While the rich live in a big and beautiful house,
> The poor are humiliated, bullied in the favela,
> I can no longer take this wave of violence,
> I just ask the authority for a little more competence.

The more political passages are displaced for the more recognizable, commodifiable, digestible, and safe passages. This illustrates the deactivation of territorial stigma. Whereas destigmatization might involve directly challenging or resisting stigmatizing discourses, lyrics pertaining to violence are selectively cut from the passages included in the ceremonies. The "spatial taint" (Wacquant et al., 2014) of violence, poverty and urban marginality are strategically bypassed in abstract, spectacularized representations which expropriate the cultural products of the favela from the favela itself. Unlike in Robb Larkins's (2015) *Favela INC,* where representations of violence can be a vehicle for commodifying the favela itself, here any association with violence is occluded altogether. This represents, then, a spectacle of non-violence where politically inconvenient and potentially stigmatizing cultural representations of violence are removed so that the corresponding struggle and challenge to existing inequalities can be replaced with only the empowerment and celebratory narrative. Absent is that very thing about which the song sings, both the reality and representation of the favela, where "Sadness and joy here walk side by side" pertaining to violence are quite literally deactivated, selectively cut from the passages included in the original song.

Across the entire ceremonies, the narrator appears reluctant to discuss the racial and political dynamics of favelas. This is despite the overt politically driven and empowering narrative intended by the ceremonies' producers. Gisele is mentioned twice by name and the word favela was mentioned only once. Absent in any of the commentary from the narrator are the social and political dynamics, nor the empowerment intentions articulated in the media guide. This lack of engagement with the intentions of the ceremonies serves to undermine their intent and contribute to an erasure through commodification. The strongest gestures towards these meanings are two vague and politically safe references to difference, similarity, and intolerance uttered at the very end of the segment. First is during an instrumental music portion and dancing of several styles, which

occurs at around 47 minutes into the ceremony: "And now the ceremony makes its comment about not only the mighty country of Brazil and the world, where difference and intolerance seem to have intensified." The second occurs in relation to a speech that comes towards the end of the urban segment as Regina Casé, an actress and creative person involved in theater, film, and television is known for her diversity work, which the media guide notes she regards as "one of the greatest resources of the country and maybe the biggest contribution from Brazil to the world" (p. 26). The narrator commented, "Regina Casé, urging the audience to look for similarities and celebrate differences." Such a blanket comment from the narrator while relying upon an assumed authenticity could be said in almost any speech at any Games in any place, a nicely pre-packaged and generic statement that is digestible, safe, and a-political in an attempt to cater to (white) international audiences.

In doing so, the Olympic opening ceremony represents favelas and the culture associated with favelados as hyperreal. Stripping away the violence inherent in Robb Larkins' (2015) Favela, Inc., the ceremony presents a favela similarly removed their lived experiences. While it could be argued that removing the highly stigmatizing associations of violence from favelas through such a high-profile mass media event presents an effective challenge to stigmatized notions of favelas, the opening ceremony at best serves to replace one hyper-reality with another. Instead of a favela marked by interpersonal violence we see a favela where no violence exists. At once, then, we have shifted from a spectacle of violence to a spectacle of non-violence. Both are hyper-real – they are representations of something for which there is no original. Even in cases of favelas where there is little or no interpersonal violence, the violence of marginalization persists, and the favela and its residents are positioned as an exotic other. Ultimately then, the deactivation of stigma does little to address the misconceptions about favelas that feed the myth of marginality. In this sense, deactivation can be viewed separately, and at times alongside, from both the production of territorial stigma and processes of de-stigmatization. We suggest that in the 2016 Opening Ceremonies in Rio, deactivation occurs at the inter-national scale whereas discourses of de-stigmatization might occur simultaneously at other scales. As hyper-real representations occluding lived reality from view, both Favela, Inc. and the *spectacle of non-violence* at best fail to improve peoples' lives and, at worst, feed the processes of commodification that can harm favela residents.

Conclusion

This paper explored the representations of favelas during the Opening Ceremonies of the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio De Janeiro. There has been a proliferation of scholarship that documents the importance of SMEs – and their opening ceremonies – in urban (re)branding and redevelopment in the era of urban entrepreneurialism (Arning, 2013; Biressi & Nunn, 2013; Gold & Gold, 2008; Mitchell, 2023). However, the BOC's decision to incorporate, or even celebrate, the city's favelas into the event opening ceremony remains somewhat unique. We suggest, however, that attempts to incorporate the favela into the opening ceremony should be viewed as part of a process of deactivating territorial stigma aimed at making the favela legible to make them amenable to capital accumulation.

The relationship between SMEs, media representation and territorial stigma remains complex. As Wilson (2024) recently argued, territorial stigma cannot be easily subverted, challenged, or resisted merely by leveraging more positive representations. While previous research focuses on the political economy of territorial stigma, as something *activated* to legitimate urban redevelopment (see, inter alia, Kallin & Slater, 2014). This paper contributes to the conceptual development of territorial stigmatizing by charting an inverse of this process – the process whereby territorial stigma is *deactivated* in spatially abstracted urban representations. Further, previous studies which have focussed on the process territorial destigmatization (Horgan, 2018), or the process by which stigma "unmade" (Muller, 2024), have tended to focus on micro-level analysis through which stigma is negotiated or subverted. This paper focuses on the process by which the spectacularized representations work to "deactivate" the stigma associated with poverty, violence and criminality in the favela and, in doing so, further their commodification. We argue that deactivation can be differentiated from de-stigmatization. Whereas destigmatization represents attempts to challenge, resist, or subvert stigmatizing discourses, deactivation illustrates more abstract, spectacularized representations that do not directly address territorial stigmatization and, in doing so, extracts the elements that can be commodified (for example, cultural produces such as music and dance) without addressing stigmatizing associations of crime, violence, poverty.

It is important to acknowledge, though, that deactivation and de-stigmatization, do not exist in opposition to the process by which territorial stigmatization is produced or "activated". Rather, as noted by Schultz Larsen and Delica (2021), stigmatization and de-stigmatization are – at different scales – converging, co-constitutive processes that are integral to the political economy of advanced marginality in neoliberal cities. In this sense, our analysis draws out a useful inversion of previous research on territorial (de)stigmatization. In their research on housing estates in Denmark, Schultz Larsen and Delica (2021) note that territorial destigmatization, at the local scale, is often undermined by the production of territorial stigmatization at the national level. We argue that deactivation and activation can operate simultaneously and at different scales. In the case of Rio de Janeiro and the deactivation of territorial stigma, local activations of stigma, and concomitant evictions, removals or pacifications (see Talbot, 2024) were decontextualized on the (inter)national stage as the favela was (re)imagined in the hyperreal as an abstract product for cultural consumption. It is also worth noting that although such hyperreal representations are somewhat disconnected from lived realities, such media representations also provide space and opportunity to frame stigmatized places beyond the deleterious narratives of crime, drugs, or violence.

We suggest that "deactivating" territorial stigma does little to address the misconceptions about favelas that feed the myth of marginality. In Rio De Janeiro's opening ceremony, the favela represented remains a spectacle that is abstracted from "real" favelas – comprising of little more than a collection of colorful blocks that works to aestheticize poverty. Likewise, the music performed during the segment is often stripped of the sociocultural political context from which it emanated. As a result, association of the favela with racialized urban poverty, crime, and violence is deactivated such that the cultural authenticity of the favela can be expropriated so that it may be commodified as a vibrant, exotic, and romanticized product for external consumption. Attuned to different scales, we therefore suggest that SMEs provide a somewhat limited opportunity to challenge or subvert territorial stigma. In seeking to communicate positive messages to a predominantly international audience, the platform itself does not lend itself to

nuanced representations of urban marginality. In addition to this, we must acknowledge that urban representations seldom exist in a vacuum. A tension emerges whereby the incorporation of the favela works to "tame" the image of the favela as a vibrant, yet abstract, urban imaginary while, at the same time, the commodification, violent pacification, and demolition of "real" favelas was legitimated both by the event itself and their incorporation into event-related promotions. In this sense, the political utility of favela representations work to symbolically tame and deactivate "stigmatized" places to facilitate their incorporation into networks of capital accumulation.

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