Ephemeral Sovereignties and Vanishing Communities: Precariousness, Gender, and the Political in Paulo Lins's *Cidade de Deus*

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Abstract

In *Cidade de Deus* (1997), the Afro-Brazilian anthropologist Paulo Lins (Rio de Janeiro, 1958—) explores the effects of the illegal drug trade on City of God, a favela located on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. Building on different readings of Lins's work (Schwarz, Fitzgibbon, and Lorenz) and on the work of other anthropologists and historians (Alves, Segato, and Dawson), this article provides a close reading of the novel, focusing on an understudied aspect: the intersections between precariousness, gender, and the political, specifically, the relationship between masculine brutality and state sovereignty. First, I examine the portrayal of young drug lords and the vanishing favela sense of community. I then delve into how Lins's drug lords personify what I call

“ephemeral sovereignties,” i.e.: inchoate incarnations of state power through disposable bodies. In *Cidade de Deus*, these volatile sovereignties manage to produce a vanishing community while simultaneously paving the way for its self-destruction.

Keywords: Brazil, City of God, Paulo Lins, favela, caudillismo, ephemeral sovereignties, narconarratives, Rita Segato, Jaime Amparo Alves

Resumen

En *Cidade de Deus* (1997), el etnógrafo afro-brasilero Paulo Lins (Rio de Janeiro, 1958—) explora el impacto del narcotráfico en la favela carioca homónima, Cidade de Deus, ubicada en la periferia de Rio de Janeiro. A partir de diferentes lecturas de la obra de Lins (Schwartz, Fitzgibbon y Lorenz) y estableciendo un diálogo con el trabajo de otros etnógrafos e historiadores, (Alves, Segato y Dawson), este artículo ofrece una lectura atenta de la novela, concentrándose en un aspecto poco estudiado: la intersección entre precariedad, género y lo político, específicamente, la relación entre brutalidad masculina y soberanía. Para empezar, examino las representaciones de narcotraficantes jóvenes en la novela y la desaparición del sentido de comunidad en la favela. Luego, profundizo con una lectura sobre cómo los narcotraficantes de Lins personifican lo que llamo “soberanías efímeras,” es decir, encarnaciones rudimentarias del poder estatal a través de cuerpos descartables. En *Cidade de Deus*, estas soberanías consiguen producir una comunidad evanescente para, al mismo tiempo, sentar las bases de su auto-destrucción.

Palabras claves: Brasil, Cidade de Deus, Paulo Lins, favela, caudillismo, soberanías efímeras, narcoliteratura, Rita Segato, Jaime Amparo Alves

Resumo

Em *Cidade de Deus* (1997), o etnógrafo afro-brasileiro Paulo Lins (Rio de Janeiro, 1958—) explora o impacto do narcotráfico na favela carioca homônima, Cidade de Deus, situada na periferia do Rio de Janeiro. A partir de diferentes leituras da obra de Lins (Schwartz, Fitzgibbon e Lorenz) e estabelecendo um diálogo com o trabalho de outros etnógrafos e historiadores, (Alves, Segato, e Dawson), este artigo oferece uma leitura atenta do romance, concentrando-se em um aspecto pouco estudado: a interseção entre precariedade, gênero e o politico, especificamente, a relação entre brutalidade masculina e soberania. Primeiro, examino as representações de narcotraficantes jovens no romance e a desaparição do sentido de comunidade na favela. Em seguida, proponho que os narcotraficantes de Lins personificam o que eu chamo de "soberanias efêmeras," ou seja, encarnações rudimentares do poder estadual através de corpos descartáveis. Em *Cidade de Deus*, estas soberanias conseguem produzir uma comunidade fugidia para, ao mesmo tempo, abrir caminho a sua autodestruição.

Palavras-chaves: Brazil, Cidade de Deus, Paulo Lins, favela, caudilhismo, soberanias efêmeras, narcoliteratura, Rita Segato, Jaime Amparo Alves

Sovereignty and Fear

Drunk and euphoric, Pipsqueak celebrates his eighteenth birthday, reflecting on his brief but eventful life. He has:

> chalked up ten murders and fifty armed robberies. He owned thirty revolvers of every caliber and was respected by all the gangsters in the area. His ability to lead came not… from the fact that he was dangerous [but from]… his desire to be the biggest. (Lins 180)

A fictional portrayal of José Eduardo Barreto Conceição (1957–85), Pipsqueak is one of the cruelest drug lords of Cidade de Deus, a favela located on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. Pipsqueak defines and quantifies his brutal leadership in terms of perceived fear. Similarly, his forerunner, Squirt, "had wanted to be a gangster so he'd be feared by all, like the gangsters where he lived. They were so feared that his chicken of a father didn't even dare look them in the eye" (16). These equations of criminality and reputation, brutality and power, fear and respect, characterize Pipsqueak, Squirt, and many of the hundreds of teenagers and boys who crowd *Cidade de Deus*, an etnographic novel written by a former favela dweller, Paulo Lins, published in Brazil in 1997, and famously adapted into an Academy Award-winning feature film, directed by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund in 2002.

Critics have read *Cidade de Deus* as an attempt to illustrate the outcome of "boundless consumerism," in that "the expansion of crime parallels the expansion of capitalist practices" (Amaral 39, my translation). The more drugs Pipsqueak sells and the more guns he owns, the more victims he accumulates to control the monopoly of those sales. But there is more to Pipsqueak's case than that, as he could also be read in terms of political sovereignty. Certainly, his ledger of crimes and weapons functions as a product of consumerism and insatiable accumulation, but it also results in territorial control. It is in this sense that he does not perceive his "ability to lead" only in relation to the

valuable commodities he owns (crimes and weapons), but also to this fear he infuses in the favela.

It is precisely in close relationship to fear towards the sovereign that Max Weber characterizes the modern state. Alongside his well-known definition of the state as the successful claimant of "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory," Weber points out that obedience to the state "is determined by highly robust motives of fear and hope" (79). Lins imagines Pipsqueak and other drug lords through these very same images of fear as well as hope —as I elaborate below. Their engagement with crime becomes desirable, as it allows them to access and retain power in the favela, producing, in turn, a certain mirage of flawless sovereignty.

The favelas' reputation itself projects such image of fear. When their inhabitants confront each other in football matches or children's games, they do so by taking "advantage of the notoriety of the favelas they had lived in to intimidate one another... The more dangerous their favela, the easier it was to command respect" (Lins 21). Belonging to a specific favela becomes another asset in the circulation of social capital, much like the number of weapons they own or the crimes they committed. Commanding "respect" (a word that reappears constantly in the novel) works as a euphemism for imposing reverential fear on others, mirroring what the state does with its citizens.

These representations of sovereignty shed a light to Pierre Bourdieu's rewriting of Weber's definition. Whereas for Weber, the state is a holder of the "monopoly of legitimate physical force," for Bourdieu, the state also claims the monopoly of "symbolic violence" (4). What is at stake, here and throughout Lins's novel, goes beyond the supply and demand of illegal drugs: it is a power struggle over who rules the territory, be it a favela or a group of favelas. This struggle, however, is rooted in the monopoly not only of violence but perhaps more importantly of fear and hope. Fear amplifies physical brutality in a symbolic way. This is why Pipsqueak, Squirt and others should not be read as

merely petty criminals but as personifications of sovereignty.

Of course, Lins's use of personification is not exempt from literary distortion, as the drug lords embody a peculiar type of sovereignty that is inchoate, i.e.: emerging but rudimentary, strong but transient, in short, precarious and ephemeral. I go back to this when I examine below the way Lins depicts the Drug Lords' bodies, with a special emphasis on size and masculinity.

Sovereignty and Masculinity

I would like to propose here the following genealogy: *Cidade de Deus*, aided by the film adaptation's transnational impact, became one of the precursors of *narconarratives*, a genre that flourished more profusely outside of Brazil, in Spanish-American cultural fields, over the past two decades, right after the novel's publication in 1997. Lins's drug lords shaped the way Mexican or Colombian fictions build the figure of the *narco*. One characteristic they all share interests me in particular: the way they inherit, reproduce, and subvert the Latin American *caudillo*, a fundamental figure to understand the region's culture on sovereignty (Acosta Morales 178). *Caudillismo* is a historical phenomenon that features first in Spanish-American speaking countries over the nineteenth century. *Caudillos* were male politician leaders associated to personalism and often a military past. Common examples of *caudillos* are Rosas (Argentina), Santa Anna (Mexico), Artigas (Uruguay) and Solano López (Paraguay), to name a few (Dawson 38–63). Especially over the nineteenth-century, *caudillismo* defies the centrality of the state, whose large and unevenly populated territories produce newer vacuums to be filled (48).

In Brazil, *caudilhismo* appears only later, in the twentieth century, which is consistent with Dawson's claim that *caudillos* "entered the vacuum of power left by the collapse of the Spanish colonial state" (48). Of course, a similar vacuum could only happen in Brazil after the fall of the slaver empire in 1889. The most popular example of a Brazilian *caudilho* is Getúlio Vargas, the "father

of the poor," the longest-serving non-royal head of state (1930–45 and 1951–54), who shared with his Hispanic counterparts a prominent cult of personality, an autocratic style of government and a military past.

Dawson defines *caudillos* as "critical figures in societies torn by conflict, nations where citizens could not turn to civic institutions or process to defend their interests" (48). *Caudillos* stand above the unsolvable contradictions in Latin American societies, and they do so, like favela drug lords and *narcos* will do decades later, through masculine brutality. They emerge as "strongmen, literally, charismatic figures who could defend their [own] interests and the interests of their supporters by unleashing a torrent violence against their enemies" (48). To a certain extent, they personify and personalize the fear and hope that Weber ascribes to the impersonal state, from which *caudillos* snatch up the monopoly of force.

Cidade de Deus bequeaths to later Mexican and Colombian *narconarratives* the symbolic tension between the state and strongmen, a personification of two poles of power that are essential for the consolidation of *caudillismo*. For Acosta Morales, *caudillos* replaced the state (178). Instead, for Dawson, they rather "acted as interlocutors between marginalized peoples and… the state" (54), without substituting it. Regardless of the "jurisdiction" of each of these poles, both Acosta and Dawson concur in one fundamental aspect: *caudillos* thrive where the state is absent. In the favela, however, things are not so simple, as it could be hardly argued that the state is not present there (Alves, "Narratives" 326).

Although an ethnographic novel, *Cidade de Deus* still features typical crime fiction tropes, such as the tensions between individualism and the state (Tocco 11–46). As Josefina Ludmer notes in her essay on the genre, *El cuerpo del delito* (1999), "the constellation of crime, in literary speech," is precisely "the tense and contradictory correlation between subjects… and the state" (15). In this sense, Lins' drug lords personify but also rival state sovereignty

through their individualistic personality. In most literary works that engage with crime fiction, the institution that often functions as a metonymy of the state is the police (Tocco 5). But even as Lins's novel draws from crime fiction, the assumptions that favelas could be understood as stateless spaces in the vein of regions where *caudillos* thrived or that the police could incarnate such state need to be complicated.

Lins often depicts the Brazilian police, "unfamiliar with the twists and turns of the [favela's] labyrinth" (19), as an iteration of what he perceives to be the state's absence in the favela. The novel features a direct relation between the police's inability to navigate the favela and the drug-dealers' increasing rule. Whereas "those who knew the projects well could walk from one end to the other without having to take the main street... the police gave chase, but..." drug lords always manage to escape (19). The favela's labyrinthine alleys produce an inebriating effect, almost an echo of the drugs being sold in the streets. Clueless, the police "would often shoot at one another. The gangsters would double back and fire from another alley, making the police dizzy" (16). Thanks to their spatial knowledge, the youngsters outsmart the police. Here, Lins follows another crime fiction trope, as he imagines incompetent policemen being regularly defeated by individualistic wits (Tocco 11–46). Whereas in classic detective fiction, it is the private detective who outsmarts the police; here, the drug lords fulfill that function. At the same time, they evolve into de facto sovereigns, as they become the ones who decide who lives and dies in the favela.

In his critique of the film adaptation, however, Jaime Amparo Alves challenges the state's absence, in that "police violence... appears as peripheral" in the story ("Narratives" 326). For him, the film "seems so intent on portraying black-on-black violence that it fails to address the role of the state in the victimization of black youth in the favela," whose "residents are the main victims of the police in Brazil" ("Narratives" 326). Elsewhere,

Alves understands favelas as a "a racialized geography of confinement," a part of a "pipeline" that leads smoothly to prison (*Anti-Black* 141–42). Alves convincingly makes the case that the Brazilian state, far from being absent, could not be more present in the favela, "with helicopters flying overhead, frequent checkpoints, collective search warrants, detentions, and killings," transforming the entire space into an outsourced outdoors jail (*Anti-Black* 24).

Despite this lack of emphasis on actual police brutality, nevertheless, the way Lins portrays drug lords should be read as literary, not literal, personifications of sovereignty, as they do not permanently replace an absent state. They are not ersatz of the state, but their fleeting, inchoate incarnation. Here, drug lords function like Dawson's understanding of *caudillos*: they are interlocutors, leaders who are somewhere in the middle between their neighbours and the actual authorities. In this sense, the subsequent *narcoliteratura* will later stride away from Lins. According to Acosta Morales, in those narratives, "the nation-state is much more like a cartel than like a social contract" (185). Favelas, however, are not cartels. Drug lords mirror the fear produced by the state, but the reflection is opaque, obviously limited by the politics of race, as Alves so clearly puts it. Something similar happens to hope.

Sovereignty and Hope

Neither *caudillos* nor favela drug lords or *narcos* are unidimensional representations of brutality. Whereas "the *narco* is not only a drug dealer but a guarantor of social order, sometimes murderer and sometimes benefactor" (Acosta Morales 180), *caudillos* "offered hope for stability through the force of their will" (Dawson 48). It is interesting that Dawson uses "hope" to describe them, because it is the exact word that features in Weber's definition of the state, next to "fear," as I mentioned above. Similarly, Lins's drug lords project both attributes to the favela: fear and hope.

After all, *caudillos*' leadership was never simply rooted on fear

towards their authority, but also on communitarian and paternal-fraternal benevolence. Vázquez Mejías traces a similar "intrinsic duality" in the figure of the *narco*, in another Latin American tradition she believes them to be modeled after: melodrama. The *narco*, a new iteration of the *telenovela* hero, is "a womanizer, a drunk, ostentatious, violent and cruel" but also "generous, concerned about their people and their family" (211). To legitimize their power, *caudillos*, drug lords, and *narcos*, they all are "strongly regional in nature" (Acosta Morales 180). They operate based on a thorough understanding of loyalty, cultivating "a sense of closeness, of fictive kinship... in their followers because of their brotherly or fatherly concern for them" (Dawson 54). Even when twentieth-century *caudillos*, like Vargas, Perón or Cárdenas, were actually in control of the central state unlike some of their nineteenth-century precursors; regionalism and loyalty were still a mainstream part of their agenda.

In an article for the *New Left Review* published in late 2001, the Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz introduced Lins's novel to the Anglophone literary field five years before the English translation. Schwarz reflects on how the favela's criminals operate always trying to balance no other than "fear" and "hope": "In the months leading up to Carnival... thieves and prostitutes would rob... to get funds for their local samba school. The crimes... could be said to be outweighed by a larger objective, of bringing good times to the city" (112). Monopolizing what thieves and prostitutes do only occasionally, drug lords wield their power at the service of their community, by compensating fear with hope: they might rob outsiders, but they do so for the greater good, to shelter and fund the favela. Instead, the community, their people, returns the favor, paying homage to them, covering their crimes every time the police show up. As Schwarz claims, "illicit activities coexist, calmly and guiltlessly, with altruistic impulses, modest ambitions, punctuality and respect" ("City" 104). There is a conspicuous ambivalence in these drug lords, which transcends

the economic aspects that motivate them. A human behavior that overflows the logic of accumulation, drug-dealing becomes a structuring political agent in the community.

Even though they do so from the favela's marginal space, these drug lords mimic the most salient paternalistic aspects of personalist politics.[1] Their figure projects fear and hope to the rest of the community in exchange for their loyalty. Nevertheless, race appears once more as a conceptual "glass ceiling." Whereas *caudillos* often acted as mediators between subalterns and the state, their social origin was quite frequently associated to the military or fazendeiros (landowners), i.e.: the very same highest spheres of power they could communicate with. Caudillos were rarely subalterns themselves, unlike Lins' drug lords. The youngsters that crowd Cidade de Deus, after all, are the offspring of the Afro-Brazilian population that flocked to favelas, those who have been excluded from the Brazilian State administration for centuries, first due to slavery, until abolition in 1888, and then due to segregation and new forms of informal enslavement (Alves, "Narrative" 140).

As Alves reminds us, young black men (regardless of their actual involvement in the drug trade) are the main target of state violence in the favelas. The attacks against them are twofold: physical and symbolic, involving "lethal police force" and "policies that reproduce poverty, unemployment and other vulnerabilities to premature death" (319). Lins's Afro-Brazilian drug lords live within the Brazilian state, whose "prison population is the fourth largest in the world" (Alves, *Anti-Black* 119). Their position as *favelados*, then, is inseparable from subalternity. But all of this does not impede Pipsqueak, for instance, from replicating the white personalist politician's tactic that *caudillos* were so keen on: seducing his community with the mirage of hope.

In this sense, Lins's drug lords partake in what Sayak Valencia calls "marginalized masculinity," i.e.: "men who are part of subordinated social classes or ethnic groups... who also help to sustain the power of hegemonic

masculinity, because they interiorize the structural elements of its practices" (Helfrich 233, qtd. in. Valencia 161). Pipsqueak, the narrator tells us, always "made a point of shaking hands with the workers, slapping the veteran gangsters on the back, and feeling up the sluts" (Lins 179). His ambivalent behavior towards others simulates the inner workings of *caudillos*, especially when they address their people. Despite their marginal or subaltern position, drug lords still personify a form of sovereignty, however provisional or ephemeral, in *Cidade de Deus*.

In short, Lins portrays drug lords as ruthless and benevolent, encapsulating sovereignty through fear and hope. Their tyrannical attitude, towards their enemies and potential traitors, coexists in perfect harmony with the solidarity to their own community, either as employers who re-distribute wealth or through territorial protection. They build alliances and expand the control over their territory by following the logic of "friends and enemies" (i.e., keep your friends close and your enemies closer). Their personality, simultaneously hostile and amicable, constitutes a warped echo of sovereignty.

This is perhaps Lins's main foundational contribution to *narconarratives*, an inaugural building block in a genre that will later put center stage *narcos*, who are simultaneously cruel and benevolent, a fictive universe of Robin Hood-like characters who are both terrifying and kind sovereigns. We need only think of Yuri Herrera's *Trabajos del reino* (2004), one of the foundational novels of the genre, where "Rey," the cartel's king, is both feared and loved. Audiovisual narratives replicated this very same convention, for example, the American-Colombian TV series *Narcos* (2015–17), which pictures the cocaine trade in Colombia, featuring the merciless but caring drug lord Pablo Escobar, played by Brazilian Wagner Moura. In *Cidade de Deus*, then, Lins replicates mainstream Latin American politics, from nineteenth-century to twentieth-century *caudilhismo*, while at the same time paving the way for the cultural

representation of the *narco* throughout the region. Power and order are personified in their masculine personality.

Size Matters: Masculinity and Brutality

In her essay *La guerra contra las mujeres* (2016), Rita Segato discusses the feminicides that take place in Ciudad Juárez, in the Mexican-American border, and their relation to the illegal drug trade. She calls them crimes of a "second state." In the vein of *caudillos* and their intermediary position, Segato claims that *narcos* operate within a parallel network that interacts, negotiates, and sometimes overlaps with state agents, producing a "second state that controls... life underneath the law" (44, my translation).

Almost always within the boundaries of the favela, Lins imagines these drug lords in ways that resonate with Segato's ideas about the performance of masculine sovereignty in the parallel "second state." Perhaps, here lies the idea of a distorted type of personification, as drug dealers are not exactly statesmen. Segato alleges that the state's very *raison d'être* is a masculine enterprise. According to her, "the history of men, the historical process of masculinity, constitutes the DNA of the state and its masculine genealogy reveals itself daily" (94). Similarly, Hélène Cixous had equated political economy with masculinity a few decades earlier, as "a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously... often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction" (879). Whereas the state and the political are projections of patriarchy, the second state could be understood as their exacerbation, a microcosm that constantly re-affirms masculine domination by rape, feminicide and vicarious violence.[2] Drug lords, in *Cidade de Deus*, often murder women, burying them alive, or kill their offspring.

The critic of the novel and its film adaptation devoted some attention to gender. For Alves, the film fails to create diverse models of Afro-Brazilian

masculinities. Whereas "the literature on masculinities has stressed the existence of differential access to the privileges of masculinity," the film "seeks to prove... stereotypes of black masculinity" and its relation with violence, "as an inherent part of black male identity" ("Narratives" 323–25). It is in this sense that the gap between the novel and the film becomes clear: as I expand below, Lins devotes a great deal of his novel to flesh out the complex relations that his Afro-Brazilian male characters hold with violence, and he does so without falling into racial prejudices and simplistic generalizations about his own community.

In her reading of the novel, Fitzgibbon defines the favela as a "world that is predominantly sexist and abusive" (137). She discusses a few scenes that portray gender violence, and later examines the representation of women in the novel, paying attention to how most of them are excluded from the trafficking circuit (147). She concludes that the novel shows "the survival of sexism... beneath the mask of globalization" (150). Lorenz links the young dealers to the Brazilian national myth of the *malandro* in that, much like the melodrama hero, they "represent the agency of womanizing men" (86) to later claim that "at times" they "fall into misogyny and homophobia" (93).[3] According to him, Lins presents both a "nostalgic vision of the masculine code of *malandragem*" (88) and a ferocious "critique of the *malandro*'s machismo and ignorance" (91).

However, the novel's mechanisms of gender deserve greater attention, as Lins does much more than merely denouncing sexism or depicting women's exclusion in the participation of the favela's economy. Gender is as relevant as race or class to understand the power dynamics at stake in the favela, especially, if we take a closer look at how Lins connects masculinity with sovereignty. For one thing, gender's centrality derives from the inseparability of masculinity and second state sovereignty. The main characters' nicknames, and particularly the narrator's treatment of size, already introduce this connection. Pispqueak's

ambition, let us remember, is to be "the biggest." Fitzgibbon notes that these "pseudonyms, often common nouns turned into proper nouns,... define a trait of their personalities" (135–36). However, she does not delve into these aliases and how they are interwoven with sovereignty and gender issues.

Unfortunately, Alison Entrekin's English translation of the novel misses some of these subtle undertones. For instance, Entrekin names the first prominent drug lord, "Cabeleira" or "Inferninho" as "Hellraiser," to allude to his cruelty.[4] But "Cabeleira" means "shag hairstyle," which is restored in the subtitling of Meirelles and Lund's film, where "Hellraiser" is called "Shaggy." The policeman who chases Cabeleira—the only cop who can compete with the youngster's spatial knowledge of the favela—goes by the nickname "Cabeção," meaning "Big Head." Entrekin chose to translate it as "Boss of Us All," emphasizing the hierarchy that policemen (and the state) have over the Afro-Brazilian subalterns, but missing the semantic universe related to the body that is common to other nicknames.

Cidade de Deus' narrative arc encompasses from the 1960s to the 1980s. The names of the subsequent generations of drug lords appear with similar connotations: Cabelinho Calmo ('Calmed Hair'), Cabelinho Curto ('Short Hair'), Bené (slang for male genitalia, but translated as "Sparrow"), Marreco (slang for "small bird" translated as "Squirt," a short child), Cenourinha ('Little Carrot'), and Dadinho, later known as Zé Pequeno (Little Joe, called "Pipsqueak"). All these names allude to male genitalia and virility, a point that seems obvious in the more explicit phallic names of Bené and Cenourinha. Equally, the reference to length and size in these nicknames points to the cultural importance attributed to the dimensions of the phallus as a sign of physical power.

According to Cixous, "masculine sexuality gravitates around the penis, engendering that centralized body (in political anatomy) under the dictatorship of its parts" (889). Lins displaces this phallic gravitation towards another body part: hair. Specifically, he portrays masculinity in relation to an abundance or

absence of hair. *Cidade de Deus* relies frequently on biblical imagery. Hair could be read as one of multiple examples of this, as it clearly evokes the figure of Samson. Much like the phallus' size, hair works as a metonymy of sovereignty, order, and brutality. In the book of *Judges*, Samson, too, is a masculine leader, the last of the judges, who exhibits supernatural manifestations of force, slaying a lion with his bare hands. The drug lords' nicknames linked to hairdos stage sheer sovereign force, understood solely as naked virility.

In addition, the prominence of hair in the drug lords' names could be read as Lins's gesture of acknowledgment of their Afro-Brazilian identity and the implications of its violent past. Hair, in *Cidade de Deus*, is first and foremost black hair. As Barbadian-British artist Paul Dash notes, black hair is a central aspect "to diasporic aesthetics and... a symbol of black resistance to oppression" in the Americas and beyond (27). Dash here understands "diaspora" as "those people of largely African ancestry in the West who are the direct descendants of slaves" (36), among them, of course, Afro-Brazilians. Dash alleges that "the black body," and particularly hair, "has been a site of political struggle" (27). He exemplifies his claim with a white Dutch traveller's testimony on the arrival of a slaver boat in seventeenth-century Surinam. Dash mentions how, after enduring the Middle Passage, the "enslaved peoples" sought refuge in tending their hair in different ways, a creative act of resistance amid oppression (27–28). Lins privileges hair because he sees, aligned with Dash, that "the aesthetics of black hair culture" is an essential part of "body style" (Dash 36). A distinguishing mark of identity, hair works as a reminder of Afro-Brazilian resistance against police brutality in the favelas.

Lins's drug lords share with Samson and Latin American *caudillos* that they all are "physically strong and carried an air of invincibility" (Dawson 49). However, Lins's multiple allusions to their hairstyles, shaggy, short, calmed, feature a parodic tone that mocks the mirage of flawless sovereignty. Lins knows too well that controlling the favela is but an unachievable masculine

fantasy. After all, most of these boys do not even reach adulthood, as they often face premature death, murdered by other men —either the police or their own peers. I will come back to this in the next section, to discuss the issue of the ephemeral and the prominence of diminutives in the drug lords' pseudonyms.

An interesting variation of these pseudonyms is "Galinha," another important drug lord. Here, once more, Entrekin's translation misses an important nuance of the source text, as she chooses the masculine "Little Rooster" to convey "Galinha." Similarly, the film's subtitling chooses a male name "Knockout Ned." But of course, "Galinha" is a feminine noun. A more accurate translation would have been "Hen." Whereas all the other drug lords are named after attributes that seem immediately virile, "Galinha" is defined by cowardice. Being a "galinha" amounts to "chicken out," to lack courage. In a way, he is the opposite of a rooster, a "cocky" person. His nickname "Galinha" is consistent with his character, for most of the story: he behaves as a non-conflictive, harmless neighbor, until Pipsqueak rapes his wife, and he decides to join the cockfight.

The novel features other masculine fantasies which are eloquent in what they tell us about power and delusions of grandeur. In the first pages, Pipsqueak, still a child, fantasizes about growing up to become like one of his idols. "He looked up to Hellraiser, but adored Big, who was top dog in the favela of Macedo Sobrinho. If he managed to be like Hellraiser, soon he'd be like Big, too: desired by women and feared by all" (Lins 43). Again, size (literally, "being Big" like the previous drug dealers) exposes the centrality of the tale of masculinity, here reduced to project insecurities and fears about both size and sexual performance. It is in this sense that controlling the favela is inseparable from masculine domination.

Conversely, Teresa, the only female dealer in the book, gets involved with drugs because of her late husband's perceived weaknesses to perform as a

drug dealer and a breadwinner. An alcoholic and a drug addict, he was "always losing money and marijuana" to the point that "sometimes he didn't have anything to offer customers, so his wife and children had to go hungry" (82). When her husband gets shot in the head, the widow starts dealing to survive. According to Lins, an unwritten honor code defined masculinity throughout the favela: a non-aggression pact among "brothers," that privileges and gives immunity to cisgender males. As years go by and the sense of community gradually vanishes from the favela, this implicit pact is increasingly breached.

Gender violence and masculine sovereignty run parallel in the novel. When Pipsqueak finally attains the much-desired ownership of the favela, he starts calling himself Zé Pequeno (Tiny), yet another reference to size. His first course of action is the distribution of the favela territory and the corresponding income between his subordinates. Of course, Teresa "only earned ten percent of each sale" (Lins 157), despite being one of the most successful dealers. The uneven distribution of the drug market mirrors masculine domination, reproducing the gender pay gap and gender violence occurring outside of the favela, too. Perhaps a more eloquent expression of patriarchy takes place after Hellraiser's nightmare, in which he dreams his own murder. In the dream, the boy cannot find his weapons, as he muses:

> "a gangster without a gun is like a whore without a bed." He remembered the dismal but simple lesson he'd learned at a tender age from his mother when she didn't have a room in the Red-Light District and his father didn't have a gun to rob with. (134)

Transgenerational boyhood trauma builds a bridge from parents to son. Hellraiser embodies the disjunction between a castrated phallic subject (the father's missing gun) and an exploited female (his mother, forced into sexual labor), whose work conditions are so precarious she is unable to work. Each element of the equation, the paternal and maternal lineages, rooted in racial

and class inequality as well as in gender violence, cannot be understood without each other.

Even though for Segato, the DNA of the state is quintessentially masculine, she additionally clarifies that defining the sovereign in terms of "'heterosexuality' is not accurate, because, strictly speaking, we know little about the sovereign's sexuality." (94). Yet, the power of heteronormativity manifests itself openly in Lins's novel. In contrast with Alves' observation that in the film "black manhood is conceived of in terms of heterosexuality" and "virility" ("Narratives" 325), this clear division does not necessarily happen as consistently in the novel, as it addresses, albeit briefly, the spaces of queerness in the favela. I am thinking in particular about the scene in which Hellraiser compares himself to his gay brother, a character who is absent in the film: "Men who cried were queers, like Ari" (Lins 145). Thinking of Ari, Hellraiser ambiguously experiences how "a vague feeling of tenderness ran through his soul, but his hatred for that faggot was reignited... He would never confess... that that bastard was of the same blood as he was" (145). As Fitzgibbon notes on her reading of the scene, this homophobic violence could be read as a problem of masculine assertion in a heteronormative environment. Ari, in Hellraiser's view, is "a family member that can jeopardize his reputation and honour" (Fitzgibbon 146). In Weberian terms, we could say that queerness endangers Hellraiser's projection of fear and hope.

It is in this sense that Segato coined her term of *mandato de masculinidad*, or "masculine imperative," i.e., a "command between peers or masculine confreres that demands a proof of belonging to the group" (18). Hellraiser follows the masculine imperative as a reaction in order to repress his own queerness. Thus, he enhances his growing misogyny and homophobia – even when he has no audience other than himself. Hellraiser's behavior offers an inverted mirror image of his brother's queerness by rejecting and repressing homosexual desire to preserve his modicum of ephemeral power.

Ephemeral Sovereignties

Beyond personalism and masculinity, what is interesting about Lins's embodiments of second-state sovereignty is that they are, first and foremost, of an ephemeral nature. Whereas sovereignty is often understood as an uninterrupted continuum of power, either in the figure of democratic institutions or tyrannical individuals, in *Cidade de Deus*, second state sovereignty is always scarce and volatile, much like Teresa's husband's life. We can see this clearly if we take a closer look at how Lins casts doubts about the masculinity of his drug lords: Cenourinha, Dadinho, Galinha, Salgueirinho, to name a few, are characterized by the diminutive *-inha or -inho*, a common, colloquial Portuguese suffix connoting both young age and/or familiarity, i.e., a term of endearment for boys. However, the suffixes' overwhelming presence in the novel could also be read as a morphological representation of these diminutive masculine ephemeral sovereignties.

It is in thise sense that the diminutives are an ironic comment on the characters' virility, another instance of the ephemeral: Zé Pequeno (Pipsqueak/Tiny), Cabelinho ('Short hair'), Cenourinha ('Little carrot'), Salgueirinho ('Small Willow') project, not only a phallic image of power, but one that cannot be sustained for long (sexually and symbolically), one that is tiny, short, little or small, as Entrekin translates the Portuguese diminutive *-inha* or *-inho*. Pipsqueak's behavior, for example, relates to speed and brevity. Right after a scene where he urinates along with Hellraiser, a kind of masculine bonding, Pipsqueak rushes "down Middle Street in a hurry," as he "only walked, talked, ate, mugged and killed people in a hurry" (Lins 166). This sense of premature climax defines Pipsqueak's actions in the favela. An obvious contradiction arises here between the all-pervasive power that these drug lords wield and their tenure's short duration, their ephemeral sovereignty.

At first sight, the issue of the ephemeral could be counterintuitive. Even nowadays, more than twenty-five years after *Cidade de Deus*' publication,

drug lords are still in charge of their communities. An article published in *The Guardian* in 2020, for example, discusses how, faced with the absence of clear, federal, or even provincial guidelines, it was the drug dealers who imposed a curfew in the favela to slow the spread of COVID-19 (Baretto and Phillips, n.p.). Nevertheless, what is ephemeral in Lins's novel is not the institution of drug trafficking *per se* but the individual attempts to control it. Here, too, drug lords mimic *caudillos*. After all, *caudillismo* is a long-lasting historical phenomenon, originated in the nineteenth century and still present in contemporary politics, at least in the form of what Dawson calls a "political style" (56). *Caudillos*, instead, are but the ephemeral expressions of *caudillismo*.

After his only girlfriend breaks up with him, Pipsqueak is portrayed as a monster. He is not only "a gangster" but also "ugly, short and chubby, with... a large head" (321). Pipsqueak's monstrosity reminds us of Valencia's "endriago subject" (16). Valencia borrows the "endriago" figure from Spanish chivalric romances —a beast with the upper body of a human and a hydra and the lower body of a dragon. In the fourteenth-century romance, Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo's *Amadís de Gaula*, the endriago works as a medieval rewriting of the biblical devil. Valencia brings the endriago to the realm of what she calls "gore capitalism," i.e.: "the undisguised and unjustified bloodshed that is the price the Third World pays for adhering to the increasingly demanding logic of capitalism," which she considers to be characterized (much like gore films) by "extreme, brutal violence" (12). Valencia underlines the symbiosis between the current economy and criminality, focusing, like Segato, on the impact of the drug trade in the Mexican-American border. Valencia coins the term "endriago subject," to describe "a new creature, an amalgam of economic [as well as] political entrepreneur and violence specialist" (40), who "utilize violence as a tool for empowerment and capital acquisition" (83). It is in this sense that masculine domination (e.g.: Pipsqueak's monstrosity) could be read in the novel not as a vestige that lingers in late/gore capitalism, in contrast to

Fitzgibbon's claims, but as its inextricable driving force. Pipsqueak, after all, acts and reproduces subjectivities that operate outside of the favela.

In addition, Pipsqueak's monstrosity could be defined as an ethopoeia of the ephemeral. "Ethopoeia," or impersonation, means "putting oneself in the place of another so as to both understand and express their feelings more vividly.'[5] In this sense, Pipsqueak" body mimic the main traits of the ephemeral: shortness, scarcity, fugacity. His body is monstrous and powerful because it is ephemeral. His "large head" is the only body part that is not scarce, precisely the one that is supposed to be smaller. A body defined by negative features amounts, in one way or another, to scarcity: his beauty, his height, his fitness, are extremely scanty. Scarcity, in turn, leads to its supplementary excess of masculine brutality and the mirage of a short-lived sovereignty. Aware of his deficits, Pipsqueak "didn't tell anyone of his torment, but instead... started raping the women he had the hots for" (Lins 321). Rape, as Segato observes, is not about sexual attraction but about power, an "allegorical act par excellence of the Schmidtian definition of sovereignty: legislative control over a territory and over the body of the other as [its] annex" (84). Pipsqueak rapes both to assert his masculinity and to keep projecting his image of sovereign fear.

For Amaral, the drug lords, excluded from real economic power, commit "crimes to... attain a status that could offer them a sense of dignity" (39). Perhaps this is why Lins constantly comes back to the word "respect," when he describes these young adults' need to be feared by their peers. But, as Amaral mentions, the coveted "dignity" can only be "illusory, bringing with it a premature death" (39). In short, respect, dignity, fear, are fictional because they are ephemeral: although Pipsqueak's brutality and selective benevolence to others seem to incarnate the almighty power of a god in his city, his own body and that of his counterparts are always doomed to be gone too soon, either due to a stray bullet, a shoot-out with the police or a war with other gangs.

The drug lords' *bocas-de-fumo*, where they produce and distribute marihuana and cocaine, could also be read as another instance of ephemeral sovereignty. Precarious territories, the *bocas-de-fumo* are revered with fear and short-lived, due to the constant, shifting alliances. In fact, it is precisely because the favela's sovereignty is so identified with strongmen, that when they are questioned, betrayed, or replaced, their fragility is revealed.

To sum up, Lins emphasizes sovereignty's ephemeral nature: despite all the fear these boys can elicit, they are ultimately interchangeable. For Schwarz the novel shows "a quasi-standardization of sequences, a sinister monotony in their very variation" ("City" 105). The multiplicity of diminutives *-inho* functions as another way of homogenizing them. In the same way that sovereignty oscillates between cruelty and benevolence, fear and hope, it also sways between presence and absence. The main characters who are so prominent in certain parts of the book are consigned to oblivion a few pages later, to be replaced by other boys, who become equally disposable. Their names and stories are blurred into one, losing individuality, decimating, in its path, precisely what they aspire to rule: their community.

Vanishing Communities

Ephemeral sovereignties pave the way for an increasing evanescence of community. This is perhaps the main trait that distinguishes Lins's literary personifications of sovereignty from historical *caudillos*, whose main asset has often been to maintain a sense of community even after their deaths. This is, after all, the legacy of Vargas in Brazil and Perón in Argentina: we need only think of the fact that movements such as *varguismo* or *peronismo* have outlived for decades the leaders they were named after.

At the beginning of the novel, set in the early 1960s, Lins seems to portray Cidade de Deus as a paradise lost, however impoverished it might have been. "Life was different here, in this place where the river, ... innocent water snake

heading for the sea, divided the land on which the children of the Portuguese and the slaves trod" (4). In these and other instances, Lins subverts classical, biblical, and medieval imagery. The innocence of water initially seems to evoke a naïve and nostalgic construction of a Brazilian Arcadia, a Garden of Eden in Rio de Janeiro. However, the subsequent mention of the serpent, the evil biblical figure that disrupted the Eden, is followed by the apparition of slavery, which shifts the tone.[6] A few pages later, we can find a similar construction, involving, again, the river and biblical imagery, which also goes from a *locus amoenus* to a *locus eremus*:

> The sky turns blue and fills the world with stars, forests make the earth green, clouds whiten landscapes and mankind innovates, reddening the river. Here, now, a favela, a neo-favela of concrete, brimming with dealer-doorways, sinister-silences, and cries of despair. (6)

The reddening of water immediately reminds us of the first plague of Egypt, as the novel takes us from the book of *Genesis* to the book of *Exodus*. Unlike the biblical plague that was aimed towards the enslavers, here, turning water into blood could be read as a punishment to the children of the formerly enslaved. The increased drug-trafficking and its industrial production of death, termed ironically as one of mankind's "innovations," works as an undesired by-product of economic development. Over the decades to come, the production of both drugs and death would grow exponentially. The once idyllic river heading to the sea is also reminiscent of an ancient image of ephemeral life, flowing naturally towards death, as it appears in Spanish Medieval poetry, i.e.: in Jorge Manrique's elegy, *Coplas por la muerte de su padre*. As the reader witnesses throughout the novel, this very same polluted river, nonetheless, is re-signified, becoming death itself, as it later carries corpses, people murdered in the drug wars, the detritus of a community vanishing in the stream of water and blood.

Right before this evocation, a previous passage announces the coming

war, which "imposed its absolute sovereignty and came... to pump hot lead into children's skulls, to force stray bullets to lodge in innocent bodies" (4). It is interesting to note that the book opens with a depersonalization of sovereignty. War, not Pipsqueak, not Hellraiser, is the lasting, solid incarnation of sovereignty. Even though wars are fought by people, its impersonal dimension wields complete dominion over the community, including its precarious, ephemeral avatars. Instead of all the hundreds of personalized nicknames that parade in the pages of the book, it is war itself who truly rules, —not the warlords. Elsewhere, I have discussed how other novels published only a few years later, such as Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004), engage with drug-trafficking while swaying between personification, depersonalization, and community (Tocco 157–93). Years before novels like Bolaño's or Yuri Herrera's *Kingdom Cons* (2004), Lins showed how the impact of the *narco* order on subaltern communities may seem personified by strongmen but inevitably ends up being depersonalized.

For Amaral, the novel features a "transfiguration of the romanticized image of the heroic marginalized person in the realistic figure of the cruel trafficker" (35). But parallel to this mutation of sovereignty's personification, the community itself endures a depersonalizing transformation. Both are slow. The community does not vanish overnight, but rather by means of a tangible, gradual escalation of these destructive drives. In the early 1970s, a precarious degree of harmony still emerged, from time to time, in the favela (Lins 178). Given the evolving drug lords' power structure, killings temporarily decrease. Nevertheless, this truce, too, proves to be ephemeral, when new apartments are built to accommodate displaced multitudes from a neighbouring favela. Due to these tensions, the community's subsequent collapse is foretold (178). The need for a rigid hierarchy itself is what can cause the community's demise because, as Paulo Freire notes, "the oppressors do not favor promoting the community as a whole, but rather selected leaders" (143). Despite their shared

origins, instead of choosing solidarity by making common cause, say through education as Freire preached, the favela's dwellers witness and partake in the destruction of their community (85).

Ultimately, despite the repetition of the interchangeable, masculine personifications of sovereignty, "the overall rhythm of the book depends not so much on points of inflexion in individual lives... as on escalations that take on a collective meaning" (Schwarz, "City" 106). Ephemeral sovereignties pave the way to vanishing communities, depersonalization trumps personification. Lins's novel shows how the drug trade decimates and brutalizes the community, for example, by desensitizing their mourning through murderous repetition. Elsewhere, Schwarz cites historian Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, to explain why Brazilian society, inside and outside of the favela, experiences a similar desensitizing process towards income inequality. According to Alencastro, "slavery bequeathed to [Brazilians] a certain insensitivity" (qtd. in Schwarz, "Neo-Backwardness" 29). Slavery looms in *Cidade de Deus* early on, along with the biblical serpent, but its legacy reappears throughout the book, showing us how the favela community is increasingly unable to grieve the victims of the drug lords' systematic violence against them.

For example, we can see this clearly in the funeral of Salgueirinho (Niftyfeet), one of the first drug lords who dies in the 1960s. His funeral, the narrator tells us, is attended by the thousands. "There were tears in every corner... The news flew like a stray bullet through City of God" (Lins 87). Denial and mourning, here, are still palpable. For Schwarz, with Salgueirinho's death, "disappears the wisdom that people should only rob outsiders and not fight senselessly among themselves" ("City" 112). For Lorenz, in turn, this is due to the fact that Salgueirinho, unlike later drug lords, "is most evocative of the good *malandro*... an honorable bandit who promotes solidarity among the gangsters and residents" (86). In other words, despite his undeniably criminal side, Salgueirinho personifies second state sovereignty, by agglutinating the

community, balancing hope and fear, however precarious this may be. Hence, the huge turnout at his funeral.

Although both Schwarz ("City" 112) and Lorenz (87) mention the death spiral of a community now numb to the loss of its members, they do not delve into specific cases. I shall do so here. Salgueirinho's loss can be clearly contrasted only a few pages below, with Squirt's demise. Squirt is stabbed by a husband who catches him having sex with his wife. "Only Lúcia Maracanã went to [Squirt's] funeral... There were no drums at his wake, no street-corner games, drinks, week, coke, no promises of revenge" (Lins 125). But the contrast is even greater when the corpses of the younger generation, ever more brutal and more professional in their industrial production and distribution of drugs and death, are unceremoniously dumped in the polluted river and forgotten. As Segato alleges, "habitual cruelty is directly proportional to the isolation of citizens by virtue of their desensitization" (21). Here, the isolation is geographically demarcated in the confines of the prison-like favela. By the 1970s, coming back to Pipsqueak, not even his mother opens his door to shelter him before he gets killed. Here, the community has vanished: all of these young men —personifications of ephemeral sovereignties— have been killed, and with their death, the family, one of the essential nodes of the community, is obliterated.

The ending of *Cidade de Deus*, then, could be read following what Segato calls the transformation of the masculine imperative into "pedagogies of cruelty" (21). It is in this sense that sexism should not be understood as an anachronism, a remnant of past times, as Fitzgibbon wants. On the contrary, the pedagogy of masculine cruelty is very much inseparable from the reactionary present, as it "is functional to the expropriator greed," subject to the market, "because a violent scene's repetition normalizes a landscape of cruelty... becoming popular with people with a low threshold of empathy, which is essential for its predatory project" (21).

In short, these successive masculine embodiments of second-state ephemeral sovereignty initially manage to produce a sense of community. They do so by projecting fear and hope, with paternalistic benevolence and fraternal alliances, however precarious they may be, while being constantly besieged by the Brazilian state. Nonetheless, their patriarchal and oppressive ways of building community, along with the lurking police machinery and its pernicious impositions of the politics of race, paves the way for its self-destruction.

Conclusions

In *Nation and Narration* (1991), Homi K. Bhabha offers a variety of ways to understand nation making processes through literature. Bhabha emphasizes the importance of nation-state boundaries as spaces where national culture blooms. According to him, a border

> must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new "people" in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation. (4)

Perhaps this is what is at stake in Lins's ephemeral sovereignties. The favela's marginal drug lords are products of both political antagonism and political representation. Certainly, they are not an entirely new or unprecedented force for political representation. As I have discussed above, they are informed by *caudilhismo*, an essential part of nation making in Brazil and, more broadly, in Latin America. As Doris Sommer points out, nation making in the region is twofold, both literary and political (73). From Argentine Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845) to Brazilian Rubem Fonseca's *Agosto* (1990), the literary portrayals of strongmen Facundo Quiroga and Getúlio Vargas, respectively, hypermasculine sovereignty has been and still is central in Latin

American literatures and politics. Lins's originality lies in that he chooses to put centre stage a more microscopic mirage of sovereignty. Instead of the larger-than-life *caudillo*, Lins embodies sovereignty in young, perishable Afro-Brazilian drug lords. *Cidade de Deus* may not feature entirely new forms of political representation but, as I hope to have shown in this article, it does introduce new forms of literary representation, new "sites of meaning," that narco-narratives would later exploit and commodify in a more transnational and televisual setting, from Medellin and Guadalajara to Miami, throughout this first quarter of the twenty-first century. The question that arises here is evident and perhaps unanswerable: Is the nature of organized crime in the illegal drug trade (ephemeral, fragmented, hypermasculine, hierarchical) factual or is it the product of cultural imagination? Despite Oswaldo Zavala's confident claim on the nonexistence of cartels, representation still informs and often shapes reality: drug lords read books or watch films and TV shows, too, building a feedback loop that is hard to disentangle.[7]

Bhabha opens *Nation and Narration* by re-publishing a nineteenth-century text, Ernest Renan's "What is a Nation?" In his lecture, Renan ponders over the territorial limitations of the modern state. He alleges that the Roman Empire, "twelve times larger than present-day France," could not be defined as "a state in the modern sense of the term" (9). Rome reached its maximum extension at 5 million square kilometers, around the end of the first century AD (Taagepera 125). The Brazilian territory, in turn, spans more than 8,5 million square kilometres, i.e.: it is thirteen times larger than the French.[8] What would Renan say about the limitations of the Brazilian nation state today? Beyond its untameable territory, turmoil and disruption have punctuated the country's sovereignty over the past few years, turning the Brazilian state into a dysfunctional, failed project (Schwarz, "Neo-Backwardness" 26–28). From the 2015 impeachment of Dilma Roussef to the 2023 attack on Congress against Lula da Silva's current third tenure, including 2018–22 Bolsonaro's far-

right wing administration, what is at stake is precisely the issue of political representation, the precariousness of the state and its ephemeral sovereignty.

Both the demonization and the glorification of past and present political leaders such as Lula himself are but an iteration of this pattern. The urge of Lula's opponents to remove him from the political arena and to evacuate his legacy lead to his 2018 incarceration. The operation proved to be an arbitrary and rudimentary enterprise, as the Brazilian Supreme Court released Lula in 2019, and a slim majority brought him back to the presidency in 2022. What these historical vicissitudes show us, time and time again, is the lingering prominence of personalism, either in the form of negation or vindication, as a defining feature of Brazilian politics.

Going back to Renan's concerns on sovereignty and territory, most critics have emphasized that *Cidade de Deus* takes place almost entirely within the favela's contour (Amaral 35; Schwarz, "City" 107; Fitzgibbon 138). Thus, they re-affirm the notion that such boundaries truly exist. But do favelas really work as internal borders within the Brazilian state? Perhaps, the favela could be understood instead as a seamless "continuum" of the state prison. As Alves notes, this is "made manifest in the punitive rationality that transforms both spaces into geographies of… death" ("Narratives" 141). If there is a border between the inside and the outside of the favela, it is so porous that it becomes invisible, as "the favela feeds the jail and the jail feeds the favela" (141). Is Lins, then, suggesting that these vanishing communities must be circumscribed to the favela? Are the spiraling wars between drug-traffickers the only context to understand racial violence?

Perhaps an answer may be found in *City of God: Ten Years Later* (2012), directed and written by the Afro-Brazilian filmmaker Luciano Vidigal and Cavi Borges. In this documentary, we can see how the oppressive lived experience of the favela is tied to an urban geography, a continuation of what happens outside of it. It is in this sense that Bhabha alleges that "the 'locality' of

national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as "other" in relation to what is outside or beyond it" (4). The locality of Brazilian culture responds to the all-pervasive politics of race that does not see boundaries. I concur with Dennison that the 2012 documentary does a much better job to portray this, if we compare them to the 2002 film adaptation (102). In this sense, the documentary turns out to be more faithful to the novel than the film adaptation.

In the novel, along with the overwhelming presence of the suffixes —*inha* or —*inho*, Lins frequently accompanies the name of characters with the epithets "*crioulos*" and "*paraíbas*," which are allusions to two groups of subalterns: Afro-Brazilians and descendants of First Nations. The City of God inhabitants end up killing each other in the service of a business ultimately funded and controlled by white, middle-class Brazilians, who reside outside the favela. The documentary is a great reminder of this racial divide, as it examines the lives of the 2002 film's cast one decade later. By 2012, most of the Afro-Brazilian actors were still enduring the very same socio-economic conditions depicted in the film they performed. The protagonists Leandro Firmino (Pipsqueak) and Alexandre Rodrigues (Rocket), for example, had been unable to build a productive career in Brazilian show business. To be sure, a notable exception is Seu Jorge, (Galinha), who became a world known musician and actor. In fact, as Dennison notes, "even those actors who found work... have struggled to make ends meet: Alexandre Rodrigues... posed for an awkward selfie with a white... passenger while driving an UBER in São Paulo in 2018" (102). The Afro-Brazilian actors' precarious careers, with a scant production throughout the last two decades, mirror the ephemeral lives of the characters they once played, showing the limitations of economic mobility ruled by the legacies of racial divisions, inside and outside the favela.

By contrast, the white filmmakers Meirelles and Lund had gained not only international celebrity but also a noticeable financial success, with a

box office of more than thirty million dollars, ten times more than its original budget.[9] In turn, white actors, such as Matheus Nachtergaele or Alice Braga, enjoyed a much more profitable and prolific career in Brazilian cinema, even in Hollywood. For instance, Braga worked with Will Smith in Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (2007) and with Anthony Hopkins in Mikael Håfström's *The Rite* (2011), among others. According to their IMDB websites, whereas Firmino and Rodrigues were credited as actors in around a dozen productions between 2002–12 (featuring in one episode only, in many of them), Nachtergaele is credited in 27 films. The gap only grew over the last decade. Although Braga is credited only in 16 productions, most of them were Hollywood blockbusters.

Such evidence of the lasting legacies of colonial racial divides, along with patriarchal forms of domination and the enduring understanding of sovereignty as a personalist form of power, still define the fate of the vanishing communities of Latin America and beyond. Lins portrays in a refined and original way the metamorphosis of an old Latin American tradition: he locates in the favela, a new site for the concentration of immense levels of trust and power in male leaders, along with their inevitable precariousness, their ephemerality. Rereading narratives such as *Cidade de Deus* allows us to bring these issues to the fore. Perhaps, it can also help us think how to re-build communities and deter what seems to be their irreversible evanescence.

Notes

1 For a similar take on paternalistic politics in Mexican film, see Dzero.

2 For more on state violence and the female body, see Segato and Federici.

3 The *malandro* is a complex figure. An accurate definition goes beyond the scope of this article, but it will suffice to say that the *malandro* is often, though not always, a black male hustler, that combines the Spanish tradition of the *picaresque* with the Afro-Brazilian music culture of *samba*. For a proper introduction to this fundamental character of Brazilian culture see Candido 1995, a classic study in the topic.

4 As Lorenz notes (93), the original edition of *Cidade de Deus* (published in 1997) features a series of character's names that would not re-appear in the subsequent edition of the book and the film (both published in 2002) due to a lawsuit. This article works with the nicknames that appear in the 2006 English translation (which features the new names) but it also refers to the Portuguese original ones that appear in the Brazilian edition published by Companhia das Letras 1997.

5 For a more comprehensive definition of "ethopoeia," see https://www.thoughtco.com/ethopoeia-rhetoric-term-1690675.

6 For more on the serpent as a polyvalent biblical figure, see Joines and Olson.

7 See Zavala.

8 According to the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, France (including its colonies) spans an area of 632,702 km^2: https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/1405599?geo=FE-1

9 These numbers were taken from IMDB's website: https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0317248/

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