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Film and the Representation of the Poverty. Touristic Mobilities in Developing countries

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, film tourism has become one of the fastest-growing niche tourism segments in the world. Many films and audiovisual works analyse various representations of social life including the poverty and degradation of the poorest urban areas of the developing world. Films are seen as being responsible for the increased interest in the favela in Brazil, the townships of South Africa, and the slums in India. The development of the favela into a tourist destination is seen as part of the so-called reality tour phenomenon and of the global circulation of the favela as a trademark. This paper evaluates poverty representations that induced tourism in developing countries. Our selection is drawn primarily from popular films that have been influential in the global north such as *City of God* (2002) and *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008).

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Keywords: Slumdog Millionaire, Representing India, Cinema, Development Countries.

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Introduction

In an interconnected world, much of the information and knowledge communicated is through audiovisual works that constitute representations of the reality but also of a fantastic world.

The cinema is especially narrative and interpretation of places of geographical space and, at the same time, is under the influence of geography as a process of territorial identity and inspiration (Pollice, 2012). The landscape of the cinema many times is screenscapes with a dynamic character (Dell'Agnese, 2009). Many films, videos and the like analyse various representations of social life, of the poverty and degradation of the poorest urban areas of the developing world. The Oscar winning films *City of God* (Brazil, 2002) and *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) are largely responsible for the increased interest in the Brazilian favelas and Indian slums as a tourist destination. Both films initiated and increased demand for favela and slum tours. A link has also been made to film tourism research due to *Slumdog Millionaire* and the subsequent increase in slum tourism in Mumbai (Mendes, 2010). In fact, recently a new form of tourism, "slum tourism," has become one of the fastest-growing niche tourism segments in the world. The development of the favela into a tourist destination is seen as part of the so-called reality tour phenomenon and of the global circulation of the favela as a trademark (Freire-Medeiros, 2008). As reality tourism has only become a growing trend in the past two decades, with publicity from a variety of media such as films, slum tourism is becoming a popular topic for debate.

Many studies confirm that the phenomenon of film tourism (tourist activity induced by the viewing of a moving image, and is accepted as encompassing film, television, pre-recorded products and digital media; Beeton, 2004; Macionis; 2004; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006) has emerged as a major growth sector and is widely recognised as a driver of tourism development for many destinations. However, the visual images do not primary motivation the choice of a tourism destination (Di Cesare & Rech, 2007; Nicosia, 2012). Actually, film tourism is a form of niche tourism largely underexplored and is linked to spatial logic and tourist consumption. Moreover, Jewell and McKinnon (2008) argue that film tourism creates new cultural landscapes, not simply just generating a desire to travel but also forming part of place identity.

Film tourism, movie tourism or screen tourism research reveals a range of assumptions, conflicts and contradictions (Connell, 2012). More knowledge about negative characteristics of a destination including the context, such as a low level of safety, could negatively affect the general perception, attitudes and travel intentions toward a destination.

This contribution refers to and comments on these developments and insights regarding the process of film-induced tourism in poor territories. The paper is conversely aimed to open a discussion on the way films about a violent, realistic image may create increasing interest in the tourism. In that case, it is not film tourism but slum tourism?

The aim in this paper stems primarily from the perspective of development studies. We do not engage in any in-depth film theory analysis; in fact the films will only be briefly discussed; however, this exploratory work can help to stimulate more research about knowledge of poverty representations that induce film tourism. The contribution of this paper is to create a debate on film tourism, and whether or not it is integrated with slum tourism or if they are very different forms of niche tourism.

The primary objective is to support the hypothesis that film tourism is a different form of niche tourism than slum tourism; however, in the case of the representation of the reality of poverty, they are integrated. In this article, the main goal is to find the increasing in tourist mobilities by exploring the potentials of film tourism. Thus, the research focuses on the promises of a tourism destination of poverty– in Brazil or India – by evaluating the performance of these locations within the movies.

It is also clear that our selection is drawn primarily from popular films that have been influential in the global north because the films themselves can play a pervasive role in our culture and consciousness and create engaging educational tool to elucidate the "third world people" (Hardikar & Turbin, 2011).

1. Destination tourism images and poverty

The image of a destination plays a principal role in the final decision to purchase (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Pike, 2004) a tourist product. The literature has shown that destination perception or image is a multidimensional concept that is formed by both cognitive and affective dimensions (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; San Martin & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008). The cognitive dimension refers to a tourist's beliefs or knowledge about the destination's attributes and could be influenced by external information sources as symbolic stimuli (i.e., marketing communications) or by social stimuli (i.e., word-of-mouth) (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Um & Crompton, 1990). Affective dimension refers to a visitor's feelings toward the destination (Chen & Uysal, 2002). The importance of image is crucial and the management of a destination's image needs a strategic direction.

The place that attracts visitors for a temporary stay is a mixture of all the tourism services and experiences offered to consumers (Buhalis, 2000; Pike 2004) but it is also a realistic experience of richness and poverty.

Cities contain extremes of wealth and poverty, each concentrated in one or more sections of the city. The wealthy areas are generally well insulated from the city around them; in contrast, areas inhabited by the poor are marginalised. Poverty is not defined in terms of low income, rather it uses broader concepts of deprivation and insecurity (Hossain, 2005). Globally, one of the major challenges facing urban planners is the proliferation of slums predominant in the urban economies of developing countries (e.g., India, African nations). The extent and spread of slums not only helps us to recognise that they are not anomalous and pathological phenomena in the urban landscape but also a manifestation of urban poverty (Goswani, 2013).

In the literature, conceptualisations of those marginalised by poverty are different and antithetical. In addition, the margin is often traced back to modernity and the condition

of marginal returns in place of the frontier, of experimentation. The margin becomes difficult to systematise and leads to a network of concepts widely discussed as inclusion/exclusion, suburbs, ghetto, and the border (Aru & Putilli, 2014; Dicken, 2005). The richness of tones of marginality is large but always is connected to peripheral areas wherever located (Amato, 2014); places where more fragile inhabitants are concentrated, weak from the point of view of economic and social.

In developing countries like India, Colombia and other nations in South America and African states, these differences become far more significant with the combination of increasing populations and urbanisation. Today, tourism is characterised by diversification and enrichment of the tourist product offered, where the tourist is satisfied not only by the contemplation of a landscape (authentic or romantic), but intends to turn it into an experience of which they can feel a part (Schmitt, 1999). In this sense, Urry (2002) argues the choice of a destination is based on an "anticipation of the experience," which constitutes a dialogue with the images of a given place carried by several media products. The message used to promote the touristic product helps to construct it as it is presented to and bought by the consumer through a set of symbolic goods "fabricated" by producing agents and the media; the web also has an important role. In fact, the choices available to the consumer are aided by the information picked up through the Internet (Buhalis, 2008), which is an ideal place to communicate, promote, and 'sell' destinations and where potential clients can more responsibly undertake comparisons and choices. The use of the Internet has become a key competitive tool, is now essential for tourist destinations (Murphy et al., 2007) and offers great potential to influence consumers' perceived images.

Research of authentic and unexplored regions, places with forms of social tension and ethical issues, contrasts with the particularities that distinguish purely hedonistic from recreational or traditional tourism. The regular tourist travels to sites for the purpose of learning and gaining knowledge and information; poverty is everywhere and anywhere to varying degrees but often does not arouse interest. Conversely, poverty actually creates curiosity because of differences in ways of life.

2. Film-induced tourism in poverty locations

The general media plays a large role in the creation and in the dissemination of destination images (Croy, 2010) and also poverty images.

Books, news and films are the sources of destination images and also create tourist visitations (Busby & Klug, 2001) but not necessarily directly to a place. Film is a motivational driver (Croy, 2009; Di Cesare & La Salandra, 2010) to be considered a potential valuable source of information about development and poverty. The popularity of cinema as a form of entertainment is often derived from the power of the moving image in a manner unmatched by either the spoken or the written word. Films have the capacity to represent particular types of situations or events – such as, with regard to development, poverty, conflict, or a specific context – much more immediately (Lewis et al., 2013).

Poverty, development, tourism and media are strongly related: for instance, Hollywood

movies produced in developing countries like *Gandhi* (1982), *City of God* (2002), *The Constant Gardener* (2005) and *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) have given a strong emphasis to tourist flows. The movies tend to be received by western audiences as being closer to the reality of developing countries. However, Mitchell and Stewart (2012) find evidence of an increase in tourism after the release of a movie; the increase is generally sustained for more than two years. This effect may be present even if the movie claims to be set in a particular location, but is actually filmed elsewhere. In general, the literature points to a number of reasons to explain the possible determinants of tourism flows between countries. An established finding coming from this literature is that from an economics lens, a set of demand factors determines tourism flow. This demand, in turn, relies on the interaction and combination of push and pull factors such as the incomes and preferences of the tourists as well as competitiveness of the destination as an attractive tourist location (Prideaux, 2005). Analysing quantitative data from India and Brazil, pre and post the diffusion of famous films like *Slumdog Millionaire* or the *City of God*, shows that the foreign tourist flows increased. Without a doubt, the increased flow comes from many factors but also from the production and vision of these movies.

In India, the tourism and hospitality sector is among the top 10 sectors to attract the highest foreign direct investment (FDI). India has been enjoying significant growth in tourist arrivals; the tourism and hospitality industry together have directly contributed over $35 billion USD to the country's output (in 2011) over the last 5 years. In addition to the direct component, the Indian tourism industry's total contribution to GDP increased to over $117 billion USD in 2011 from about $100 billion USD in 2009. Over 6.6 million foreign tourist arrivals were reported in 2012, expanding at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.8 per cent during 2005–2012. By October 2013, foreign tourist arrivals rose to 5.3 million (Figure 1). This robust growth in tourist arrivals contributed substantially to India's foreign exchange earnings from tourism.

Figure 1: Foreign tourists arriving in India (million)
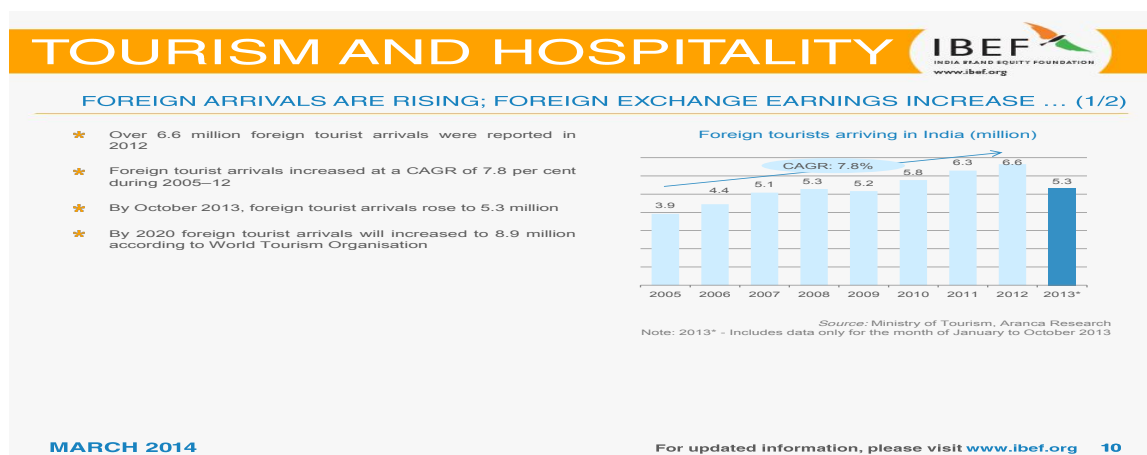
2013 - Includes data only for the month of January to October 2013
Source: Ministry of Tourism, Aranca Research (www.ibef.org)

India is a country that is highly influenced by its film industry (e.g. Bollywood). In general, given the visibility and influence films command, several countries utilise film tourism as an effective medium to promote their tourism industry. Particularly in Bollywood (the pan-Indian film industry), foreign locations have long been the preferred shooting spot.

Film and photography evidence the relationship between the object/culture of the camera's gaze and the subject/culture involved in the gazing (Sengupta, 2010). The critically acclaimed *City of God* depicted gang violence in Brazil's favela in a way that oversimplified an increasingly complex and difficult situation. *Gandhi*, focused on a particular individual's political address but offered little of wider Indian society and context; such a film can influence welfare policies of foreign nations. *The Constant Gardener* begins with a strong, angry story, and with actors who let the story happen to them instead of rushing ahead to check off the surprises. It seems solidly grounded in its Kenyan location; like *City of God*, it feels organically rooted. A clear example of this deep relationship between media, poverty and tourism is the so-called "slum effect" (Freire-Medereiros, 2009), that shows the impact of the movies produced in Brazil or India on tour sales and the interest in the favela and slum as a tourist destination. Not only movies but also other kinds of media have a strong influence on a destination's image (Croy et al., 2010). Business reportedly increased by 25% after release of the film (Ma, 2010).

Fernando Meirelles' film, *City of God*, was promoted worldwide as a "native's testimony" about life in Rio's ghettos, reinforced by the fact that many of the young actors were themselves picked from favelas in Rio. The film's produces, somewhat paradoxically with its realistic claims, added an extremely "sexy" and "cool" image of a violent favela (Jaguaribe, 2004). The film, based on real events, received four Oscar nominations. Meirelles has been accused of glamorising the rising violence, showing excessive detachment towards his protagonists. The favela outside of Rio is simultaneously included and excluded from all that Rio represents. It is at once a dumping ground for the city's by products—the (human) waste generated by its own development—and its products (Diken, 2005). More generally, as Diken (2005) points out, the favela is considered to be a fantasy space that both conditions and escapes the 'social'. Fantasies create objects of desire, but they portray these objects as being out of reach. Engelhart (2014) confirms that 3.7 million visitors—including 600,000 (mostly white, mostly rich) foreigners—flooded Brazil for the month-long 2014 World Cup, spending an estimated 6.7 billion Brazilian reals ($3 billion USD). Some visitors opted to pass their time in a Brazilian favela, like Rocinha, which lies in the southern zone of Rio and is perched on a pretty hillside. Many booked their slum rooms online and then reviewed their stays on Tripadvisor[1]. In 2008, the government began an aggressive "pacification" process that was meant to win back the slums. In fact image of Brazil, also after world football, is better. Actually, about 50,000 people do favela tours each year in Rio alone (Engelhart, 2014).

Tourism in Brazil is a growing sector and key to the economy of several regions in the country. The country had 5.1 million visitors in 2010 (Figure 2), ranking it, in terms of

the international tourist arrivals, as the second main destination in South America, and third in Latin America after Mexico and Argentina (UNWTO, 2012). An annual survey commissioned by the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism showed that in 2009, international demand in Brazil primarily consisted of leisure (45.5 per cent) and business, and convention and event (22.9 per cent) tourists. The main reasons that leisure tourists websites for travelling to Brazil included its sunny weather and beaches (61.5 per cent); nature, ecotourism or adventure; and culture (9.7 per cent).

Figure 2 : Arrivals of international tourists in Brazil, 1970–2010
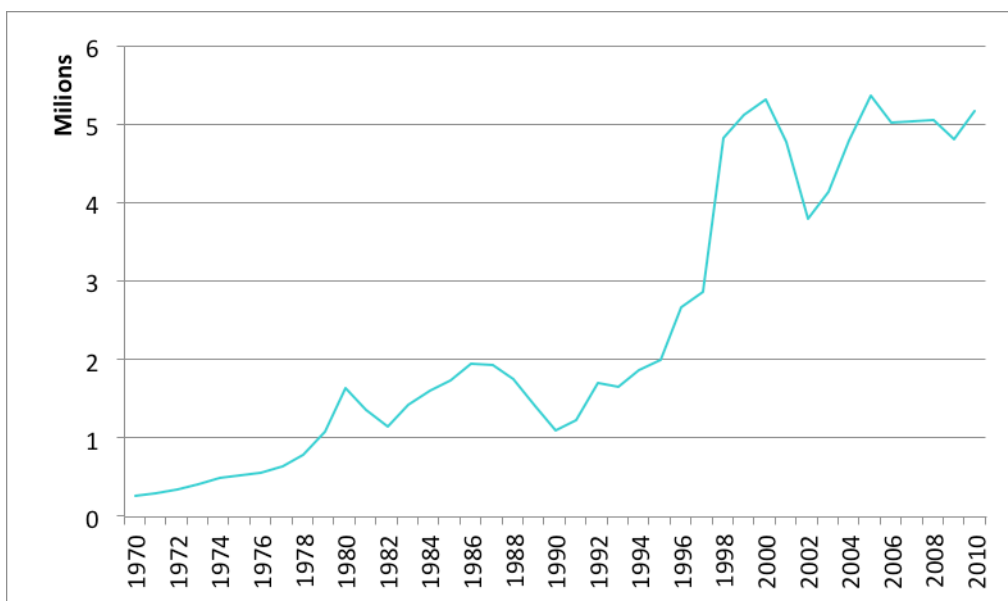
Source: Ministério do Turismo 2011

Slumdog Millionaire is famous for its potential to give voice to poor and marginalised children such as 'Jamal', the 'slumdog' born and raised in India's slums. Told in flashbacks from the point of view of a young man, the film narrates the story of two brothers from a shantytown in Bombay in the 1980s who choose different pathways in life. In the opening sequence of the film, one of the brothers has reached the final of the much-vaunted TV quiz show, the Indian version of "Who wants to be a Millionaire." Jamal chronicles the most crucial aspects of his story through a kaleidoscope of rapidly shuffling images of Mumbai's slum-life. Via fast-paced sequences full of jump cuts – depicting communal riots, professional begging and child molesting gangsters – the boys and the camera travel across India and back again. It is no secret that *Slumdog* is meant to reflect life in Dharavi, the 550-acre spread of slums in the heart of Mumbai. In 2009, more people had watched *Slumdog* Millionaire than had visited India (Sengupta, 2010).
These and similar films create interest among viewers who want the chance to witness the film locations in real life, rather than on a big screen.

3. The debate surrounding slum tourism

From Rio de Janeiro to Mumbai, short, organised tours of poor areas have grown in popularity; so too have ethical discussions regarding whether or not slum tourism or poverty tourism is educational and philanthropic, or voyeuristic and exploitative. Poverty tourism intersects with places of urban misery and their representation: slums represent the negative sides of cities, marginalised districts or ghettos and, in less developed countries, are places of danger, crime and violence (Durr, 2012). Slum tourism involves the commodification of urban deprivation (Durr & Jeff, 2012). Slum tourism has expanded in popularity, probably due to the spread of communication routes (Delic, 2011) and media events; similarly, tourists who write about their experiences in virtual spaces create an increase in the demand for similar tours.

The development of guided tours in destinations and places of poverty and degradation is controversial, likely because the combination of pleasure and poverty affects the sensitivity and moral values of public opinion (Freire-Medeiros, 2009).

Slum tourism can be fabulously well-managed as an exchange of culture with local people, as a representative of a society, as a confrontation with certain stereotypes and at the same time, an escape from monotony (MacCannel, 2002) or a search for absolutely real, objective authenticity; an experience which genuinely samples the culture of the society and the host people (Frenzel & Koens, 2012).

The term slum, in vogue since the beginning of the 18th century, is used to describe squalid housing in densely populated areas of industrial cities. A slum is a compact area of an overcrowding population and poorly built congested dwelling conditions; an unhygienic environment usually with inadequate infrastructure lacking in proper sanitary and drinking water facilities (Goswami, 2013). The concept of slum varies widely from country to country and depends on a variety of defining parameters. In some countries slums are largely forgotten parts of a city, in others they are the poorest areas (Diekmann & Hannan, 2012).

It is of note that holidays are perfect opportunities for so-called experiential tourists, driven by their emotions, to see what is imagined and be immersed in a culture and lifestyle of a destination. This is also known as an affirmation of the so-called 'epidemic' of the imaginary (Zizek, 2004), in which images and desires tend to progressively replace reality. The sociologist Urry (2002) has shown that in the era of hyper-mobility, the tourist experience is mere observation of spectacular places. Tourists are quick and fleeting but must prove that they have also "practiced" the holiday (Cohen, 1972). The tourism of poverty may therefore be defined as tourism diversion (Cohen, 2007; Ma, 2010) or experiencing a difference from the boredom of daily routine, which are justified by curiosity but where a voyeuristic aspect is a definite component (Williams, 2008).

It appears that poverty tourism could include educational aspects typical of township tourism (Ramchander, 2004), such as the observation of expressions of culture and ways of life typical of South Africa, or the Brazilian favela (Freire-Medeiros, 2007; 2009), which became a trademark of the country and at the same time, was marketed as a tourist destination.

Whyte et al. (2011) contend that the driving purpose of visit is for tourists to observe poverty personally. Examples of organisations who organise such tours are numerous, but sometimes it is necessary for the companies to specify that there are operators with social or ethical purposes that benefit local residents and improve local economies. In this sense, the aim is to involve residents in the decision-making processes as they may receive benefits from this particular type of tourism. Yet, we need to ask which roles and functions illegal powers have developed in these areas. Other operators that offer regular sightseeing tours in cities have added the slum experience as an integral part of urban representation (Durr, 2012).

4. Implication and conclusion

The image that we construct for a country is often the image that has been created in our minds from narrations of other persons, from books and, to a large extent, from watching films that have been shot in the country. Film may be an effective tool to change people's image of a place.

Cinema systematically functions as a means of escape, a fantastic world from the everyday routine, and this characteristic aligns with other types of tourism. Tourism has an important role in interconnecting people, places and images. Although films offer high entertainment value while popularizing aspects of Brazilian or Indian culture, they also function as a valuable tool to generally increase tourism. Film tourism is a recent socio-cultural phenomenon, a combination of at least two cultural genres, film and tourism (Hao & Ryan, 2013). As many people have enjoyed *Slumdog* or *The City of God*, data reveal evidence that the films are not separate from increasing tourism but it is very difficult to understand if these implications rest on film tourism or slum tourism. There is evidently, also an interest in visiting the poor environments of the cities as a form of cultural experience tourism, which evolved from western representations (Diekmann & Hannam, 2012).

With regard to films of the poor neighbourhoods in the urban context, they are one of main reasons for mobility and development of slum tourism, especially in the process of actual touristification and curiosity of new tourists. It seems clear that film tourism benefits from slum tourism; thus confirming that slum tourism operators, like all operators, profit from good marketing and audiences of films products. The two kind of tourism are interconnecting in the same sphere, which are designed as separate spheres.

One limit of our contribution is that the selection is drawn primarily from popular films in English language that have been influential in the global world but it should be noted that there are many documentaries and short movies that are less famous but still representative.

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[1] It's important to mention the results of the reviews on tripadvisor.it with keywords used as "favela tour," "township tour South Africa," "slum tour Kenya." The short research showed 188 reviews about township tours in South Africa, 132 about favela tours (especially Rocinha), and 100 reviews for slum tours in India and only one in Kenya (accessed 20/09/2014) (Privitera, 2014).

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