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Favela Heritage Practices: Women Warriors' Struggles for Political Memory and Social Justice in Rio de Janeiro

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses everyday spatial heritage practices in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*. It focusses on the experiences of *faveladas,* Black and poor women residents of the *favelas*, as they build their houses and struggle for political memory in the city. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and photowalks conducted in 2011–2013 and 2018 with residents of the *favelas* of Pavão-Pavãozinho and Cantagalo (PPG), this article documents the insurgent heritage practices of 'women warriors' and analyses the ways in which these practices typify means of resistance to urban coloniality. I draw on theories by the Afro-Brazilian feminist scholars and activists Beatriz Nascimento on quilombos (maroon communities) and Lélia Gonzalez on 'Amefricanity', who recourse to black and indigenous women's Southern Atlantic experiences of oppression and forced migration and of resistance, to suggest the notion of 'Amefrican' heritage practices. The women warriors' spatial practices and resistance encompass curated *favela* heritage. They challenge prejudice against the *favelas* and Afro-Brazilians, thereby sustaining 'Amefrican' heritage practices and shaping Rio de Janeiro's cultural heritage and future, especially against contemporary processes of urban coloniality.

KEYWORDS

'Amefricanity'; forced migration; resistance; *favela* heritage practices; quilombo; women warriors

Introduction

Herein, I analyse the insurgent spatial heritage practices of *faveladas*[1] or women from *favelas*. I suggest that the everyday practices of autoconstruction by 'women warriors'[2] as well as their struggles for political memory and social justice are powerful counter-processes to urban coloniality in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

In recent decades, residents of *favelas* or poor informal neighbourhoods have been living through a period of urban destruction, displacement, and forced evictions, with increasing police terror against Black[3] and poor *favela* residents who have been historically stigmatised and racialised. Nevertheless, territorial *favela* museums have been established in some of Rio's *favelas* to challenge the pathologising narrative of the *favela* and *favelados*. Territorial *favela* museums, such as that of Pavão-Pavãozinho and Cantagalo

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(PPG), were mainly established by residents. They aim to represent the entire *favela* as a living territorial museum with tangible and intangible heritage, resident autoconstruction and self-built houses, art, cultural practices, and memories. The construction of *favela* museums has also been a strategy to resist increasing evictions in a struggle towards reclaiming and revalorising the history of not only Afro-Brazilian and migrant residents but also the entire physical territory and houses in the *favela* (see Desille 2024). The spatiotemporal construct of the *favela* enables the conceptualisation of a living cultural heritage or a 'heritage in becoming' (Nikielska-Sekula 2019).

Based on multi-phase ethnographic fieldwork, participatory photography, and photowalks with residents in the *favelas* of PPG in Rio de Janeiro in 2011–2013 and 2018, the present paper stems from stories of *faveladas* or 'women warriors'. Their testimonies confirm the importance of internal migration, forced migration, and the afterlives of slavery in identity narratives. However, they also point towards the successful creation of alternative communities of resistance through autoconstruction, living territorial *favela* museums, and struggles against eviction. I contend that *faveladas*' alternative communities of resistance are in fact privileged sites of insurgent spatial heritage practices, living heritage, or 'Amefrican' heritage. Here, I draw on the theories of the Afro-Brazilian feminist scholars and activists Beatriz Nascimento (2021) on quilombos (maroon communities) and Lélia Gonzalez (1988) on 'Amefricanity', as informed by Black and indigenous women's Southern Atlantic experiences of oppression, forced migration, and resistance. I hope to humbly contribute to this literature, showing that 'Amefrican' heritage practices hold the potential to challenge urban coloniality throughout the dynamics of power and struggles for political memory beyond curated cultural *favela* heritage.

'Amefricanity' and the Quilombo

Drawing on the resistance to colonial violence of Black and indigenous women in the Americas, Afro-Brazilian feminist, scholar, and activist Lélia Gonzalez coined the term 'Amefricanity' in 1988. Beatriz Nascimento, also a prominent Afro-Brazilian feminist, aimed to rehumanise the Black body and self-image and restore dignity through the exploration of the quilombo as a site of cultural resistance (Håndlykken-Luz 2022; Nascimento cited in Smith et al. 2021) against the dehumanised image of the slave. The quilombo has also been a crucial symbol of Black resistance. Abdias Nascimento drew on the notion of quilombo by Beatriz Nascimento and the legacies of these extant physical territories as a model of resistance and political organisation and suggested a sociopolitical system and the idea of an Afro-Brazilian political philosophy and political alternative. This was also an urgent call to Black Brazilians to 'win back their memory' (Nascimento 1980: 141).

The notions of 'Amefricanity' and the quilombo allow for attention to the experiences emerging from the Black population born out of the transatlantic slave trade. The literature has been crucial in examining and analysing cultural heritage practices and struggles for political memory and the recognition of dignity, citizenship, and social justice. Nascimento captures the experiences of the violence of displacement, the zone of terror, and forms of resistance in carrying and producing Blackness (Smith 2021: 33). This concept, which emphasises 'the Middle Passage as a zone of terror and a generative birthplace of

Blackness' (Smith 2021: 33), includes both women's experiences of violence and resistance and that of healing.

Nascimento theorised on the 'quilombo as a multi-sited Black space' of resistance and liberation, referring to the *favelas*, bailes funk, and Candomblé terreiros (worship houses of Afro-Brazilian religion), and 'the Black body as an extension of the land – the subject of Black migration' (Håndlykken-Luz 2022; Smith et al. 2021: 287). Nascimento conceived the quilombo as the 'territory of becoming' (Håndlykken-Luz 2022; Ratts 2006; Smith et al. 2021) and the Black female body as a political site (Håndlykken-Luz 2022; Smith et al. 2021: 287). These are symbolised through the quilombo as 'corporeal (located in the Black body), transcendent (anchored in the spiritual simultaneity of the here and there of Black life between the Americas and Africa), and transatlantic (born out of a new spatial zone of being, as created by the transatlantic slave trade)' (Håndlykken-Luz 2022; Smith et al. 2021: 287). Beatriz Nascimento saw 'the quilombos as sites of resistance where the Black collective transnational experiences with violence, through time and space, construct and deconstruct, make and unmake the world' (Smith et al. 2021: 287). The residents I encountered in PPG often reminded me that the *favela* was established by a community of fugitive slaves or a quilombo (Håndlykken-Luz 2022).

Favela *Heritage Practices and Autoconstruction in Rio's Embattled Urban Geography*

More than 700 *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro are home to approximately 2 million residents, accounting for 24 per cent of the population. *Favelas* have been established in their majority by Afro-Brazilians, descendants of slaves, forced migrants, and migrants from the northeast of Brazil since the early 1900s. Yet, the criminalisation and concomitant hygienisation (Garmany and Richmond 2020) of the *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro have been historically legitimised by presenting the residents as not only being without history, culture, nor heritage but also in need to be 'civilised' and 'pacified' in a context of tremendous social and racial inequalities. In recent decades, Black and poor residents in Rio's *favelas* have been targeted by militarisation and police terror in the context of increasing necropolitical (Mbembe 2019) violence. Indicative of the city's gendered Black genocide and anti-Blackness (Vargas 2012), residents live afterlives of slavery in an anti-Black city (Alves 2018) that targets *faveladas*, Black and poor women from the *favelas,* in particular ways through the intersection of racism and sexism (Gonzalez 2021: 202). As the writings of Carolina Maria de Jesus testify, this is not a recent phenomenon. In her book *Quarto de Despejo* (1960) (lit. Junk Room, English title: Child of the Dark), we gain access to her struggles as a *favela* writer and resident challenging discrimination, racism, poverty, and sexism in the 1950s and 1960s. Similar to many of the women I spoke with in PPG, de Jesus was born in Minas Gerais and was a descendant of slaves. She wrote in her journal about her life in a *favela*, where she made a living as a maid, cook, and garbage collector. She also built her own house using materials available to her. More importantly, she challenged racism and celebrated her black heritage. Indeed, these violent processes have been increasingly challenged by *faveladas* (Veillette 2017).

In Brazil, and Rio de Janeiro in particular, *faveladas* have been active members of the struggle for rights and social justice for the many urban poor. This happens despite the

fact that Black women are at the bottom of the social pyramid (Telles 2006). *Faveladas* have been crucial in creating the city from below, resisting evictions, and building communities through 'autoconstruction' (Holston 2008). This term captures both the practice of the self-building of houses and the struggle for rights and dignity, and the shaping of insurgent citizenship in Brazil's urban peripheries, while challenging the extreme social inequalities and the reproduction of differentiated citizenship and urban coloniality. Although Holston (2008) has not focussed much on the particular struggles of women in autoconstruction and their everyday practices as heritage, the concepts of autoconstruction and insurgent citizenship have been crucial in studies on urban poverty and social movements in Brazil. Additionally, these concepts are relevant in the analysis of autoconstruction beyond the building of houses and struggles for land, as they point to the symbolic dimension of autoconstruction and the imagination of alternative futures (2008: 8). Holston (2008: 9) argues that 'in the development of autoconstructed peripheries, the very same historical sites of differentiation – political rights, access to land, illegality, and servility – have fuelled the irruption of an insurgent citizenship that destabilises the differentiated'. These practices also display 'the political imagination that both produces and disrupts citizenship' (2008: 13).

Faveladas have been fundamental since the 1950s in neighbourhood associations (McCann 2013), housing rights movements (Chisholm 2019), and politics resisting evictions (Perry 2013). In her study of Black women activists fighting against land grabs in Salvador, Brazil, Perry (2013) emphasises their agency and everyday resistance as political while fighting the gendered racial logics of spatial exclusion. Perry (2013) argues that *faveladas*' everyday practices of building their communities and struggles against evictions are often presented as apolitical (2013), while mother victims of state violence find their struggles for political memory often silenced, and their murdered children are presented as criminals (Ota and Mason 2022). *Faveladas,* women warriors, and mothers who lost their children to state violence also produce political memory and heritage while fighting for truth, social justice, and the decriminalisation of their children (Ota and Mason 2022). I contribute to this scholarship with a study of everyday spatial heritage practices and struggles of Black women in the *favelas* of PPG.

Contested Cultural Heritage in Rio de Janeiro: Between Recognition and Demolition

As previously mentioned, Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* are shaped by decades of migration. The transatlantic slave trade has historically constituted the largest forced migration[4], and 5 of the 12 million African slaves transported forcefully to the Americas were deported to Brazil. The Afro-Brazilian population in Brazil, descendants of slaves, is the largest Black population outside Nigeria (Schwarcz and Starling 2015: 15). Slavery in Brazil was abolished as late as 1888, and the freed slaves migrated to cities such as Rio. They were quickly evicted from the central squares of the city, and many settled in the neighbouring hills. The Afro-Brazilian residents in the *favelas* are descendants of forced migration during slavery.

The city of Rio was the location of the slave market, where the largest number of slaves were transported. The slave market was only recently declared a heritage site: its remains were discovered during the port development 'Porto Maravilha' (Marvelous Port, referring

to Rio as the marvellous city), and targeted for tourism with the establishment of 'The Museum of Tomorrow' in 2015. In a related process, in 2012, Rio was recognised as the first urban cultural landscape to be declared a UNESCO world heritage site. The UN Special Rapporteur for the right to adequate housing stated that the *favelas* were an integral part of the heritage status (Rolnik cited in Rio on Watch, 23 June 2018). However, based on the description by UNESCO, it appears that only the architecture on the beach side in Copacabana is included in the official cultural landscape within the World Heritage Site (UNESCO 2016); in 2018, a campaign was launched in Latin America and Rio to include slums and *favelas* as heritage sites (*RioOnWatch* 2018). Researchers have also highlighted the importance of collective memory and *favela* heritage in the context of urban destruction, displacement, and forced evictions in Rio in the past decade (Simon and Braathen 2019). Additionally, they have highlighted the potential of cultural heritage as a political strategy against forced evictions (Chisholm 2020).

Over the past decade, a wide range of research has been conducted on local memory, museology, tourism, and *favela* museums in Rio de Janeiro, such as PPG (see for instance Chisholm 2019, 2020; Portilho 2016; Venancio and Portilho 2020). Additionally, Savova (2009) studied UNESCO's intangible-tangible politics at the *favela* museum in Providência. Living territorial *favela* museums in Rio, such as the Evictions Museum in Vila Autódromo (n.d.), highlight the importance of collective memory and cultural heritage, (Simon and Braathen 2019) as a strategy against eviction. Territorial *favela* museums, such as those in Maré and Vila Autódromo, unfold stories of oppression and the afterlives of slavery, resistance to colonial violence, and the social and cultural lynching of Afro-Brazilians (Nascimento 1989). Living *favela* museums aim to rehumanise the *favela* and valorise Afro-Brazilian and northeastern cultural practices, which have been stigmatised and associated with backwardness and criminality, thereby creating alternative communities of resistance.

The period from 2008 to 2012 in PPG was characterised by both urban destruction and infrastructural projects. These initiatives include large investments through the federal infrastructural development programme PAC, launched by then-President Lula in PPG in 2007, and the so-called police pacification programme, with the police pacification unit (UPP) installed in PPG in 2009 (Håndlykken-Luz 2021). The elevator complex *Rubem Braga* (see Figure 1) founded and constructed with the Growth and Acceleration Programme (PAC) in particular, had a tremendous impact on the space of the *favela*. Ironically, the PAC supported the open-air living territorial *favela* museum established in PPG, with the ambition of preserving the entire community's historical memory and living territorial heritage. When UNESCO recognised Rio's cultural landscape as a heritage site in 2012 and selected it to present heritage from Rio's cultural landscape, the elevator complex was indicated as a symbol of inclusion (UNESCO, 2016). However, the PAC-funded elevator and infrastructural projects in PPG also meant that hundreds of houses were marked for eviction, highlighting its contradictory premises. *Favela* residents emphasised that the PAC symbolised urban destruction, while veiling the living cultural heritage and autoconstruction. This example indicates the dynamics of resistance and power in the creation of spatial living heritage practices intersecting the dispositif of control beyond the *favela*, also involved in the discourses and curation of both institutionalised and authorised heritage discourses (Smith 2020), such as the elevator complex and heritage from below and the living territorial *favela* museum.

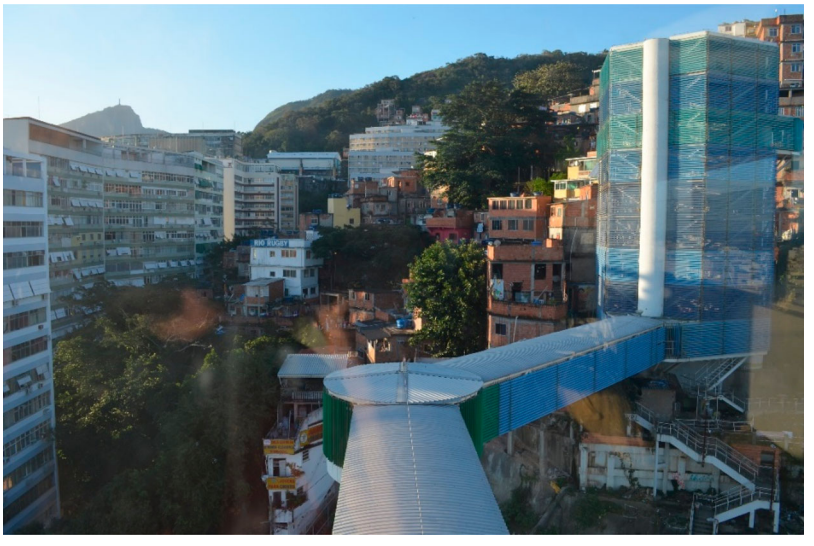

Figure 1. View from Rubem Braga elevator complex of the second tower and Cantagalo. The Ipanema blocks are visible on the left (photo by the author, 2018).

In the following sections, I discuss the role of *faveladas*' resistance through living cultural heritage and spatial heritage practices, such as autoconstruction, the *favela* territorial museum, and the *casas-tela* (canvas houses) in PPG. I discuss *favela* heritage practices, drawing on photowalks in PPG and residents' stories of autoconstruction, spatial praxis, and everyday resistance.

Cultural Heritage Practices and Women Warriors

Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted as a multi-phase ethnography between 2011 and 2013 and during six-week visits in 2017 and 2018, including participant observation, walking interviews (O'Neill and Roberts 2019), photowalks, and participatory photography with residents in PPG. Although the two *favelas* of PPG have historically been separate spaces, under the control of two different drug factions and with some hostilities related to the demography and origin of the population since the end of the 2000s, numerous upgrading projects, such as the PAC and so-called police pacification programme mentioned above, targeted at the *favelas* have used the term PPG as a common territory or *complexo*.

Most of the interviews were conducted while walking in the *favela* on sites and paths selected by the participants, including walks following the trajectory of the *casas-tela* and visits to some of the residents' houses. I have included material from conversations with five women in PPG in 2012 and 2018. The data are obtained from photowalks in the community, field notes, and photographs taken by residents.[5] The research was exploratory, and residents raised issues that were important in their everyday lives, such as living with threats of forced eviction, everyday struggles of building houses, and memories of the role of women in building the community. It was a period with multiple changes, characterised by the first phase of the police pacification programme, in which heavy weapons

were taken out of sight and armed conflicts decreased. In 2017 and 2018, armed gang members and drug sales returned to the streets, and because of daily shootouts and conflicts between traffickers and the police, it was difficult to rephotograph certain locations and access others.

Favela *Heritage, and* Casas-tela *in PPG*

The cultural heritage and histories of migration are present in everyday life in the *favelas* today. The Museo da Favela (MUF),[6] was established in 2008 as an NGO territorial museum, where the space of the *favela* becomes the museum, including an open-air gallery with graffiti paintings (*casas-tela*) on residents' houses (see Figure 2).

The MUF aims 'to transform this community into a Carioca Tourist and Cultural Monument in the History of the Formation of the *Favela*s, the cultural origins of Samba, the north-eastern migrant culture, black culture, and visual arts and dance' (MUF n.d.). The MUF was established by PPG residents in partnership with universities in Rio, with support from numerous actors beyond the territory, including the PAC (Portilho 2018a; 2018b) (Figure 3).

The role of the *favela* museum is not only to challenge the divide between the *asfalto* (the asphalt, or the formal city) and the *favela* (the informal city) but also to claim the right to memory and the city in the present and future.[7] Furthermore, the MUF 'intends to transform the hill into a tourist monument in Rio' (MUF n.d.).

The roles of women and women warriors in the *favela* are also included in the yearly exhibitions, as discussed in the next section.

Stories of Mulheres Guerreiras (Women Warriors)

Marcia, a woman in her 50s born in PPG, photographed women valorising Afro-Brazilian cultures and provided me with a photo she had taken some years ago (see Figure 4). We met many times over the years, and she explained the importance of Black women in the construction of the *favela* and told the story of her grandparents who migrated to PPG from Minas Gerais. Stories of women warriors (*mulheres guerreiras*) and 'illustrious elders' (*velhos ilustres*) were also depicted in wall paintings, and their stories were

Figure 2. Casas-Tela circuits by Museo da Favela (photo by MUF in Pinto et al. 2012).

Figure 3. 'Casa-tela' in PPG (photo by MUF n.d.).

exhibited in the local *favela* museum,[8] emphasising the hard work of women who had been and remain instrumental to the community.

Dona Celestina in her 70s, whom I met in 2012, and Dona Vieira in her 60s, whom I met in 2018, respectively, were selected as 'women warriors' and 'illustrious elders' by the

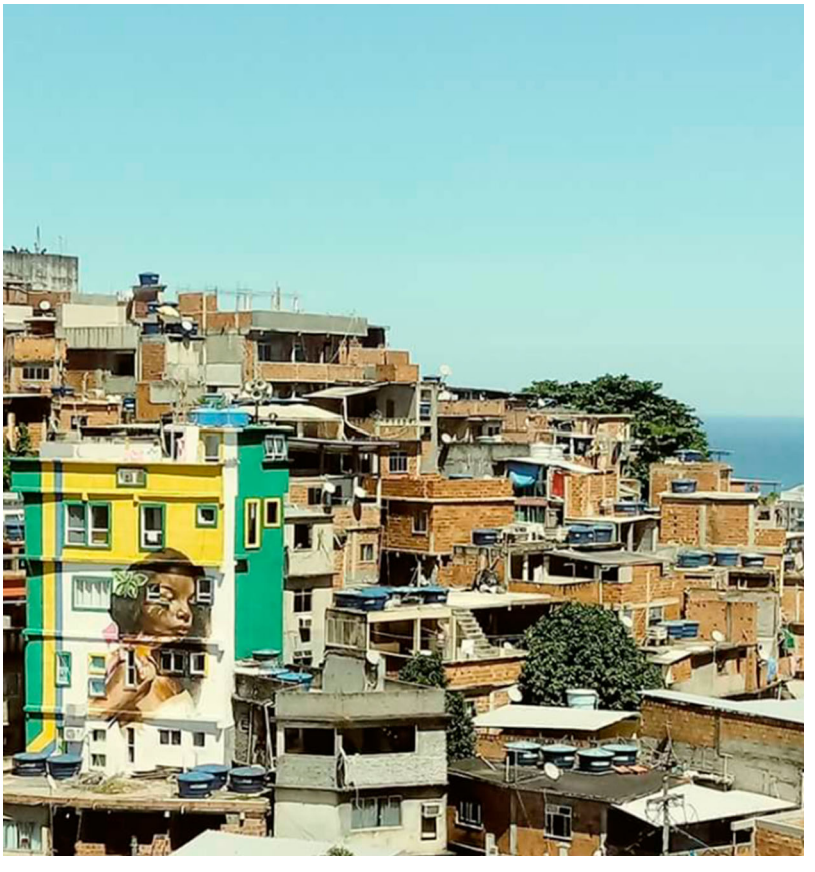

Figure 4. A painting on the façade of a house in PPG (photo by Marcia, 2016).

MUF in 2008 and 2019, as presented below. They passed away in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Thoughts by Dona Vieira, elected one of the women warriors in 2019 are presented as follows:

> I stop eating to give to others. I give what I have to help my neighbours. Then, I buy it again when I can. My son is like that too. My daughter is intelligent; she learns easily, but she wastes it […] I am quite religious, I go to mass, I volunteer in church work […]. (Dona Vieira 2019, MUF)

The presentation on Dona Vieira above is annotated with 'The solidarity is in her blood … ', the image shared by the MUF on their website and social media channels. Over the years, many residents emphasised the importance of women in their families and their everyday struggles, that they were workers, and that many had informal jobs or worked as domestic servants. These stories indicate the importance of reclaiming morality as workers; dignity and recognition are also viewed through autoconstruction, as Black women have historically been deprived of humanity, allocated to the kitchen, and criminalised. The struggles of *faveladas* and Black women are also emphasised in the writings of de Jesus, Nascimento, and Gonzalez.

Dona Celestina was elected as an 'illustrious elder' by the MUF in 2008. The text below was disseminated by the MUF in 2022 in a campaign remembering previous women warriors and old-timers from the hill (*favela*), including Dona Celestina, who narrated her memories of when she migrated to settle in the *favela*.

> There were only those trails, just like on the farms, for you to walk, and bush covered you; light was from candles or glass lamps, and that was what was around here. (MUF n.d.)

As I walked past her house in 2018, I saw that it remained intact, and when I tried to find her again, I learned that she had passed away earlier that year.

Curating Contested Favela *Heritage*

The process of painting *casas-tela* began over a decade ago, and they revealed polyhedral (Håndlykken-Luz 2019) or unforeseen power dynamics. In 2018, residents informed me that some of the *casas-tela* that I had photographed earlier in 2012 were painted over by traffickers who wanted to depict footballers or people killed during confrontations. We could not photograph these locations because they were too close to a drug sales point. When the MUF initiated the *casas-tela* project, a resident who had had their house painted with the *casas-tela* of a woman from Bahia in white clothing – representing *Candomblé*, an Afro-Brazilian religion – wanted to have the painting removed (Håndlykken-Luz 2020). The curated *casas-tela* trial draws on residents' stories collected by PPG residents through the MUF (Pinto et al. 2012: 112-113), and houses in certain locations were selected, while residents were invited to receive a *casa-tela*. This was done in dialogue with the residents. A resident informed me on a walk in 2018 that it was repainted to depict a samba musician and conversations between people on the street, as shown in Figure 5.

This example demonstrates the persecution and intolerance of Afro-Brazilian culture and religion, in this case, represented by a Black woman from Bahia, with reference to *Candomblé*. Evangelist churches and Pentecostalism dominate the territory, which is the case in most *favelas* in Rio. The leaders of the *casas-tela* initiatives explicitly

Figure 5. (above) Casas-tela no. 14 Conversa na porta da casa; (below) the Original painting of a Baiana Woman (photo by MUF in Pinto et al. 2012: 112).

wanted to narrate and valorise the multiple stories of the *favela* and its cultural practices, memories, and Afro-Brazilian cultures that can also be regarded as 'quilombo cultural practices'. As Nascimento (2021) theorised on the quilombo, beyond the physical space of resistance by fugitive slaves creating alternative communities of resistance, the quilombo represents a corporeal, transcendent and transatlantic dimension of oppression, resistance, and liberation (Smith et al. 2021).

This case indicates these dimensions, as do the stories and narratives collected in the community and is the basis for the curated trajectory or trial of *casas-tela*, where residents point out the importance of not only the quilombo, thereby revalorising Afro-Brazilian cultures and religions, but also threats of evictions. However, in praxis, the creation, destruction, and repainting of the *casas-tela* indicate the persisting gendered anti-Blackness (Vargas 2012), also in the *favela* as a Black space, thus unfolding unforeseen or polyhedral facets of spatial heritage practices, or 'heritage in becoming' (Nikielska-Sekula 2019), indicating contested 'Amefrican' heritage practices. The reference to the 'Amefrican' in the words of Gonzalez (1988), or the quilombo, the

transatlantic, revalorising Blackness, and the Black women's body as a 'site of home' and 'liberation' in the words of Nascimento (in Smith et al. 2021), is still contested in the *favela* with mainly Afro-Brazilian residents. Most *favela* residents in Rio are now evangelical, and Afro-Brazilian worship houses have been persecuted and demolished, as the Afro-Brazilian religion is criminalised, indicating anti-Blackness and religious racism (Cerqueira and Boas 2021). This example indicates the intersection of race, gender, and space in the creation of living cultural heritage as sites of resistance and oppression, thus unfolding persistent gendered anti-blackness.

However, the original painting was created by a non-Brazilian artist, which also indicated how numerous actors beyond the *favelas* were involved in the curation of *favela* heritage, as in this case, through the *favela* museum and *casas-tela* trial. The artist might not have been familiar with the stigma of the Afro-Brazilian religion, and the painting was only 50 m away from an evangelic church (Pinto et al. 2012). This example indicates how autoconstruction beyond the material construction of houses is a crucial part of residents' belonging and struggles for rights, dignity, and insurgent citizenship (Holston 2008). This example thus indicates the tensions and contradictions in 'curating heritage' in a living territorial *favela* museum. It also reveals the multiple dynamics of power and actors involved in the creation, destruction, or remaking of *favela* cultural heritage.

Another dimension of the contested *favela* heritage is the residents' stories of eviction. These were not a part of the *favela* museum in PPG, as opposed to the *favela* museums created in the *favela* of Vila Autódromo to resist the eviction of residents. In the following, I present some stories of Black women in PPG who built their own houses and resisted eviction from 2011 to 2013.

Amefrican Heritage Practices, Stories of Autoconstruction, and Displacement

Residents' self-built houses and autoconstruction were not only crucial as material heritage but also present in residents' stories of their struggles in building the community, where Black women were fundamental.

Marcia, Dona Celestina, Dona Vieira, and Rosa recounted their stories of the self-building practices in the *favelas* and emphasised the importance of autoconstruction, struggles for the right to land and citizenship. Many households comprised only women and children, as many men died young, were in prison, worked far away, or had left. Walking in the *favelas*, I met women who lived in houses marked for eviction, narrated their stories about the threats of eviction they had opposed, and emphasised that they had built the houses with their hands.

'Eu tenho esta memoria viva dentro de mim' (I have this living memory within me)

Dona Celestina, whom I visited in 2012, built her house with her cousin when she was 15 years old. She narrated how she arrived in the *favela* in the 1940s: 'Here it was only bushes, there was no light, no water, there was nothing. People paid women to carry water all the way from Lagoa'. She explained how she faced threats of eviction:

> One day, they arrived here; I was even cleaning the house. They said that they were going to demolish our house or I had to sell it […] I was afraid and thought it was the end. That I was going to have my final days here and that they would take me out here by force. I have been living here in the house that I constructed for 60 years; I came here when I was 15 years old. At the time, it had a view towards the ocean, and I saw the whole expansion of the community (*favela*) […] I said, not even dead, I will leave this place. (Interview with Dona Celestina 2012)

She stated, 'Now I am without destiny […] I have not been living here for one or two years; no, I came here when I was a girl'. She was not evicted from her house because of the abandonment of public work by the PAC-programme.

Marcia, a resident in her fifties, recounted the story of her grandmother, a descendant of slaves from Minas Gerais who migrated to PPG in the 1930s.

> I spend much time here in the area, and here, you can also see some of the history. Many *favela* occupants over there have now been evicted. Over there, where you can see the green park, was the *favela* of Catacumba. At the time, this place where we stand now started to become a community (*favela*), and my grandmother used to walk over there and get water. She used a bucket with 20 l of water that she placed on her head and walked all the way beside the lake and through Lagoa, Ipanema, and up the steep hills to Cantagalo […] She sold this water on the street to people who used to wash clothes for the people from the apartment blocks (*predios*) in Rua Barão da Torre (In Ipanema). They use a lot of water, so many people spend their days carrying water. In this way, my grandmother managed to save some money to raise my mother. This *favela* has many stories about the struggles of women. Today, you can see this beautiful view, but you know very little about the history, especially that of the evictions of the *favelas*. It is great that we have those memories, that I have this living memory within me. (Video interview with Marcia 2018 in Cantagalo)

These stories indicate how spatial praxis and women warriors' autoconstruction, including projecting a future and saving to raise the children while working as domestic servants in the *asfalto,* could also be considered living cultural heritage, or rather 'Amefrican' heritage, unfolding stories of migration, slavery, and women's resistance when building their houses and their everyday struggles such as the walks of carrying water (see Figure 6), revealing living political memories challenging urban coloniality. Later, residents managed to get a water pipe installed in the 1960s by the then-Governor Lacerda. These stories are depicted in the *casas-tela*. However, the residents rejected the painting of Lacerda, as he led mass evictions of the *favelas* in the 1960s (Pinto et al. 2012), but a painting of the water pipe and a woman carrying water was included in one of the *casas-tela* (Pinto et al. 2012:78)

'Foi muita, muita, muita luta!' *(It was a lot, a lot, a lot of struggle!)*

I spoke with many women, such as Dona Viera, Dona Celestina, Rosa, and Maria, who were outraged and said that they never wanted to leave their houses. When I visited Dona Vieira's house on a walk in 2018, she told her story of building a house in the *favela* and said that:

> I was born and raised here. I worked in the neighbourhood association for a decade. I have been working since I was 14, braiding hair […]; when I was 28 years old, I began to pay the INSS (social security), and thank God, I am retired today […] I also worked 12 years as a *gari*

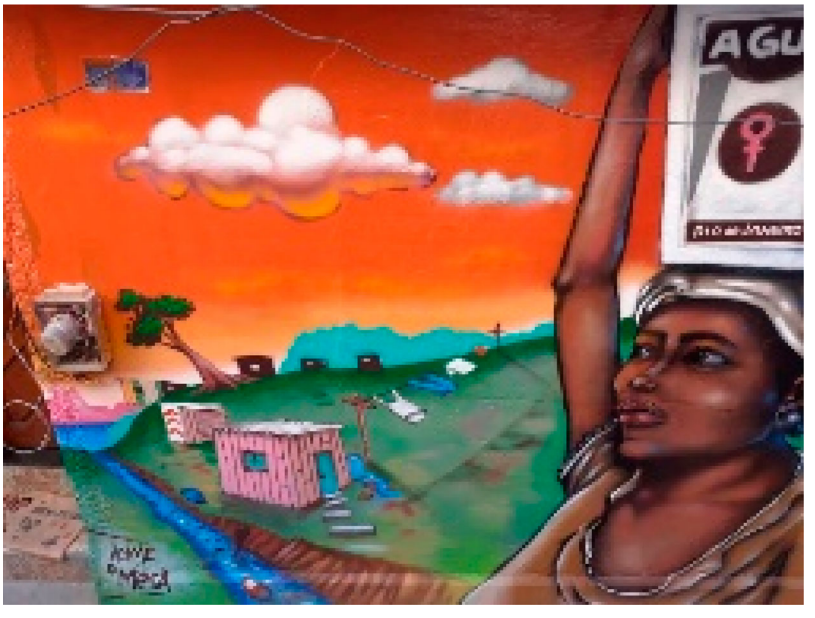

Figure 6. Mural by the artist ACME in PPG, depicting a woman carrying water from the *Lagoa* (Lagoon) Rodrigo de Freitas, also a story recounted by many women, Marcia's grandmother, Dona Celestina and Rosa (photo by MUF n.d.).

> (garbage picker) […] an apartment is a prison for me, a prison … here, I have all my freedom, I go outside, I sit in front of my door […] leave this house for another place, I have no need for that. (Interview with Dona Vieira 2018)

Some women recounted stories of building and rebuilding houses over the decades. On top of the hill, I met Rosa and Maria, who sat in front of their burned house (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Maria sits in front of her burned-down house marked for eviction next to a painting by local artists for the Christmas celebrations (photo by the author, 2012).

> We feel threatened, they do not inform us about anything […] no one tells us where we will be removed […] I was born and raised here; they tell us this is an 'area of risk' and that we have to go out of here. But if this is an area of risk, why would they construct the water reserve over there? (Interview with Maria 2012)

Rosa explained that she arrived in the *favela* from the North-East in the 1940s.

> There was nothing here: no water, electricity, nor sewage. We built a house in wood in the bushes. It was very small, and there was no space for us. We had to expand the house […] We had to carry water up here. We had to wake up early and go down to the block of flats to get water. […] We washed the clothes in Catacumba and carried water back here […] It was a great struggle to construct what we have here today. At the time, we did not have the violence that we have today, there was a lot of respect […] My daughter was born here 50 years ago […] My house is constructed on the top of a rock. With my own hands, I broke many stones, and my daughter helped me. At 6 o'clock until midnight, I worked outside (in Ipanema as a domestic worker), and in the evening, I came back to the house. I cleaned everything to take back to my boss so that I could work here on my house on the weekends; I carried a lot of stones and bricks from down there, up the steep hills. *Foi muita, muita, muita luta!* (a lot, a lot, a lot of struggle!) […] and then suddenly this is an 'area of risk' […] Here, it was always quiet; here I feel accomplished. (Interview with Rosa 2012)

Through these cases, we can see how Black women in the *favelas*, or women warriors, are challenging segregated landscapes and the historical allocation of space to Black women in Brazil as descendants of slaves and domestic servants, dehumanised and assigned to poor neighbourhoods such as the *favela*, in contrast to the mansions close to the *asfalto* (Ipanema and Copacabana), where many *faveladas* work as domestic servants. In de Jesus's writings, she described Black women's struggles in the *favelas*, including the discrimination, racism, and struggle for survival they faced. She wrote this from the perspective of a Black woman, reclaiming humanity and both a physical space in the *favela* and an epistemic space.

The insurgent heritage practices and revalorisation of Blackness, as well as the stories and struggles of 'women warriors', align with the idea of the Black Atlantic by Beatriz Nascimento in the 1970s as a transatlantic space, evoking quilombo practices as also conceived through the notion of 'Amefricanity' developed by Lelia Gonzalez who builds on the everyday struggles by Black women in Brazil, as narrated by Carolina Maria de Jesus in the 1960s. Women warriors spatialised insurgent heritage practices from the intersection of the Americas and Africa, as evoked in the transatlantic route and the path of the slave ship, both as a zone of terror and a generative birthplace of Blackness (Smith 2021: 33; Nascimento cited in Ratts 2006). These experiences of both the afterlives of slavery and ongoing coloniality, as well as practices of resistance, can be evoked through the paths of the *faveladas*, traced and retraced in the stories of women warriors carrying water and construction material, moving from the *quarto de empregada* (the servants' room), working as domestic servants in the *asfalto* carrying wood, and bricks up the steep hills of the *favela*, as we have seen through the stories of Marcia's grandmother, Dona Vieira, Dona Celestina, Rosa, and Maria, and their spatialised insurgent heritage practices.

Some of the women I met in Pavão-Pavãozinho between 2011 and 2013 were nowhere to be found here, such as Dona Celestina, who passed away. I could also not access the place where Rosa and Maria lived on the hill in PPG because of the increased tension

between traffickers and the police. Their stories are also a part of the struggle against the threats of eviction and autoconstruction. However, from 2011 to 2013, there were no official interventions mobilised through the *favela* museum that could have stored cultural heritage against threats of eviction. Figure 8 depicts murals on houses on the top of the hill of Pavão-Pavãozinho, where Rosa and Maria lived in 2011–2013. These wall paintings were done by local artists but were not registered as part of the *casas-tela* trial.

In PPG, the *favela* museum, MUF, received funding from the PAC. Residents were evicted due to public work by the PAC, indicating the numerous power dynamics involved in constructing and mobilising heritage through the *favela*. However, the local artist ACME, also one of the founders of the *favela* museums, later managed to resist evictions by mobilising cultural heritage as a strategy to resist eviction (Figure 9).

The photo above was provided by Marcia, and it depicts the view from ACME's house towards Copacabana. Ultimately, ACME managed to resist eviction by mobilising his community and networks beyond the frontiers of PPG (Håndlykken-Luz 2022). This example demonstrates socio-spatial negotiations for the right to housing and citizenship in the *favela* and the everyday practices of resistance against eviction, racism, and prejudice as a heritage practise mobilised as a strategy to resist eviction (Chisholm 2020).

The artist ACME was one of the founders of the MUF and was responsible for the realisation of the many murals and *casas-tela* in PPG with a revalorisation of Blackness, the history of migration from the North-East, as well as the Black and indigenous histories.

These stories indicate the multiple intersecting power dynamics in curating *favela* heritage and cultural heritage as a resistance from below.

The spatialised experiences and resistance of Black women from the *favelas* in building houses and a future for their children while many worked as servants and faced

Figure 8. Houses on the top of the hill in PPG (photo by Marcia, 2018).

Figure 9. Auto portrait by ACME and view from his house (photo by Marcia, 2018).

multiple layers of discrimination can be analysed through the quilombo (Nascimento 2021) and 'Amefricanity' (Gonzalez 1988), thus exposing how these struggles of *favela-das*, or women warriors, are also material, epistemic, and ontological struggles; revealing the dehumanisation and discrimination of *faveladas*; and creating heritage while sharing these stories and struggles as political memories, or, as Marcia said, 'living memories within me'.

Discussion

The writings by Carolina Maria de Jesus, Beatriz Nascimento, and Lélia Gonzalez allow for an analysis of the place of Black women in Brazilian society from an intersectional lens. Black women have historically been allocated to the kitchen as domestic servants, indicating a legacy of slavery, racism, and restraints of mobility, while struggling to realise a better life in the *favela*, as well as reclaiming dignity, humanity, citizenship, and social rights.

These are not only stories of everyday spatialised heritage-making beyond mere material survival, constructing a house, or aiming for a better life in the favela, but also a political and symbolic space reaffirming *faveladas*' and Black women's humanity as 'women warriors' in the world, as expressed by Nascimento: 'I am quilombo' and 'I am the Atlantic', where the ocean is the 'nowhere/somewhere' of the Black experience (Smith 2021: 33).

As Beatriz Nascimento states in the film Ori:

> It is important to see that today, the quilombo brings us not geographical territory anymore but territory as a symbol. We are human. We have rights to the territory and land […] I have the right to the space I occupy within this system, within this nation, and within this geographical niche, this Pernambuco Sierra. The earth is my quilombo. My space is my quilombo. Where I am, I am. When I am somewhere, I am someone. (Nascimento cited in Gerber 'Ôrí', cited in Ratts 2006: 59, My translation)

These everyday struggles of women warriors also indicate how *faveladas* challenge coloniality through spatialised heritage – the physical, social, and symbolic place for *faveladas*

and Black women. These can be conceptualised as insurgent practices through the idea of the quilombo and 'Amefrican' heritage, which are spatialised creating living memories and a politics of life.

The stories of women warriors or *faveladas,* alternative communities of resistance, as we have seen through the stories of women in PPG, provide a window into 'Black women's politics, challenging the intersection of racial, gender, class, and spatial inequalities as discussed in scholarship on Black women's resistance and struggles over land rights' (Håndlykken-Luz 2022; Perry 2013). The experiences of Marcia's grandmother, Dona Celestina, Rosa, and Maria reflect the reality of women's resistance in the *favelas*, namely, the auto-constructing agency of women building their houses and having to find solutions for improving infrastructure while being treated as second-class citizens. Such experiences are evocative of the struggles of Black women's resistance, as narrated in the journals of Carolina Maria de Jesus in the 1960s, to police violence and racism in contemporary Brazil. These insurgent everyday struggles against class oppression, sexism, and racism can be seen as a part of 'Amefrican' heritage practices. The unfolding of racial, gendered, class, and spatial dimensions in the production of the city of Rio and the urban space of PPG as 'Amefrican' heritage practices is evidenced in the accounts of women, including their experiences of building houses, caring for their families (often as the head of their households), working as *empregadas* (housekeepers), fighting the afterlives of slavery, for political memory, and for the right to the city. I argue that Black urban struggles transcend material survival and subsistence (Håndlykken-Luz 2022; Perry 2005); they are spatialised epistemic, symbolic, and ontological struggles that unfold women warriors' 'Amefrican' heritage practices. Recognising such practices as political and heritage is crucial, as this gives visibility to the role of Black women in creating heritage and politics. In the case of Vila Autódromo, these have been efficient. Women's communities of resistance have also been crucial in creating *favela* museums, resisting evictions, and, more recently, fighting the pandemic.

The theories propounded by Nascimento and Gonzalez facilitate going beyond Holston and paying attention to the specific struggles of Black women, conceptualised as transatlantic, beyond the physical borders of the *favela*. Certainly, as Perry (2013) argues, in terms of autoconstruction and the struggle for the right to housing and land as a political practice, *faveladas* are crucial in making the city (Håndlykken-Luz 2022); however, in this article, we have seen how these insurgent practices by women warriors go beyond the material struggles for housing and territory while negotiating, making, and unmaking 'Amefrican' heritage and quilombo practices.

The theories by Nascimento and Gonzalez allow for capturing the dimensions of resistance, violence, liberation, and healing integral to cultural heritage practices, or what I term 'Amefrican' cultural heritage, as well as their contestations and power dynamics among residents and the involvement of actors beyond the community. I argue that these dimensions are crucial to the study of *favela* heritage or of cultural 'heritage in becoming' (Nikielska-Sekula 2019), including other marginalised poor communities, as discussed in the case of silenced living heritage and struggles for political memory by Black mothers of victims of state violence (Ota and Mason 2022), and they are not included in the *favela* museum in PPG. This article argues that it is crucial to include *faveladas*, women warriors, and mothers as agents of cultural heritage,

including rituals towards resisting violence, struggles for political memory and healing, and the right to memory, truth, and social justice.

Conclusion

The stories of Carolina Maria de Jesus, who wrote the '*Quarto de despejo*', created a space for knowledge production of Black women in Brazil such as Beatriz Nascimento and Lélia Gonzalez, who expanded further on the quilombos and their legacies as a model of resistance, liberation, and political organisation.

I argue that the stories, memories, and experiences of women warriors, as we have observed through the experiences of Marcia and her grandmother, Dona Celestina, Dona Vieira, Maria, and Rosa, unfold everyday resistance and heritage-making by sharing the struggles of women in the *favelas* and their hard physical work, including carrying water, constructing homes, and creating a future while also challenging spatial segregation and coloniality in the city. Their stories as Black women and women warriors, as shared through artistic practices, oral history, women warriors' exhibitions, or the *favela* as a living heritage also unfold an ontological, symbolic, and epistemic struggle, as Black women and *faveladas* in contemporary Brazil continue to be denied space and presence in a racist society. The conception of the quilombo is powerful, as it transcends the physical territory of the quilombo and includes the transatlantic Black diaspora (Smith 2021; Nascimento 2021). The concept of 'Amefricanity' also includes the struggles of indigenous and Black populations to reclaim humanity, attain spaces for knowledge production, and exact resistance.

To conclude, I suggest that the notion of 'Amefrican' heritage, drawing on the concepts of the quilombo, the Atlantic (Nascimento 2021) and 'Amefricanity' (Gonzalez 1988), allows for attention to the multiple and intersecting dimensions of *favela* heritage practices, including experiences of oppression, resistance, and liberation, as analysed in this article through spatial heritage practices such as autoconstruction, stories of women warriors, and *casas-tela*. The conception of 'Amefrican' heritage allows for a transatlantic, diasporic feminist, and decolonial approach that bridges the gap between migration and heritage studies. The empirical accounts analysed in this article and the notion of 'Amefrican' heritage contribute to scholarship on migration and heritage studies challenging essentialised notions of heritage and the minority-majority dynamic, while suggesting a decolonial and transatlantic approach allowing for attention to women warriors' everyday heritage practices challenging coloniality, mitigating social and spatial exclusion, and creating alternative futures.

The collective memory mobilised through the *favela* museums, the 'curated' heritage as seen in the *casas-tela* and living territorial *favela* museum of PPG, and the everyday spatial praxis of *faveladas* such as autoconstruction and building of their neighbourhoods are crucial spatial praxis and living heritage practices in PPG, beyond the material construction of houses, as they evoke spatialised struggles that are epistemic, symbolic, and ontological.

In the city of Rio de Janeiro, *faveladas* have mobilised heritage practices as strategies for resistance to evictions and police violence, as well as for creating alternative narratives that challenge the pathologising discourse of the *favela*, Black, and poor residents associated with criminality, violence, and drugs.

Future research should examine silenced and contested spatial cultural heritage practices, including the multiplicity of actors and practices mobilised through the *favela*

museums, beyond the 'curated' cultural heritage. The potential for *favelas* and poor informal neighbourhoods to mobilise heritage as a strategy to resist eviction (Chisholm 2020) requires further investigation in relation to institutionalised heritage, such as UNESCO's protection of Rio's cultural landscape. Future research should focus on the multiplicity of actors and power dynamics involved in insurgent *favela* heritage practices, including the objectives of tourism and entrepreneurship or the potential of heritage from below, as we have seen in the stories of Marcia and her grandmother, Dona Vieira, Dona Celestina, Maria, and Rosa. The diversity of practices, dynamics of power, relations at play in the colony, and the practice of slavery (Nascimento 2021) are still relevant for understanding heritage-making and the contested 'Amefrican' heritage in the context of urban coloniality in Rio de Janeiro and beyond.

Notes

1. *Faveladas* (or *favelados* for men) are residents from the favela, often used with a negative connotation. However, residents reclaimed the term *favelada* (woman from the favela).
2. 'Women warriors' (*mulheres guerreiras*) is frequently used term to describe Black women's resistance referring to everyday struggles against violence, everyday survival, and building communities (see Veillette, 2021: 95). In this paper, I use the term referring to the women from the favelas or *faveladas*. In PPG, the favela museum has organised women warrior exhibitions since 2008. The term is used also amongst residents in Rio and other favelas.
3. Afro-Brazilians or Black, (including *pardo* or brown): I use the term Black here, as all Afro-Brazilians and *favelas* are particularly targeted by structural racism and police violence that hit racialised residents in Rio's *favelas* particularly with increasing numbers of death, while Brazil supposedly has been presenting itself as a 'racial democracy' based on its so-called racial harmony and mixture, with no formal segregation since the abolition of slavery in 1888. Black Brazilians, descendants of slaves, are however still affected through the 'afterlives of slavery', as visible in all statistics on life expectancy, health, income, education, incarceration, etc (see Håndlykken-Luz 2022).
4. See https://www.slavevoyages.org/.
5. The residents who contributed with photos were not anonymised (Håndlykken-Luz, 2022), and their first names accompanied their photos according to their suggestions. The remaining participants in this project are anonymised or referred to by their surname according to their wish. This project was validated by NSD (Norwegian centre for research data), the responsible review board for my university (project number 59959).
6. 'The Museum de Favela (MUF) is the 'first territorial and alive museum about favela memories and cultural heritage in the world. Its collection has about 20,000 residents and their lifestyle narrate an important and unknown part of Rio de Janeiro's history. The territorial museum is located above the steep slopes of Cantagalo's mountain range, among Ipanema, Copacabana and Lagoa, at Rio de Janeiro's south zone, in Brazil. It has an area of about 30ft² and a rich collection of culture and lifestyle. Its natural heritage gathers the Atlantic Forest and remarkable panoramic views among the most astonishing views of Rio de Janeiro'. (See https://www.museudefavela.org/)
7. For an article on the favela museum in English, see https://rioonwatch.org/?p=45983
8. For more information about the local favela museum (MUF), see: https://www.museudefavela.org/sobre-o-muf/

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