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Picturing Inequalities

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The picture below has been seen throughout the world. The photographer, Brazilian Tuca Vieira, may rue the fact it has escaped him, but he has many other interesting points to make.

Photo 1 Inequality



©Tuca Vieira 2007. <http://www.tucavieira.com.br/>

Tuca Vieira writes ¹: « Recently I found this picture I took on Facebook, with no mention of the author, but with hundreds of comments. No one cared who had taken the picture. It was made ten years ago for the *Folha de S. Paulo* and I keep receiving requests from all over the world to reproduce it in books, magazines and educational

¹ From the website <http://www.tucavieira.com.br/>, initially published in *ZUM* # 3 December 2012.

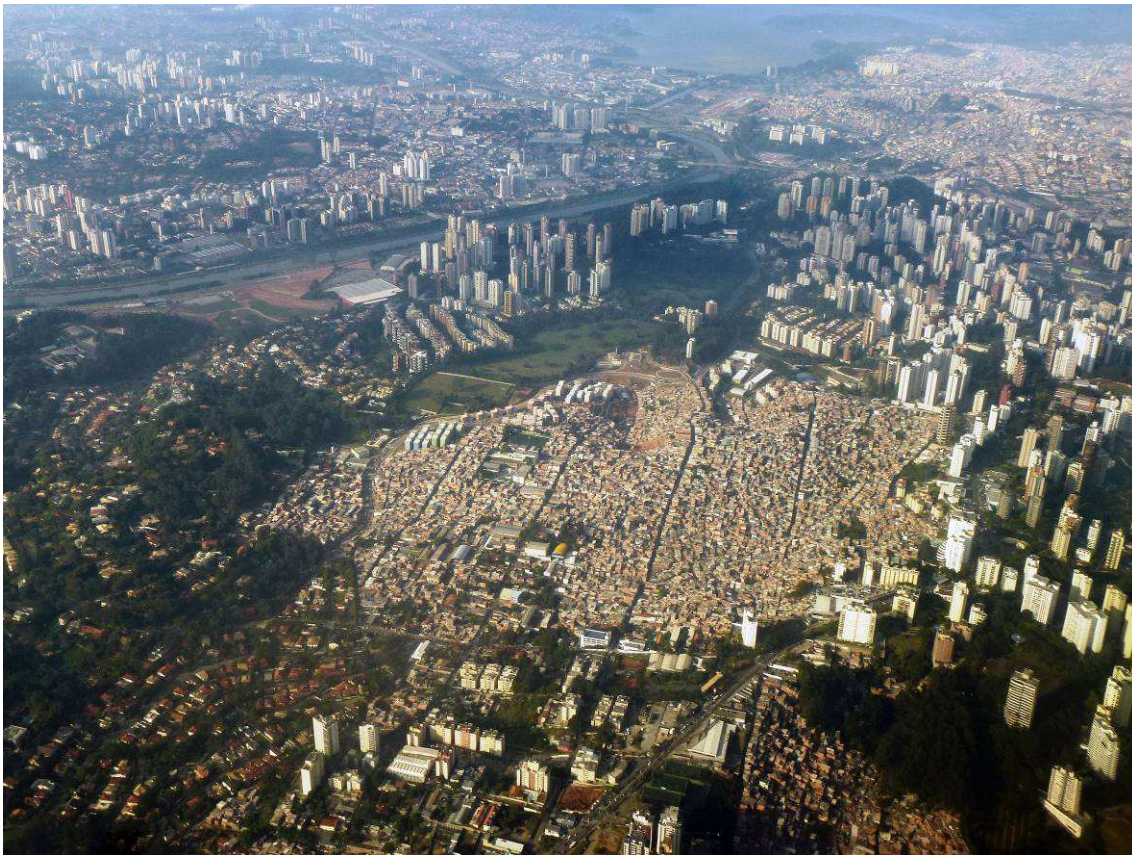
material. I owe this picture a lot. It made my work famous, brought me prizes and helped me exhibit here and abroad. But the fact is I've lost control over this picture ».

Tuca goes on to explain that the picture was on the posters, invitations, leaflets, and postcards of the exhibition *Global Cities*, in 2007 at the Tate Modern, in London, and he was invited for the opening, but not to the gala dinner, presumably because « the guy who made the emblematic picture for the exhibition did not have the full status of an artist ».

He has further thoughts on the impact of the picture on himself : « They started introducing me as 'Tuca, the guy who took that picture' [...] Today I don't mind all that much [...] it may be that this picture will help me attain what should be any artist's objective : make people think about the world rather than about the work and its author. It may be photography's great merit. It has freed itself from its author, and from the original context, to take part in a debate about Brazil, Latin America, inequality. As the son of socialist activists, raised on indignation and the aspiration to social change, nothing could please me more. Journalism, art and politics are inseparable ».

Let's take the story one step further. This picture was taken in Paraisópolis, a São Paulo slum within the wealthy Morumbi area, where the State governor has his palace.

Photo 2 Paraisópolis



©Hervé Théry 2014

*Favela Paraisópolis*² is located on the south of the city of São Paulo, in the Vila Andrade district, and has over 60.000 inhabitants within its 118 hectares according to the census of « *Aglomerados Subnormais* » (abnormal agglomerations, a euphemism for *favela* or slum) of the IBGE, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. It was initially planned for upper-class housing in 1921, when the former Morumbi fazenda was split into 10 by 50 meters³ plots.

In this rural area, the plots remained empty until the 1950s when they started to be « invaded » by low-income families, mostly immigrants from the Nordeste, the poorest region of the country, attracted by job openings in booming building industries : the population of the city rose from 2.2 million in 1950 to

² Literally, by a conjunction of Portuguese and Greek, « the city of Paradise » (sic).

³ Approximately 33 by 164 feet (NdT)

3.8 million in 1960 (4.7 for the whole urbanized area, the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo). Having reached 11 million inhabitants according to the 2010 census (19,6 for the Metropolitan Region), from a starting point of 31 385 inhabitants on the first reliable census in 1872, its population had in fact been multiplied by 358 in 138 years⁴.

Tableau 1 Population growth of the city, Metropolitan Region and State of São Paulo

	City of São Paulo	Metropolitan Region of São Paulo	State of São Paulo
1872	31.385	-	837.354
1890	64.934	-	1.384.753
1900	239.820	-	2.282.279
1920	579.033	-	4.592.188
1940	1.326.261	1.568.045	7.180.316
1950	2.198.096	2.622.786	9.134.423
1960	3.781.446	4.739.406	12.974.699
1970	5.924.615	8.139.730	17.771.948
1980	8.493.226	12.588.725	25.040.712
1991	9.646.185	15.444.941	31.588.925
2000	10.434.252	17.878.703	37.032.403
2010	11.244.369	19.672.582	41.252.160

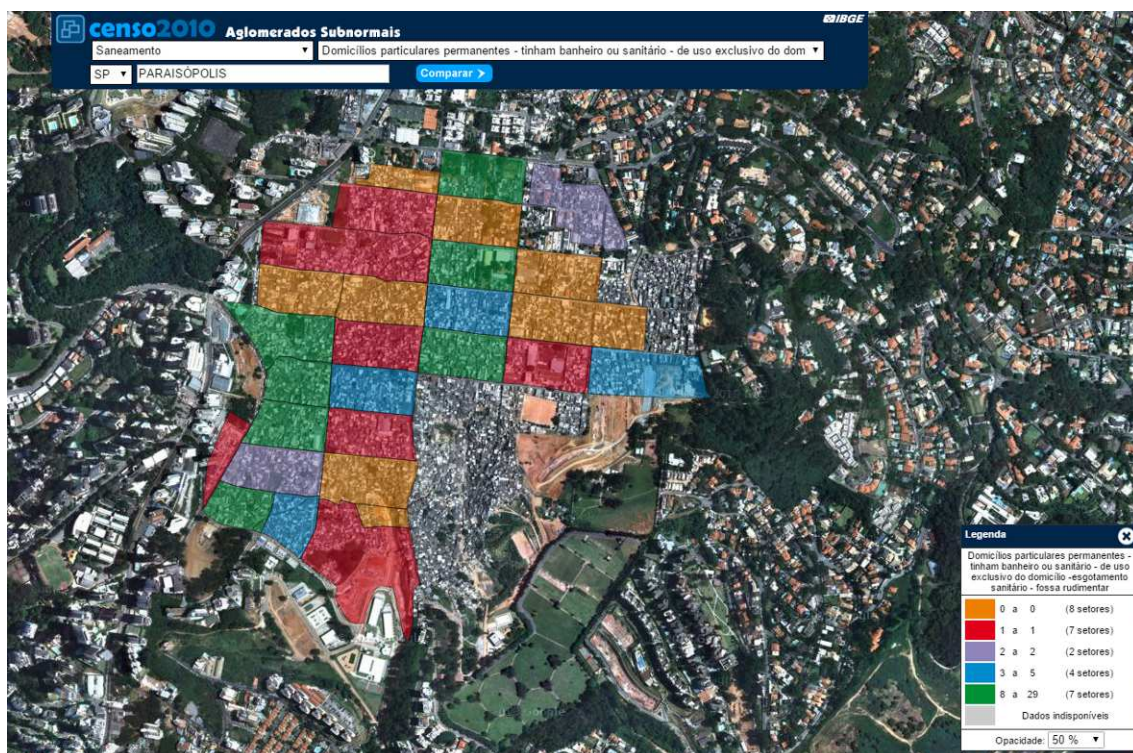
Fonte: IBGE, Censo Demográficos

The favela itself, disregarded by city authorities and struggling to gain legal status, had 20.000 inhabitants by 1970. Well-to-do neighbourhoods and luxury condos were springing up around it, often built by workers from Paraisópolis.

⁴ L'estimation de l'IBGE pour 2014 étant de 11 895 893, on arrive à une multiplication par 379 en 142 ans. Note utile ? bof (NdT)

The population density of Paraisópolis is impressive, with 1.000 inhabitants per hectare. Only a quarter of the population has sanitation, half of the streets are unpaved, and 60% of homes are illegally connected to the electricity grid. There is much more information on the portal of the IBGE on *aglomerados subnormais* (on figure 3, details of houses with indoor bathrooms but no drainage).

Figure 3 Paraisópolis on the IBGE portal of *aglomerados subnormais*



Source: <http://www.censo2010.ibge.gov.br/agsn/>

Paraisópolis has become a reference for scholars of favelas (or *bidonvilles*, *umjondolo*, *shammasa*, *iskwatres*, *villas miserias*, *barriadas* or *pueblos jóvenes*, to mention the designation of slums in various countries). The website of the city of São Paulo⁵ mentions that in a single month, March 2008, Paraisópolis received foreign delegations from Lagos (Nigeria), Ekurhuleni (South Africa),

⁵ <http://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/comunicacao/noticias>

Cairo (Egypt), Manilla (Philippines), Mumbai (India), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), La Paz (Bolivia), from Chile, Île-de-France and Ghana.

Photo 4 Children of Paraisópolis



©Hervé Théry 2012

Tuca Vieira reminds us that if his picture drew attention to this favela, it is only one of the many violent contrasts to be seen in São Paulo: « In a way, this picture of Paraisópolis [...] does not show things as they are. It is not the richest who live in the building with swimming-pools, and they are not right next to the poorest, who by the way don't live in Paraisópolis. The symbolic and didactic power of the picture has to do with its simple visual grammar ».

We can therefore recommend a visit to the photographer's website (<http://www.tucavieira.com.br>), to see many other pictures and places, a few of which are shown here. One should be mentioned in particular, photo n°8 (which unfortunately is no longer visible on the website), which shows a fire in a favela, a frequent 'incident', the latest having taken place in October 2014 in the Bras neighbourhood. According to the documentary *Limpam com fogo* (« They clean

by fire »), independently produced by journalists César Vieira, Conrado Ferrato and Rafael Crespo, in the past two decades over 1.200 fires occurred in the slums of São Paulo, half of them between 2008 and 2012.

Photo 5 Favela in São Paulo



©Tuca Vieira. <http://www.tucavieira.com.br/>

Photo 6 Avenida Paulista, in São Paulo's center



©Tuca Vieira. <http://www.tucavieira.com.br/>

Photo 7 Building in São Paulo's center



©Tuca Vieira. <http://www.tucavieira.com.br/>

Photo 8 Fire destroying a favela in São Paulo



©Tuca Vieira

Let Tuca Vieira have the last word, as he discusses the way in which his picture escaped him and came to overshadow his other work, some of it equally potent: « Sometimes, I'm really pissed at that picture. I have new projects, but the Paraisópolis scene hides anything else I do. For someone as young as I am, you can't talk about a legacy. But it keeps coming back, each time the picture re-surfaces. It that what I'll be leaving to posterity? Will anything else I do ever be as important as that single photo? I was reading the other day that more pictures have been taken in the past four years than in the rest of the history of photography. So, to think about it, it is probably not that bad to have made one that is remembered ». He's right.

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Websites with information on Paraisópolis

<http://paraisopolis.org/>

<https://pt-br.facebook.com/ParaisopolisSP>

<http://www.ongflorescer.com.br/>

Portal da Prefeitura da Cidade de São Paulo

<http://www.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/habitacao/paraisopolis/>