

News feature / Travel

Brazil: streets of death

Deo Mugoia takes a look at the seedy side of exotic Rio de Janeiro

Deo Mugoia

Wherever you are, wherever you go in Brazil, your life is cheap, your life is close to death.

I have almost sniffed what it is like to be in places like Columbia, Lebanon, Uganda, Northern Ireland, the Philippines or even South Africa. Brazil is not at war. It is a peaceful country, where citizens treat foreigners like friends, when you have the annual three-day carnival of dance, joy, sex and football that created heroes like Pele, Didi, Garrincha, Rivelino, Tostuo, Zico and others.

However, living in a city like Rio de Janeiro you have a different story to tell. Population of 8 million walking, driving, taking the bus, one is wary of everyone. Armed thieves always invade houses and rob everyone. In such cases one would expect to get police protection - but police as proper Brazilians say: "Are more dangerous than gangsters themselves." People are afraid of the Police so no one likes to offend them. Not only because they sometimes are

violent and collaborate with gangsters, but also because they treat certain majority of the population as suspects. Let's take one case.

As an African in Brazil, a friend of mine was considered the 'SUSPECTRACE.' Although, Afro-Brazilians form 47 per cent of the population, they are the scum of the society.

Aggressive cop is pure Clint Eastwood. The other one is sizing him up. He has a big stern gun, the type used in drug wars all over South America.

After abolition of slavery in 1888, Blacks and Mulattos or coloureds were left with nothing. Today, a Black person is a modern slave - servant, floor cleaner, night-day guard, car guard, low paid worker. Blacks don't have enough education.

So high positions in all sectors are a priority to White Brazilians. Sometimes you see successful Blacks - but as the case in the United States or wherever slavery was history - they are artists or sports-persons. And so, one sees a few men's names in music Gilberto Gil, Jorge Ben, the football king Pele or even the heavyweight boxer Maguila, who is supposed to be the future contender for the former deposed, Mike Tyson.

Most Blacks are then suspects. Thieves, bandits, cocaine smugglers - police won't leave you alone, if you are Black or Brown.

In August 1990 my friend, Jack was stopped four times by armed police because he happened to be driving a car. Having given some friends a ride home one Saturday late at night, he parked to relieve himself in the north zone area of Rio, known as Tijuca. "What are you doing here at this time of the night?" the two armed policemen officer asked him. It was getting close to one o'clock. "No. Don't answer. We know you. We know what you are looking for ... You stopped to pee? Big joke." Jack said he was not a Brazilian, and can show his passport, while he explained that he had just given some friends a ride home. One of the policemen officer got closer, pushing his gun on to the

man's left rib. "I know your face. You drug dealer" he said. "Maconheiro (the word comes from maconha, which means marijuana, so is a marijuana smoker) Don't lie to me ... you stopped just to pee? Liar ... Raise your hands."

Aggressive cop is pure Clint Eastwood. The other one is sizing him up. He has a big stern gun the type used in drug wars all over South America. Jack senses this was no game, the policemen were going to rob him, and possibly shoot him; tomorrow the paper will say he was killed trying to avoid arrest, whilst a check would reveal cocaine in his car (put there by the policemen).

Tanzanians will get the news months later, that Jack left the country to sell cocaine abroad. Hands in the air he shouted: "Senor policeman, why don't you search my car and see my documents first? I didn't come to your country to deal with drugs?" Which makes the cop more excited. "Don't tell me what to do maconheiro! It's not your duty. It's mine! Shut up!" Anyway, he began to search Jack's pockets taking his wallet, checking the money (Jack is hoping all the while that he won't steal it), pushing him with the gun's muzzle. "Where is your car documents, driving license?" his companion, more in tune with the law, the lesser of evils takes the papers and goes through them.

The other crazy John Wayne is busy counting how many cruzeiros (Brazilian money) his search revealed. Jack knows, if they won't rob him directly, they will find something to link him indirectly. So they will need a bribe, a pretext ...

The night is still. The city pretends to be sleeping. The policemen officers sniffs Jack's fingers, his wallet. Sniff! Mark the word. The lunatic is convinced that a Black man driving a car must have stolen it. "he is OK .. tal legal." says the policeman officer, handing back the documents. As Jack puts them inside his pockets, the lunatic with a cocked machine gun then got into Jack's car, searching the floor, under car, opens up the bonnet - wherever he encounters a piece of paper, he sniffs it like a dog looking for dried meat in yesterday's bones. His friend is getting better still. "Where are you from?" He answered, "Tanzania". "How long have you been in Brazil? Do you like our country? He answered, "I like it, but in situations like this I feel a lot of injustice against Blacks. Because if I was a White gringo, an American or Scandinavian blonde foreigner, I would not be treated with such suspicion."

"What did he say?" the gunman finding nothing to implicate Jack roars. Anyway, that's one of more than ten stories of a similar nature Jack has encountered.

The neurotic police, the racist air are part of the general tension you feel in Brazil. Danger or no danger, racism or no racism, Brazil still remains one of the most interesting countries in the world.

SAVE UP TO 80% OFF BRAND NAME MENS & LADIES FASHIONS

"BRELLA"

MENS & LADIES CLOTHING
 "FOR WORK OR PLAY"
 605 KING ST. 453-0588
 (ABOVE PIZZA DELIGHT)
 STORE HOURS: MON.-WED. 9-5
 THURS., FRI. 9-9, SAT. 9-5

UNB TUTORS

Do you need additional help with your course content?

The UNB Inventory of Tutors is now available. This list identifies senior undergraduate and graduate students willing and able to tutor in a wide variety of subject areas. Copies of the Inventory can be obtained at the Dean of Students office; the Department of Extension and Summer Session; the offices of Deans and Departmental Chairs; and from residence Dons.

Tutors are paid on a fee-for-service basis.

EVERY
WITNES!
 on us!*

PIZZA
 DONARI

CO.

Please Use Us!
 Minimum
 Door of Bidg

0-33